



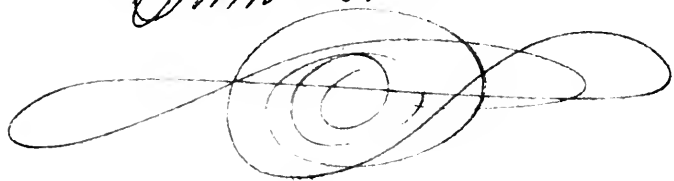
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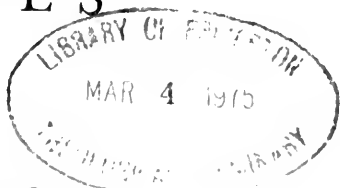
Sam. J. Miller.



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DISCOURSES

ON



VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

INCLUDING SEVERAL

Saml. Miller's

ON PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

1795

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

Whom [i. e. Christ] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Col. i. 28.

B I R M I N G H A M,

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MDCCLXXXVII.

T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE greater part of the following discourses have been published separately, having been composed for *particular occasions*; but several of them being now out of print, and others nearly so, I have thought proper to reprint them all, and to add a few others, in order to complete a volume. These are such as I have been frequently desired to publish, as the sentiments they contain are not commonly insisted upon. Some of them, though not adapted to every capacity, are in the highest degree *practical*; they illustrate some parts of Dr. Hartley's excellent theory of the human
A 2 affections;

affections; and will, I hope, approve themselves to those who accustom themselves to take no superficial views of human nature and human life.

It is possible that, if my life be spared, I may, some time hence, publish a volume of plainer discourses, adapted to readers of the lowest capacity (for such are most of all wanted) but at present I have not been able to please myself with the selection. Though I think it my duty to give my hearers the clearest views that I have been able to get for myself of the *doctrines* of christianity, especially such of them as have suffered the most by those corruptions and abuses to which it has pleased divine providence that the religion of his son should have been subject, they will bear witness for me that I always represent every thing of a
specu-

speculative nature as subservient to practice, and indeed of little or no use in any other view.

But, in order to make christianity of use to the sensible part of mankind, as well as to recommend it to unbelievers, Mahometans, and Jews, it must be exhibited in such a light as to be at least *credible*; and also the more *rational*, and *amiable*, it can be represented, consistently with truth, the more probable it is that it will be cordially embraced, and its moral precepts complied with. Speculative and practical considerations ought therefore to go hand in hand; since they have intimate connexions with each other, and cannot be separated without injury to both, especially the latter.

The great object of all the doctrines of christianity is to lead us to consider

ourselves as the subjects of the moral government of God, a being of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, hating iniquity, but placable to the truly penitent, who has formed man for a state of immortality after death; and who has fully apprized us of these particulars, so unspeakably interesting to us, by men who proved their divine mission by such works as God only could perform. In all this there is nothing shocking to the reason of any man; and the consideration of these important truths cannot but make a favourable impression on our hearts, and inspire the worthiest resolutions. They lead us to *love God above all, and our fellow creatures as ourselves*, as standing in the same relation to our common God and Father, the care of the same indulgent providence, and heirs together of the same hope of eternal life revealed to us in the gospel. By giving us
a pro-

a prospect of a future and better state, and teaching us to conceive of ourselves as destined to a higher sphere of action, to which the various scenes of this life are preparatory, they enable us to raise our hearts above the world, and all the gratifications and pursuits of it, and they animate us to acquit ourselves in the best manner we possibly can here, in order to qualify us for something greater and happier hereafter.

A due attention to the nature and circumstances of this life, as it respects another, cannot fail to inspire a temper of *habitual devotion*, and lead us to regard obedience to the will of God as the great and joyful business of our lives, and every thing else respecting our condition here as a matter of comparative indifference. To conduct ourselves with propriety, in whatever situation it shall please divine provi-

dence to place us, we shall consider as being our principal concern, as that which alone can make us truly happy while we live, and give us hope in the hour of death.

The great design of the following discourses, though some of them relate to matters of speculation, is to inculcate such practical principles as these. If any other speculative principles will inculcate them more effectually, I shall readily give them the preference to my own. But I am not more satisfied that the doctrines for which I have contended in my controversial writings are most consonant to *truth*, and the genuine *sense of scripture*, than I am that they have superior power to enoble the minds, to mend the hearts, and reform the lives of men; which we must all acknowledge to be the great object and end of religion, and especially of the mission of Christ; who was
sent

sent to bless men in turning them from their iniquities, and to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.

While I am continued in the capacity of a public teacher of christianity (which I deem to be the most truly honourable of any character, office, or employment, in this world) I shall endeavour to make my hearers both to understand, and value, their religion, and also to exemplify it by a suitable conduct in life. Let others think, and speak, as they please of my zeal for particular opinions, the only test of true discipleship to Jesus, which I inculcate upon the christian society that I serve, is that which our Lord himself has given, *By their fruits ye shall know them*; and I am willing to hope that, if tried by this test, we shall not be found to be singularly defective. Faults we all have. It is the part of humility to acknowledge them
in

in ourselves, and to make allowance for them in others. And in this respect I only desire the same candid treatment from others that all others shall have from me. I shall even be well content with much less.

The greatest ambition of christian ministers should be to render their respective churches examples to others, in regularity of discipline, and in the most effectual modes of instruction, adapted to every age, and especially to persons in younger life, in which one of these discourses will shew that instruction will have infinitely more effect than in any other. In the Introduction to my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, I have laid down what I thought the best method of accomplishing one of these great ends in christian societies. Since that was written, I have improved my methods, and shall perhaps take some opportunity of explain-

explaining them more at large. Let others give due attention to the same important subject; and by comparing different experiments, and the results of them, we may hope, in time, to perfect ourselves in this most important *art*, viz. that of *religious instruction*.

Much practice (which I can assure my younger friends in the christian ministry, makes the business continually more pleasing to myself, as well as more useful to those under my care) has led me, as I have observed, to enlarge and improve the plan I have referred to. But I shall here only mention an article to which I had not given much attention when I wrote the Essay above-mentioned. It is the *expounding of the scriptures* in the usual course of reading them in public worship. Besides the immediate object of this mode of instruction, viz.

viz. enabling our readers to distinguish the true sense of the scriptures, and to relish them in their own private reading, it affords the minister an opportunity of giving them much useful information of various kinds, and especially illustrating the evidences of revelation, such as might never occur in the course of regular sermons.

I have now, in the space of about six years, gone through all the books of the New Testament; and when I shall have gone over the same ground a second time, I shall probably publish the *notes* I have drawn up for this purpose, for the use of unitarian societies of laymen, and also of private persons, and families. But in the mean time, I wish to recommend the same method to other ministers, as an exercise in which they will find more satisfaction, and advantage, than they may be aware of. It is

is indeed no *new* thing ; but like *catechising*, and other good customs, in consequence of having been improperly conducted, it has unhappily grown into disuse.

Besides earnestly *contending for the true faith of the gospel*, let us all *consider one another, to provoke unto love, and to good works*.

N. B. The discourses that have not been printed before begin with that *on the Danger of bad Habits*, page 358.

As the discourses which are here reprinted will not be printed again *separately*, the original *prefaces*, and every thing annexed to them, are given with them. For this reason the *Reflexions on the subject of Free Inquiry* are subjoined to the *Sermon on the 5th of November*. The other pieces annexed to that Sermon, relating to the

doctrine of the *trinity*, will be reprinted, if I should ever collect, and republish, all the tracts relating to my controversy on that subject, which I probably shall do when the whole is completed.

T H E

T H E

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A

S E R M O N,

Preached before the Congregation of

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

AT

MILL-HILL-CHAPEL, in LEEDS

MAY 16, 1773.

On OCCASION of resigning the PASTORAL OFFICE
among them.

B

T H E

P R E F A C E.

HAVING been induced to publish the following discourse, by the request of the society to whom it was addressed, and to whom I owe the happiness of some years of my life, I have thought proper to prefix to it a copy of my *letter of resignation*, and of the *answer* to it, though, when they were written, there was far from being any design of making this use of them. This, however, I have done, because I presumed that they would be equally agreeable to the congregation with the Sermon itself, as *a memorial of our past intercourse, and mutual esteem*; and also because, if the Sermon be calculated to have any good effect, with respect to other ministers or congregations, these pieces must have the same tendency; shewing, more especially, what liberties a candid and generous minded people, who are satisfied of the good intention of their minister, will bear from him, and receive with thankfulness. I own that I had also a farther view, viz. to give a more just idea than the Sermon alone could give, of the terms on which I have lived with the congregation

tion at Leeds ; which, to serve the base purposes of a party, has been grossly misrepresented, as the account of it has been industriously propagated.

The reason why the letter of resignation contains more than a simple notice of my intention, was that I then had no design of making any other address to the people upon the occasion ; and though, by this means, some of the sentiments came to be repeated in the subsequent discourse, they appear to me to be of so much importance, as to bear that repetition.

I call my situation at Leeds a happy one. It has been so on several accounts ; but what I have chiefly valued it for is, that, without the most distant apprehension of giving offence to a very great majority of the congregation, I have been at full liberty to *spea*k, *w*rite, or *d*o, whatever I have judged that the interests of that particular society, or of christianity in general required. I do not know many congregations of dissenters in England, so numerous as that of Leeds, where I could have been so happy in this respect ; and it is a species of happiness without which I should have had little enjoyment of any situation, how advantageous soever it had been on other accounts.

I shall take the opportunity of this preface to recommend to the serious consideration both of the society at Mill-hill, and of all persons into
whose

whose hands this discourse of mine may fall, that excellent sermon of Mr. Graham's, intitled *Repentance the only condition of final acceptance* (which was also preached at Mill-hill chapel) as having the same general tendency with this sermon, and also his *Letters on the doctrine of atonement*. In these pieces the reader will find what I think to be a fair and undisguised account of what is most essential in the religion of the gospel, expressed with a plainness and energy almost peculiar to the author.

*To the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at
Mill-hill, Leeds.*

My christian brethren,

ALively sense of the happiness I have enjoyed during the continuance of my relation to you, as your pastor, makes it truly painful to me to inform you, that this agreeable relation must soon cease, and that I now give you notice to provide yourself with a successor to me.

My reason for this step is by no means any sort of dissatisfaction with respect to you. On the contrary, there is no situation in life of which I

shall ever expect to have more real enjoyment, or which I shall consider as more truly reputable to me. Other prospects, however, have opened to me, by pursuing which, I flatter myself, that it will be in my power to be more useful both to my family, and the world.

Painful as my separation from you will be, I hope I shall have the satisfaction to leave upon your minds a testimony to the fidelity with which I have acted as your servant, and the servant of our common Lord and master Jesus Christ. The purity of his gospel, as far as God has enabled me to understand it myself, I have, without *fear*, but I hope, also, without any great or hurtful *imprudence*, endeavoured to explain to you; free, I trust, in a great measure, from that impure mixture of the doctrines and traditions of men, which, in the past ages of darkness and ignorance, had greatly debased its spirit, and obstructed its effect, and to which the providence of God seems to be now, in a more especial manner, opening the eyes of the christian world; in order, we may hope, to its recovering its original lustre, and thereby recommending itself to the universal acceptance of Jews and Gentiles.

With respect to this object I have only followed the steps of some of my worthy predecessors; and it will be your true glory, and my happiness, that

you make choice of a successor to me who will carry on this great and necessary work.

As much, however, as I have had this important work at heart, I have been careful to keep the pulpit almost entirely sacred to the still more important business of inculcating just maxims of conduct, and recommending a life and conversation becoming the purity of the gospel. If I or you have failed in this great point, to which all truth is but subservient, it will be my grief, and your aggravated blame; and better had it been for you to have been Papists, or Pagans, than even lukewarm, and much more than profligate professors of genuine christianity.

I undertook the charge of this congregation after having been several years engaged in a very different employment, under many disadvantages, and with great diffidence, and I am sensible of various imperfections with which the performance of my ministerial duty has been attended; but your candour, I have reason to think, has been such, as to think that not ill done, which was well intended. Also, notwithstanding some of the schemes which I have formed, and endeavoured to carry into execution, have not been attended with all the success that I or you could have wished, I flatter myself that my services and behaviour have, upon the whole, been such, as have produced some good effect,

effect, both in making the religion we profess appear more intelligible and amiable, and in enforcing a life and conversation suitable to it.

In this case, even the recollection of our past intercourse will always contribute to answer the same great end; and then, though our relation as *pastor and people* shall cease, that of *fellow-christians* will never be dissolved; and we may be looking forward to that more intimate and lasting union which shall take place hereafter, and which shall for ever subsist among the upright and good; when all other relations, and all other things, will appear to be, what they really are, in comparison with this, transitory and insignificant.

With my sincere prayers that the wise providence of God may direct your choice of my successor, and establish you in every thing that is good and exemplary, I am, with increased affection,

My christian brethren,

Your servant,

In the gospel of Jesus Christ,

LEEDS,
Dec. 20, 1772.

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

The Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at Mill-Hill, to their Pastor,

The Rev. Dr. Priestley.

Rev. Sir,

YOUR letter, advising your intention of a resignation of your pastoral charge over us, to take place in a short time, has been communicated, and openly read.

We have been too intimately, and too happily connected with you, to receive such a notice with indifference. We know too well your genuine worth and real merit, to be insensible of the great loss we may sustain by such a change in our congregational and individual connexions with you. But at the same time our sincere friendship for you disposes us to rejoice with you in any change that may materially affect the interest of yourself and family, for whose mutual welfare our good wishes will always accompany you.

We should think ourselves wanting to our own feelings, as well as to your deserts, if, on this occasion, and in this public congregational manner, we did not acknowledge to you the very grateful sentiments we feel for all your sincere and faithful

E services

services to us as a people; and particularly, as *parents*, to bless you for those affectionate and earnest endeavours which you have steadily pursued, in order to instil knowledge, and inculcate good principles on the minds of our children; and we are desirous to bear our testimony, that as we received you in harmony and peace, so has love and friendship mutually prevailed between us, and we trust will ever prevail.

That the *God of peace* may attend and bless you, is the sincere prayer of your ever affectionate friends.

(Signed by order of the congregation)

Dear Sir,

Your most obedient servant

and well-wisher,

GEORGE OATES.

LEEDS, MILL-HILL,

Dec. 27, 1772.

S E R M O N.

I P E T E R i. 13.

*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,
be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace
that is to be brought unto you at the reve-
lation of Jesus Christ.*

My christian brethren,

I DO not think that I can take my leave of you, with whom I have been very happily connected, either with more propriety, or satisfaction, than by recommending to your attention the passage which I have now read to you from the epistle of the apostle Peter; as it contains a general view of the obligations and hopes of christians, which are necessarily the chief object of attention to every christian minister, and to all christian people.

It

It has been my duty, whether I have properly attended to it or not, to explain and confirm to you, and thereby frequently to remind you, of the great principles of christian faith; and it has been your duty to bear the word of exhortation, to give proper attention to the subject, and, being convinced of the truth of christianity, to apply yourselves diligently to the observance of its precepts, in expectation of its glorious rewards; or, in the language of my text (as it may be more properly rendered, or paraphrased) *to gird up the loins of your mind, and, being vigilant, to entertain the most undoubting assurance of the happiness which awaits you at the coming of Jesus Christ.*

Such, my brethren, is the importance of religion (being, in fact, the great business of human life) and such the fascination of the cares of this world, that it behoves us to be continually upon our guard, lest the scenes through which we must necessarily pass, draw off our attention from things of infinitely more moment, though more distant; and thus the great end and purpose of our
being

being be sacrificed to what is merely accidental or instrumental to it.

It is our consolation, however, that almost all our difficulties in the conduct of life, as it respects futurity, have no other source than want of *attention of mind* to the subject. For so absolutely inconsiderable are the things of this life, in comparison with that which is to succeed it, that even an imperfect apprehension of the nature of our situation (if, in consequence of being sufficiently impressed and attended to, it be allowed to have its proper influence on our minds) would be sufficient to keep us in the path of our duty. But without attention and consideration, no motives, however just and weighty, can have any effect.

In reality, men miscarry, and miss the great end of their being, only in consequence of acting *precipitately*, and without attending to the necessary consequences of their actions. In other words, it is when they act *irrationally*, like brute beasts, governed by mere appetite and passion. And when they act in this manner, is it to be wondered at, that they do not attain the pro-

per happiness of rational and intelligent beings?

It is with great propriety, therefore, that *faith* is represented in the scriptures as the great principle of the christian life, that it was by faith, or in consequence of a firm belief in futurity, depending upon the promise of God, that all the worthies of the Old Testament were enabled to distinguish themselves as they did, and that it is still by faith that we christians are *to overcome the world*.

Now this efficacious faith is not a single *act*, or *effort* of the mind, or a simple *conviction* that a future event will take place (for then every man who, if he were interrogated, would answer that he was a christian, would be a good man) but it is such a *full persuasion* of mind, and such a *lively apprehension* of a distant event, as shall give it its just influence, the same that it would have near at hand; and this can only be acquired by frequent attention to it, and meditation upon it.

Could this great end be attained, were truly christian principles and prospects sufficiently

ficiently impressed on our minds, it would be impossible for us to be guilty of any base or criminal action; and the great motives to the love of God, and of our fellow creatures not being counteracted by any foreign influence, but having their natural and uncontrouled effect upon the mind, we should *love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves.* And when these governing principles had taken deep root in our minds, they would lead to the practice of the whole of our duty; and, our hearts and affections being engaged, every thing right and good would be easy and pleasant to us.

If these maxims be true, a great deal must be *done* by a man before he can be a christian in the proper sense of the word, that is, *not in name and profession only, but in deed and in truth*; because a *habit and temper* is to be formed, which can only be produced by the long continuance of proper actions. A truly christian character is not to be formed but by a course of *discipline and exercise*, calculated to keep the mind continually

continually impressed with a lively sense of the great truths of christianity; so as to overpower the influence of the objects which surround us, and which are continually soliciting our attention.

If there be any one error in religion more dangerous in its tendency than others, it is the opinion which, in some form or other (and it is capable of endless modifications) has existed almost from the commencement of christianity, viz. that religion properly so called, or that which renders a man acceptable in the sight of God, and fits him for heaven, is not a *habit* or *disposition of mind*, such as I have now mentioned, which evidently requires *time* and *care* to form; but some *single act*, or *effort*, whether proceeding from a man's self, or from God.

If this be the case, the whole may commence and terminate in the shortest space of time, and it may as well take place at the last hour of life, as at any other. Consequently, in the prospect of this, men may continue to live in sin, secretly flattering themselves with the hope of a late but effectual

fectual repentance. But if repentance consist of a *change of disposition and conduct*, it is not even possible that a late, or what we call a *death-bed repentance*, can be an effectual one. For true repentance can only take place in consequence of just views of things, sufficiently impressed upon the mind by careful reflection; and since it is not a *momentary operation*, but a *fixed character* that is wanted, it is, in reality, but very little that can be done at any one particular time.

A man, for instance, may at any time resolve to change his conduct, but that does not amount to an actual change. He may perform any single action; but a single action, though it may *lead to*, does not *constitute* an habit; and even a habit, or course of actions, must be continued a considerable time before it can be quite easy and familiar to him, so that his heart and affections shall be engaged in it; and then only is the *character* properly formed. Again, this character, arising from a fixed attachment of mind to our duty, admits of *degrees*; for

it may be a very weak or a very strong attachment; and our future reward will be in proportion to the strength and confirmed state of all our good habits and dispositions. For as great as is the diversity of human characters in this life, it is probable that the justice and wisdom of God will provide as great a diversity in their future retribution.

Besides the opinion that the great business of religion is the work of a moment, unavoidably subjects men to the grossest and most fatal delusions. Indeed, how can it be otherwise, when the thing to be attained passes wholly within a man's own breast, and is generally spoken of as a thing that is incapable of verbal description; the consequence of which must be, that persons of a warm imagination will presume, on any insignificant emotion, that they have experienced this happy change, and, valuing themselves upon it, will be apt to condemn and despise the rest of the world; while persons of a timid disposition will be tormented with doubts and despair. Not being con-

tent to judge of their hearts by their lives, they will be perpetually seeking for something that no man in his sober senses ever imagined he had found.

All the representations which are given by our Saviour of the effect of the gospel, either in the hearts of individuals, or in the world at large (which correspond to one another) give us the idea of something that has a *gradual progress*, and no where of a sudden *instantaneous effect*. Thus we find it compared to *seed sown in the ground*, to a small quantity of *leaven*, to labouring in a *vineyard*, &c. all of which require a considerable time before a sensible effect is produced.

The doctrines of the gospel, though established by miracles, did not produce their effect on the minds of men by a *miraculous*, but by a *natural* power. Indeed, external miracles would have been superfluous upon this scheme; since God by internal miracles only might have converted the whole world. The gospel had that effect, and that only, which the ground on which

it was soon admitted. The new views which it opened to mankind induced most of those who were convinced that it was of God to come to a resolution to change their former conduct; but neither could their mere belief of christianity, nor their consequent resolution actually profit them, till it had time to bring forth the proper fruits of it, viz. *good works*; and a *change of character*. And when men did thus become christians, still the apostles never cease urging them, not only to act up to their profession, but to go on to perfection, comparing the christian course to a *race*, or other exercise, which required the greatest, and most unremitting exertion of all their powers.

If I be asked how this end is to be attained, or, in the language of the apostle, how we must *gird up the loins of our minds*, by what means is this lively and efficacious faith in the great practical principles of religion to be acquired. I answer, with Paul, that *faith comes by hearing*, supposing the consequence of hearing to be

3

believing,

believing, and that believing operates as it ought to do. For it naturally arises from giving sufficient attention of mind to the evidence on which our faith rests, and from frequent meditation on the objects of our faith; and it cannot be produced by any other means.

A man, therefore, who means to be a christian in earnest, must, in a more especial manner, make himself acquainted with the books of *scripture*, and meditate upon their contents; because these books, and these books alone, contain the proper materials for this excellent and necessary *discipline of the mind*, viz. a genuine view of the principles of christian faith, hope, and practice.

It is in these books only that we have an authentic account of the several dispensations of God to mankind. Here we have the original instructions of men sent of God, that is, of God himself; respecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. Here we meet with a distinct account of the lives of the prophets, and especially of the great prophet of God Jesus Christ,

by whose miracles, death, and resurrection, all the promises of God are confirmed to us. In these books also we see, and are thereby made to *participate* of, the genuine effects of religious principles on the hearts of men, in the piety and benevolence with which the sacred writers were apparently actuated; so that we enter into their excellent sentiments, as well as view their exemplary lives.

If, my brethren, we would consult our real improvement and happiness, as christians, we must be sensible that we cannot be too minutely acquainted with such particulars as these, or meditate too much upon them. No other exercise can be efficacious to form the heart and guide the life. We therefore find the greatest stress laid upon this employment in the books of scripture. Moses strongly inculcates it upon the Jews, Deut. vi. 6. *These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou*

thou walkest by the way, and when thou lyeſt down, and when thou riſeſt up, &c. The psalmiſt repeatedly expreſſes the ſatisfaction which he had in his meditation upon the word of God, Pf. i. 1. *Bleſſed is the man that walketh not in the counſel of the ungodly, nor ſtandeth in the way of ſinners, nor ſitteth in the ſeat of the ſcornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* See alſo, Pf. xix. 7, &c. and cxix. 97. The apoſtle Paul likewiſe ſays of Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 15, 16.) *From a child thou haſt known the holy ſcriptures, which are able to make thee wiſe unto ſalvation, through faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus. All ſcripture, given by inſpiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works.*

THEſE injunctions and exhortations certainly authorize us to conclude, that the frequent reading of the ſcriptures, the taking pleaſure in them, and meditation upon their contents, are abſolutely neceſſary in

order to *gird up the loins of our minds*, and to form a truly christian character and conduct. The scriptures will not be neglected by any person, but in consequence of his not apprehending himself to be sufficiently interested in their contents; and without this apprehension it is impossible that truly religious principles can be implanted, and take root in the mind. Without this aid the temptations of the world will be too strong for a man. He will not be sufficiently upon his guard, so as to have the perfect command of himself, and not be surpris'd into improper sentiments and unworthy actions.

I mention a constant attention to the scriptures not as the only means of girding up the loins of our minds, and strengthening religious principles, but as that which is of eminent use to recommend and enforce the rest, such as prayer, an attendance upon public worship, and other means of religion. All these things have a natural connexion, and they introduce and assist one another.

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It may be said, that these things being only the *means* of religion, so much stress should not be laid upon them. But I would observe that they are the *evidences* as well as the means of genuine religion ; and also that no *end* can be gained without the use of the proper means. Besides, my immediate object at present is to insist chiefly upon those things which seem to be the most neglected, whatever be their relative importance ; and if it was the error of the last age to lay too much stress upon the means of religion, it is evidently the error of many in the present age, at least such as you whom I am now addressing, to pay too little attention to them ; and if the former error produced a spurious kind of religion, the tendency of our present sentiments and conduct is to leave us no religion at all.

Having given this account of the importance of attending to the means of religion in general, and to the study of the scriptures in particular, as being of the most eminent use to generate and strengthen the great principle of christian faith, which is the foundation

dation of all religion, I shall add a few observations concerning two other outward means of christian improvement, and which are also marks of our attention to the profession of christianity, viz. *public worship*, and *the Lord's supper*, the neglect of which is not the fault of this congregation in particular (though this is the only reason why I chuse to speak of them at all on this occasion) but of the present age in general.

I shall say nothing of the design, or use, either of public worship, or of the Lord's supper, because you will agree with me in your ideas of them; but, my brethren, I wish to make you more sensible of the obligation you are under to act agreeably to your own convictions.

If one day in seven be appointed to be a season of rest from labour, and for serious recollection of mind, by that Being who has made us capable both of labour and of reflection, let us conscientiously appropriate this, as well as every other portion of our time, to the use for which it was intended, and for which, we may therefore presume, it

is really wanted ; and let us not, out of too great a dread of superstition (which ought certainly to be guarded against, in this as well as in every thing else) pass into the contrary extreme, of a gross abuse of a divine ordinance, and a scandalous licentiousness of conduct.

Works of *necessity* and *mercy* are allowed to be a sufficient reason for setting aside the distinction of the Lord's day from the rest ; but that journey, for instance, cannot be said to be *necessary*, for which nothing but *convenience* can be pleaded ; neither can it be necessary to confine yourselves at home by taking a medicine on that day, when your health would not suffer by its being taken on the day before, or the day after. Also a cold, or other slight indisposition, is with a very ill grace pleaded as an excuse for absence from public worship, by those who are known to run much greater risques on other accounts. I wish it were merely a matter of *doubt*, whether, in many cases, the plea of necessity be justly alleged, and that it could be

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be supposed that persons acted according to their *judgments*, though biased by their inclinations. But alas, so generally, and so manifestly, is business of a nature altogether foreign to the proper design of the Lord's day, thrown into it, by many persons, that it cannot be accounted for but by supposing it to be the effect of particular *design* and *contrivance*; which, being a wilful neglect of an acknowledged duty, certainly argues a want of the fear of God, and the absence of *religious principle*, properly so called.

Again, you will agree with me, my brethren, that our Lord Jesus Christ expressly commanded his disciples to commemorate his death (which was the greatest proof of his love to us) by a cheerful, but at the same time a solemn and serious rite, and that this memorial is to continue in his church till his second coming. This rite, therefore, is, in fact, one of the *standing proofs* of the truth of christianity; and consequently by joining in it, we not only acknowledge that truth, but bear our *testimony* to it, and like the apostles

tles

bles themselves, are both the *disciples*, and in some measure, the *witnesſes* of *Chriſt*, even to the end of time.

You are ſenſible that the command to join in the celebration of this inſtitution extends to all who bear the *chriſtian* name, and who are qualified to join in any other part of *chriſtian* worſhip. To what then, my brethren, can your neglect of this ordinance be owing? It muſt be either ſome latent ſuperſtition, a criminal want of attention to the ſubject, or a more criminal indifference to the thing itſelf, ariſing from a want of reſpect to the authority that enjoins it. I wiſh it were even poſſible to ſuggeſt any other reaſon for your conduct.

The moral uſes of the very few poſitive inſtitutions in the *chriſtian* religion are ſufficiently obvious; but admitting that they were not ſo, it ought to ſuffice us, that they are enjoined by a *competent authority*; and the man who can knowingly tranſgreſs any one acknowledged command, though, to his apprehenſion, ever ſo unmeaning, is certainly deſtitute of reſpect to the *authority* by which it

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it is enjoined, and of a *principle of obedience* in general ; which, with respect to God, is, in the highest degree, criminal and dangerous. You do not yourselves always give to a servant, or a child, the reasons of your commands ; and yet you justly expect implicit obedience ; and you would consider their *peremptory disobedience* as deserving of the severest punishment, though the thing itself should be ever so trifling.

As I cannot take my leave of you, my brethren, without expressing my earnest wishes that the several schemes I have formed, and endeavoured to carry into execution, for your benefit (and at the same time, that of dissenting congregations in general) may have their effect after my departure from you ; and as a summary and connected view of them may possibly be of some use for that purpose, I shall, on this occasion, briefly remind you of them, and also inform you what I should have wished to have done farther, in pursuance of the same general design.

Perceiving, upon my first coming among you, that very few, in proportion to the
number

number of the congregation, received *the Lord's supper*, I published *A Free Address* to you upon the subject, calculated, as I thought, to explain the nature of that institution, to answer the objections you might have to the celebration of it, especially those which remained from the ignorance and superstition of the dark ages of christianity, and to set the advantage and obligation of communicating in a clear and strong light. I have had the satisfaction to find that my endeavours in this respect have not been wholly without effect, though by no means so great as I wished, or indeed expected.

In this Address I gave my opinion very strongly, and I have repeated it upon several occasions since, against that service which is called the *preparation for the Lord's supper*, as altogether unscriptural, and superstitious; but I thought it, upon the whole, most expedient, to content myself with those declarations; and I did not chuse to give offence to any well-meaning persons by discontinuing that service. I meant, however, very
soon,

soon, to have made the proposal, and should have been glad if you had cheerfully acceded to it.

Being sensible how much is incumbent upon *masters of families*, and how much is in their power, with respect to the care of their children and servants, in instructing them, attending to their morals, and keeping up the worship of God in their families, I published a plain and earnest *Address* to you on this subject also, together with short *forms of prayer* for all the usual occasions of a family; and I took what care I could to have it put into the hands of every master of a family among you. Whether this attempt has had any good effect, is known to God and your own consciences.

Observing that, in consequence of the happy tranquillity which Dissenters have of late years enjoyed, but little attention has been given by them to the true principles of their dissent, which has necessarily been accompanied with a declension of just zeal for the interest, as the cause of religious liberty, I endeavoured to make the principles of our
dissent

diffent better understood, and more especially to impress the minds of those who maintained them with a just sense of their importance and obligation, in a *Free Address to Protestant Dissenters as such*. But as this Address appeared to me to be less necessary in this congregation, and indeed in this part of the country, than in many other places, I took no particular care to make it known to you ; and to avoid giving offence by the necessary freedom of it, I published it without my name.

The great profligacy of the present age being manifestly owing to a want of moral and religious principles, imbibed in early years, and it being impossible to inculcate these principles with sufficient force and effect by discourses from the pulpit, which are almost necessarily miscellaneous and unconnected. I formed, and have carried into execution a pretty extensive plan of *religious instruction*, advancing, in a regular progress, from infancy, to years of perfect manhood.

For this purpose I thought it convenient to divide the younger part of my hearers into

three classes. The first consisted of *children*, for whose use I printed a short and very plain *catechism*, containing such a view of the principles of religion, as I think the youngest children, that have attained to the use of speech, may be made to understand. The second consisted of young persons more advanced in years, for whom I drew up another catechism, consisting of a set of *questions* only, peculiarly calculated, as I think, to bring them very early, and pretty thoroughly acquainted with *the scriptures*, the genuine source of all religious knowledge.

The third class consisted of *young men*, from the age of sixteen or eighteen, to about thirty, for whose use I composed a set of *lectures*, which I delivered in the way of conversation, in which I endeavoured to demonstrate to them in a regular manner, the principles of *natural religion*, the *evidences*, and the *doctrines of revelation*, and which I concluded with a view of *the corruptions of christianity*, historically deduced. By this means, I am satisfied, from the trial that I have now made of it, that young persons may
most

most easily be brought to understand their religion, as Christians, Protestants, and Dissenters.

The peculiar advantages of this mode of instruction, and a more distinct account of the nature of it, I explained in an *Essay on the best method of communicating religious knowledge to the members of christian societies*. Part of this course of lectures I have already published, under the title of *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*, and I intend, God willing, to publish the remainder in due time.

In part, to avoid obvious inconveniences, and partly for want of a room sufficiently large for the purpose, I confined these lectures, for the first time of reading them, to *young men*; but I should have been glad, if, at the second time of reading them, I could have contrived to instruct the *young women*, either at the same time, or separately.

It is with great satisfaction that I can say, with respect to most of the young men of this congregation, that they have given due attendance on these lectures; and I flatter

myself that by the attention which they gave to them when they were delivered, and which I hope they will still continue to give to them when they are printed, they will find their time and pains not ill bestowed.

With respect to children of the first class, I must own that I had not all the encouragement that I wished, and still less with respect to the second; owing, perhaps, to the parents not sufficiently entering into the nature of a thing so new to them as this was. For I am unwilling to suppose that they were averse to taking the pains, which they must, at least at the first, have necessarily done, to prepare their children for this kind of exercise.

It is acknowledged by all, that the general plan and *discipline* of our societies has deviated very far indeed from that of the primitive churches, which consisted of persons whose object it was to *watch over and edify one another*, and especially that a very unequal part of the burden is now thrown upon the minister; since he is generally so situated, that he cannot, with the least pro-

bability of success, interpose his advice or admonition where it may be most wanted. I therefore wrote and published an *Address* to you, and other christian societies, upon that subject, proposing what appeared to me a better constitution of a christian church, by means of which the original and proper ends of christian societies might be more effectually answered.

I am afraid we are gone too far from the primitive institutions of christianity to expect a revival of them in this age; but I hope that the idea I then endeavoured to give you of the obligation that naturally lies upon every member of a christian society, who, on any account whatever, has influence in it (without any formal nomination to an office) to contribute all that may be in his power to the real benefit of it, by instruction, reproof, or any other way, will not be wholly without effect; and that you will in general be more attentive to the important christian duty of *provoking to love and to good works, exhorting one another daily*

while it is called to-day, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Lastly, perceiving in this neighbourhood, and, in some measure, among yourselves, the progress of what appears to me to be a spurious and mischievous set of notions in religion, inspiring very unworthy ideas of the divine being, and the maxims of his government, which cannot but have an unfavourable effect upon the disposition of men's minds, and consequently upon their conduct in life, I published, in the cheapest form that I could, and, in order to give as little offence as possible, without my name, a serious *Appeal* to the professors of christianity upon the subject. This, and other small pieces, written in pursuance of the same design, I have had the satisfaction to find, have been the instrument, in the hands of divine providence, of enlightening the minds of many in the knowledge of what I believe to be *his truth*, and I hope they will still continue to produce the same effect.

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I was the more willing to publish something of this kind, as it has always been my opinion, and my practice has been agreeable to it, to keep all subjects of religious controversy, as much as possible, out of the pulpit; and yet it was to be wished, that persons of plain understandings, who were disposed to read and inquire for themselves, might have an opportunity of seeing the foundation, in reason and the scriptures, of those doctrines, which alone can render the divine being the object of filial reverence, love, and confidence; and likewise be able to answer those who alledge detached passages of scripture, in favour of long established corruptions, passages often ill translated, but more often wretchedly interpreted.

Allow me to say without offence to any who may be otherwise minded, if any such should be present, that *speculative principles*, especially those which relate to the nature, character, and moral government of God, are by no means a matter of indifference with respect to *practice*; and therefore that

great care ought to be taken to form just ideas of these subjects.

If the divine being be considered as capable of punishing men for a crime which they did not commit, of sentencing some to everlasting happiness, and others to everlasting misery, from mere arbitrary will; and of shewing no mercy to any of his offending, though truly penitent creatures (whom, for wise ends, he made imperfect) till a full satisfaction was made to his infinite justice (even so far as to take it of the innocent, if the guilty were not able to pay) which is in fact to have no proper principle of mercy or forgiveness at all, it is not in human nature to look up to him with reverence, love, or confidence.

Also the doctrine of the *divine unity* is a subject of practical, as well as of speculative consideration, and indeed for no other reason could so much stress be laid upon it in the books of the Old and New Testament, in which we are required *to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, strength, and mind*. This certainly requires that all our
affections

affections center in *one* great object. But *three persons* are *three objects*, which will necessarily be considered in different lights, having different *attributes*, as well as different *names*. For the difference between *persons* and *beings* is merely verbal, and not real. It is even acknowledged that the difference is not comprehensible by us, and therefore with respect to us, and our sentiments and feelings, it must be the same as if there was no difference at all; and consequently the worship of three different persons must necessarily be the worship of three different gods.

But, my brethren; if these things be of a practical nature, see that you make a practical use of them, by giving sufficient attention to them, as I explained in the first part of this discourse, and let them have their natural influence upon your minds; and also see that you do not disgrace and discredit a rational faith by an unworthy conduct. Better had it been for you to have believed in three, or three hundred gods, and those of wood and stone, than to believe
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in the *one only living and true God*, and at the same time live as without him in the world, intirely thoughtless of his being, character, and government, as if you were not accountable to him for your conduct. Infinitely better were it for you to believe whatever the most stupid of mankind have believed concerning God, than disregard his laws, profane his name, or neglect his worship.

Better were it for you to have believed in a revengeful implacable object of worship, than to believe in a God truly merciful and gracious, who freely, and *for his goodness sake* only, forgives all the sincerely penitent, and has sent his son to live and die, in order to bring men to repentance, and at the same time not to be solicitous to become the proper objects of his mercy, or not to imitate such an amiable pattern, and *be merciful as your father who is in heaven is merciful*; freely, and without any satisfaction, forgiving, as you yourselves hope to be forgiven. In short, better were it for you to believe all the absurdities of the church of Rome,

Rome,

Rome, than not to add purity of heart and life to purity of doctrine and worship.

Gross ignorance and superstition still prevail among the generality of professing christians, especially the unlearned; and it would be unreasonable to expect that opinions which have prevailed, and which have been held sacred by almost the whole christian world, for many ages (in which our excellent religion was suffered, by the unsearchable wisdom of God, to lie under a cloud) should not retain their influence with some more *ingenuous minds*, and even that some degree of *learning* and *ability* should be employed in their defence. This is the case with respect to the grossest absurdities of popery, which, it cannot be denied, have had, and probably still have, their defenders among the most learned and the best of mankind.

It is evident, however, and the friends of christianity will rejoice in the prospect of it, that the truth is making its way by degrees, and in a manner that promises its general prevalence, viz. with men of real
learning,

learning, and especially those men of letters who give most of their time to the study of the scriptures; and also with other persons of good sense and good dispositions, who are capable of inquiring and thinking for themselves; and the number of these persons is increasing every day.

A very remarkable and happy change has, in the course of divine providence, been gradually brought about among yourselves in this respect, in the space of a century, which period of time is now elapsed since the erection of the building in which we are now assembled. Indeed, the whole of the change has taken place in the memory of very many of you who are now present. I shall think myself happy if I have been, in any respect, the means, in the hands of God, of advancing this great work of reformation among you; but much more so, if, together with the principles of sound knowledge, I have, in any measure, successfully inculcated what is still more needful, that *integrity of heart and life*, that genuine love of God and of mankind, without which
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all knowledge is but as *sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal*.

The times of our ancestors were times of laudable *zeal*, but of very limited knowledge. It were pity if an increase of knowledge should be attended with a decrease of *zeal*. You cannot be sufficiently thankful to God for bringing you *out of darkness into his marvellous light*; but see that you walk worthy of that light, and that you bring no disgrace upon rational christianity by your unworthy conduct. In the present state of human nature it cannot be expected but that such *offences* as these will come, but *two unto them by whom they come*.

I trust, my brethren, that you do not need any exhortation to continue stedfast in your principles as *Dissenters*, and upon this subject I have nothing to add to what I have said in my *Address to Protestant Dissenters as such*. I shall only remind you at present, that to be a Dissenter, in the present state of things, in this country, is to bear our testimony against the authority and imposition of men in matters of religion, and also
against

against the many abuses and corruptions in christian doctrine, discipline, and worship, which had their source in the antichristian church of Rome, and which yet remain in our established church.

A cause like this wants not the countenance of *numbers*, or of *wealth*, to make it respectable. It is true, my brethren, our profession excludes us from many of the honours and emoluments of this world, and even subjects us to many grievous pains and penalties, whenever the malice of our enemies shall break through the restraints of humanity and natural justice, by taking advantage of several *laws*, which are as disgraceful to our country and free constitution, as they are injurious to us. But I trust that, considering the nature of our profession, and our expectations as *christians*, we shall not be surpris'd, or discouraged by this circumstance, as if some *strange*, and extraordinary *thing had happened to us*; when our master himself, *not being of the world*, was *hated by the world*, and his religion was from the very beginning a *sect that was every where spoken against*. In

In fact, what you and I, my brethren, call genuine christianity, has hardly ever been so much as tolerated by the laws of any christian country, at least in Europe, and what is called christendom. I trust, however, from a view of the present face of things, compared with the writings of the prophets (which were certainly intended to apprize us of very important events respecting the christian church) that the time is fast approaching, when an end will be put to all antichristian tyranny, and when *the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.*

All who are interested in the support of these *antichristian establishments*, which usurp an undue authority over the consciences of men, and whose wealth and power are advanced by them, are at this very time in a state of general consternation, both at home and abroad; seeing their principles and mixims universally decried, and their unjust claims assailed from a great variety of quarters, so that *their kingdom is now full of darkness, and they are gnawing their tongues for*

for pain, but without repenting of their deeds, Rev. xvi. 10. And we are authorized, my brethren, by the spirit which foretold both this corruption of christianity, and the restoration of it from this deplorably corrupted state, to enjoy their confusion and distress; and, together with the powers of heaven, and the holy apostles and prophets, to rejoice at the fall of this *mystical Babylon*, since it is *God that avengeth us of her.* Rev. xviii. 20.

But *who shall abide this day of our Lord's coming*, to plead his cause in the world; when those princes and states which *would not have him to reign over them*, and who have persecuted and oppressed his faithful witnesses, shall be *broken in pieces like a pot-ter's vessel.*

THE CONCLUSION.

I think myself happy, my brethren, and I shall reflect upon it with pleasure as long as I am capable of reflection, that, as our connexion has subsisted with perfect harmony,

mony, it is dissolved with mutual gratitude and esteem. I am conscious, indeed, of many imperfections, and of some neglects in the discharge of my duty, but you have had the candour to overlook them. I would observe, however, that it is not by the opinion which we may entertain of each other that we must stand or fall, at the tribunal of the *great shepherd and bishop of souls*, Christ Jesus. He, being endued by God with a perfect knowledge of our characters (though, having a fellow feeling of our infirmities, he will be disposed to make all reasonable allowances for us) may acquit where we condemn, and condemn where we acquit. To this decisive judgment let us have respect. Happy will it be for us if I have so preached, and you so heard, that we need *not be ashamed before him at his coming.*

It is another ground of satisfaction to me, that I leave the congregation in so good a state, in a variety of respects, especially so harmonious in your general sentiments and views, on which account you cannot fail to appear highly respectable wherever the

Dissenting interest is known ; and you have given a very important proof of your prudence and judgment, as well as of your harmony, in the perfect unanimity with which you have acted in the choice of my successor ; a choice in which I sincerely concur, and on which I congratulate you. May you continue to be a pattern to other congregations, in this and in every thing else in which a christian society can be worthy of imitation, and may you reap the proper and happy fruits of what has been so truly praise-worthy in your dispositions and conduct.

And now, brethren, in the words of the apostle Paul, Acts xx. 32. I commend you to God, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them who are sanctified. To Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen!

A SERMON,

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED DECEMBER the 31st, 1780,

AT THE
NEW MEETING, IN BIRMINGHAM,
ON UNDERTAKING THE
PASTORAL OFFICE IN THAT PLACE.

T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE request that has been made to me to publish this sermon has been such, that it is with great pleasure that I comply with it. But my principal motive is to exhibit what I hope will not long be so remarkable a thing as it is at present in this country, viz. the concurrence of a numerous and respectable society of christians in the proper unitarian principles; thinking, for the reasons mentioned in the Sermon itself, that it cannot be too generally known, that there are christian societies who hold these principles.

Those who are acquainted with the state of the Dissenters will be satisfied, that, notwithstanding the great advances that have been made of late years in just and liberal sentiments, there are few societies among them who would even bear such an address as that which is now before the public. But the congregation of the New Meeting, at Birmingham, have had uncommon advantages, in the instructions of the late excellent Mr. Bourn, those of my worthy colleague, and of the Reverend Mr. Hawkes, whom I have the honour to succeed.

The same simplicity of conduct, and the same fearless integrity in the cause of truth, would, I doubt not, be every where, in due time, crowned with the same success. And, certainly, this is a cause which well deserves that we should be willing to run some risk for. In promoting genuine christianity, it must be expected by us, that we exert not only *fortitude*, but likewise *patience*, before we see the happy fruits of our labours.

I hope that my own example, as far as it is known, will operate to encourage some. There are few who have of late years suffered more from bigotry than myself. So extremely unpopular was I for some years after my first settlement as a minister, though I had never preached a controversial sermon, or done any thing that I thought could irritate (and I do not know that I was charged with any thing in my conduct unbecoming a christian, or a christian minister) that, besides losing the greatest part of my hearers, when I printed and circulated *Proposals for opening a School*, for which I was not thought to be unqualified, I never got a single scholar. I did not want friends to solicit for me; but to all that could be said in my favour, it was replied, "What! send my son to an Arian?" For such I then was, and did not conceal it.

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When I look back upon this trying situation, I consider myself more indebted to it, on several accounts, than to any other of the scenes through which it has pleased Divine Providence to lead me. And I hope I am equally thankful to that Being who disposes of all things, both for leading me into it, and bringing me out of it.

From so discouraging an outset, I thank God, that, having persisted in my inquiries after truth, and in the most unreserved profession of whatever I have apprehended to be such (notwithstanding, in the course of it, I have been led to maintain opinions the most offensive that were ever advanced among christians) I have been brought, though with very different views, within the call of a christian society who are liberal enough to think me capable of serving them in the character of their pastor. Nor is this the only congregation where I have had reason to think my services would have been acceptable.

Even those opinions which occasioned so great an outcry at first, I can already perceive not to give such alarm at present; and I am persuaded that, in due time, they will not only wear a still less frightful aspect, but be generally received by christians, and be valued by them as one of the greatest bulwarks of the protestant cause, against

the most fundamental corruptions of the true christian system.

Having been favoured with so much more encouragement than I had reason to expect (far more than most others who have trod the same unpromising path) I hope I shall not, in a more advantageous situation, pursue any other course than that which I have hitherto held, and that I shall cheerfully exert my best endeavours in the service of the society I have the happiness to be connected with, and whose candour and indulgence I shall, on several accounts, have so much need of.

Notwithstanding the attention that I hope I shall always give to these superior duties, and to theological studies, I propose not to remit any of my application to philosophical pursuits, which also I entered upon under many disadvantages, and which I am now much better situated for prosecuting. These pursuits, different as they are, are far from being at variance. On the contrary, they perfectly harmonize with, and promote each other.

I shall subjoin a copy of the *request of the congregation* to print this sermon, and shall add, that the reader will find some of the most important sentiments in this discourse farther urged in the *Sermon on my resignation of the pastoral office at Leeds*, but more largely in an excellent piece just published,
entitled

entitled, *A free and serious address to the christian laity, especially such as, embracing unitarian sentiments, conform to trinitarian worship, &c.*

The doctrine of the *proper object of religious worship* is of such importance, that it behoves all who are impressed with a just sense of it to *cry aloud and not spare*; especially now that the attention of the christian world is awake to it, and the opposition to the great doctrine of the *divine unity*, may be expected, from the evident agreeableness of it to reason and the scriptures, to be more and more impotent. I rejoice to see so seasonable a publication as that above-mentioned on the subject, and wish it may have all the effect it deserves.

I will also now inform the reader, that on this subject I addressed the public in an anonymous piece, entitled *A letter to a layman on the subject of Mr. Lindsey's proposal for a reformed English church*, in the year 1774. Also a considerable part of my *free address to protestant dissenters as such* relates to this subject.

BIRMINGHAM, 28th Jan. 1781.

Rev. and dear Sir,

WE subscribing members of the congregation of Protestant Dissenters assembling at the New-Meeting in Birmingham, being now met upon congregational affairs, are happy in embracing this opportunity of presenting you with our united thanks for the honour you have done us in accepting our unanimous invitation to take, in connection with the Rev. Mr. Blythe, the pastoral care of this church. Permit us also to thank you for the introductory discourse you delivered us, and to request its publication. As we heard it with much satisfaction and pleasure, so we cannot but wish to have it in our power more deliberately to review the important sentiments it inculcated, and also be the means of giving others an opportunity of profiting by them. Trusting to your candour, we make no difficulty in imparting these wishes to you, and with the most cordial respect we remain,

Rev. and dear Sir,

Your affectionate and very humble Servants,

WILLIAM RUSSELL.

Signed at the request, and on the behalf }
of the subscribers present. }

JOHN

JOHN xvii. 16.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

My Christian Brethren,

IN these words of our Saviour we have a view given us of the great object of the christian religion, from which we may collect a general, but just idea, of the proper *end and use of christian societies, with the duties of the severai members of them*; and for this reason I wish to call your attention to them on my acceptance of your invitation to the pastoral office among you.

Our Lord answered with truth, when, in his reply to Pilate, he said, *My kingdom is not of this world.* For the *power* exercised in his kingdom is not over men's persons and property, the *honours* of it are not worldly honours and distinctions; and the advantages

tages of it, to the prince or the subject, are not such as are fought for by earthly sovereigns and their adherents. So far are either from any pretensions to worldly power, wealth, pleasure, or even security, that, in consequence of *not-being of the world*, but having a disposition of mind unfitted to it, and looking beyond it, they are the objects of hatred and persecution to men of mere worldly views, and who by divine permission have the powers of this world at their command.

This was fully experienced by our Lord himself, who when he was on earth was *rejected and despised of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah liii. 3.) and who terminated a laborious life with a painful and ignominious death upon the cross. His followers also, and generally in proportion to their being animated with the same spirit, and actuated by the same views (openly professing the truth of his gospel in its purity, and making light of what the world could do in opposition to it) have found the truth of what he himself apprized them,

viz. that *the servant is not greater than his Lord*, and that as *the world had hated him*, so it *would hate them also*. But then, as the apostle says, as they *suffered with him*, suffered in his cause, in the cause of truth and a good conscience, they will assuredly *reign with him, and be glorified together* (2 Tim. ii. 12.)

If then, we call ourselves christians, we must ever bear in mind, that, though we live in the world, that is with men who have no views or prospects beyond it, whose chief pursuits are riches, honours, or pleasures, these are but *secondary* things for us. We are to receive them thankfully, and above all to improve them properly, if, in the course of divine providence, they fall to our lot; but we are, at the same time, to be always looking beyond them, to a *more enduring substance*, to a *treasure in heaven*, to *honours* that are unfading, which *come from God* and not from man, and to that *pleasure* which is *at his right hand for evermore*, accompanied with that inward satisfaction of mind, which always attends the possession
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of a good conscience. And we ought ever to be ready even to renounce all the advantages, honours, and pleasures of the world, when they come in competition with our duty, and our obedience to the commands of Christ. We must not hold *even life itself so dear to us*, as that we should not be ready to part with it (and in whatever manner those who in this world have the power over life shall please) rather than *make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*. If in the hour of trial we deny Christ, *he will also deny us*.

It is much easier to preserve these just views of the object and end of our profession in an openly hostile, than in a seemingly friendly world, from the constant opposition of principles and objects in the former circumstances. In this case, that is, in a state of persecution, whether we voluntarily attend to it or not, we cannot help seeing, and reflecting continually, that this world is not our home. While we preserve the profession of our faith uncorrupted, and while we retain our integrity, in asserting that faith, without

without any of those unworthy artifices, whereby too many evade the consequences of a frank and open declaration of their real principles, we see there is no state of enjoyment or repose to be looked for here; and we therefore naturally, and indeed necessarily, look forward to *that rest which yet remaineth for the people of God* (Heb. iv. 9.) where alone *the wicked cease from troubling* (Job iii. 17.) In this situation we want no motives to cultivate that temper and disposition of mind, which alone can qualify us for the happiness of that heavenly state.

But when the world is not *apparently* hostile to us, it is most of all *truly* so. For then it is, that, not being molested by the world, at the same time that we are subject to the influence of it; being *men of like passions with others*, the same things that strike others strike us. By mixing with the world, and sharing the emoluments of it, we naturally become fond of them, and attached to them; and within certain limits this is unavoidable, and not amiss. But is it in human nature, without particular efforts with ourselves,

ourselves, to which the bulk of mankind are much averse, to keep within the bounds of moderation, and not to become too much attached to the world, and those things of it which are foreign to our main object and ultimate views? Living with the world, we naturally live as the world does, and become gradually, in all respects, like the world; and the great objects of our christian profession, being too long kept out of sight, lose their influence, and we are in danger of abandoning the pursuit of them altogether.

Now the use of christian societies is to counteract the influence of the world around us, to keep up the idea of our being separate from the world, and of the importance of being on our guard against the infection of it. It is a provision for regular instruction in the doctrines of the gospel, and for meditation upon the nature and excellence of it, in order to *establish, strengthen, and settle us in our most holy faith* (1 Peter v. 10.) and thus to prepare us for encountering the frowns or the smiles of the world around us.

In

In christian assemblies, the scriptures, which contain the history of all the dispensations of God to mankind, the pious sentiments of men devoted to God and honoured by him, especially the history of our Saviour, his doctrines, miracles, and conversation, with the labours and writings of the apostles who succeeded him (abounding with excellent instruction, and most animating examples of virtue and piety, adapted to every age and condition in life) are constantly read and explained. It is in consequence of being in a habit of attending to these things at least on one day in seven, and being led thereby to give more particular attention to them at our leisure hours, in our families, in our closets, and in the intervals of our daily occupations, that, amidst the business of this life (which must be attended to, having for its object our well being here) those things which relate to our well being hereafter are not forgotten. Thus are we striving for the *bread that perishes*, and, at the same time, more earnestly still for *that which endureth to everlasting life*. (John vi. 27.)

The very *forms* of christian societies, when they are properly kept up, the very meeting of one another, not as common friends and acquaintance, but as *christians*, and joining together in acts of christian worship, hearing the same instructions and professing the same faith, have great efficacy in promoting a christian temper, and is a powerful motive to christian conduct. All habits of society are restraints upon men; and as it is confessedly difficult to break the chains of bad company, so it would not be easy to a man to frequent a christian society, and continue a course of life manifestly inconsistent with the profession of christianity. He would feel himself reproved by the consciousness of the disesteem in which he was held by those whose esteem, from habits of friendship and society, he could not but value, and would imagine even the silent countenance to mean more than it really did.

Consequently, this society, if (for whatever reason, whether of convenience, or the mere shame of quitting it) it was actually kept up, would constrain him at least to
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keep up an outward decent appearance ; and then, if the foreign corrupt influence was not very strong, it would, in time produce a greater conformity of life, and of heart also, to his profession, and he would at length perfectly assimilate with those with whom he associated. Also the admonitions of his christian friends, which, while he frequented their society, he would be more in the way of receiving, would strongly operate to the same end.

If the foreign corrupt influence was too strong, he would abandon the society altogether ; and this is the next good consequence to be desired, as it would tend to mark the distinction between the members of christian societies and the rest of the world. All these happy consequences would be more manifest, if christian societies, in times of ease and indulgence, were more truly christian, that is, if christian zeal did not too naturally cool in such circumstances.

It is very evident, from this general view of the object of christian societies, that the business of them may be considered as three-

fold, viz. *joint devotion, regular instruction,* and *particular admonition.* And the best provision was made for all these ends in the constitution of the primitive churches; in which, besides a number of persons who undertook the management of the secular concerns of the society, and were called *deacons*, there were several others who bore the common title of *presbyters*, or *bishops*, and who were all *pastors* or *teachers*, distributing the work among them according to their several capacities, and at the same time giving particular attention to the conduct of all the members of the society; preventing irregularities by seasonable admonition or reproof, and reporting particular cases to the whole church, if their private admonitions, and those of a few more of their brethren, had no effect. By this means christian churches were kept more pure, and free from unworthy members, and consequently every person had more restraints to break through before he could act in a manner unbecoming a christian, or reject the profession of christianity.

This

This excellent institution was kept up, and had its full effect during some centuries, and long after the time when one of these presbyters more eminently qualified for his office than the rest, having been carefully educated with a view to it, and giving his whole time and attention to the duties of it (a distinction which for obvious reasons could not generally have taken place in the very primitive times) had the style and rank of *bishop* appropriated to himself, leading the devotions of the congregation, being prepared to give them regular instruction, especially expounding the scriptures every Lord's day, or at least as often as occasion required. But at the request, or with the consent of the bishop, the presbyters discharged every part of his office, and they were sufficiently qualified to serve the churches of inferior rank, that were dependent on the principal church.

Unfortunately, as every thing that bears the name of *power* is liable to abuse, this has been the case with respect to the office of *elder* in our churches, and now the very name is

lost among us; but with it we have likewise lost the uses of a valuable institution.

The minister, or public teacher, besides being a single person, is, from his situation, and general circumstances, altogether inadequate to the work of private admonition or advice, and much more to that of *censure*, which requires the prudence and influence of a person of equal rank, and living in habits of society and friendship with the object of those acts of the truest friendship. The minister has no opportunity for these offices more than any other person, and therefore they cannot be expected of him. Besides, being too often entirely dependent upon his people for his subsistence, he cannot always be supposed to have that courage and independence of mind, which is requisite for the faithful discharge of those most difficult duties.

Unfortunately, also, the times have generally been such, that this circumstance has operated to prevent even the instructions of the minister from having that extent and effect which they might otherwise have had;

had; being in a manner limited to discourses from the pulpit, which are addressed chiefly to persons of some years and experience; whilst children, young persons, and those who are advancing to a state of manhood, have been less attended to, the time and labour of the ministers being employed on other objects.

Having, in a former situation, given particular attention to this evil, and having the advantage of some experience, I shall, with your approbation (having already the concurrence of my worthy colleague) attempt to remedy it. Happy shall we think ourselves, if judging as I hope you always will do, for yourselves, we shall have your hearty concurrence to do what we shall think conducive to your own best interests, as members of a christian society.

With respect to particular admonition, which we see in the epistles of Paul was more especially the business of the presbyters or elders, as it is likewise a duty incumbent upon *all* christians; till it be thought proper to new model our societies (which will

require the greatest consideration, in order to guard against the abuses of former times) you must all hold yourselves in duty bound to do that as relations, friends, neighbours, and acquaintance, which you are not bound to do as officers in a regularly constituted christian church. And those who have need of it must receive, and be thankful for, every admonition proceeding from real friendship, as they value that *moral improvement* which is the end of it.

It would be happy if mankind could do without any forms of government, civil or ecclesiastical, and if all pains and penalties could be safely abolished, as well as church censures. But if every man were allowed, without fear, and without censure, to do *that which was right in his own eyes*, both themselves and others would soon find the inconvenience of it. However, with prudence in those whose place it is to give admonition, and docility in those who stand in need of it, something may be done to remedy the evils to which we are now exposed,

Besides

Besides the duties that are incumbent on the ministers and people of particular christian societies, with respect to their own improvement and edification, we ought not to forget, that every christian society, and every individual christian, bears a relation to, and is part of, the whole christian church; and therefore ought to consult what will be for its honour, and favour its propagation in those countries in which christianity is not yet received.

Our Saviour and the apostles never fail to enforce the practice even of ordinary moral duties, from considerations which respect the edification of others as well as a man's self. We are to let our *light shine before men*, in order that *others may see our good works*, and thereby *glorify our father who is in heaven* (Matt. v. 26). We are also to do nothing by which our brother shall be *offended* (Rom. xiv. 21) that is, made to offend; and that the knowledge of christianity may be propagated in the world, no man must keep the belief of it to himself, but, if called upon,

upon, must, at all hazards, make public profession of his faith in Christ.

Now whatever it be that makes any person think injuriously of the christian religion, so as to prevent his embracing it, prevents all that good which would arise from the reception of it. Every man, therefore, who holds opinions that are irrational and absurd, under the name of christianity, opinions at which the common sense of Jews, Mahometans, and Heathens is known to revolt, and on account of which they actually reject the christian revelation, does his part towards this evil, so that a certain portion of it lies at his door.

If unbelievers take *unreasonable* offence, as the Jews at a suffering Messiah, and the Gentiles of old at a religion founded by a man who died upon a cross, they alone are answerable for their unjustifiable prepossessions; and the christian, who exhibits his religion fairly, and suggests what *ought* to give satisfaction to those who *require a reason of his faith*, stands acquitted. He
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will also be free from blame, if he take due pains to inform himself concerning the genuine doctrines of christianity, and yet, through invincible prejudice, arising from his situation and circumstances, holds *any* errors, even those at which men stumble, and are offended, most of all. *But wo unto him by whom the offence cometh*, if it has arisen from any thing morally wrong in his disposition, as from negligence in his inquiries, or from his obstinacy in holding offensive errors, after reasonable means of conviction.

You need not be informed, that it has pleased divine providence, which brings good out of all evil, to suffer our holy religion to be grossly corrupted, chiefly by a mixture of opinions and maxims derived from the philosophy of the heathen world. These heathen doctrines, utterly unsuitable to the genius and spirit of christianity, and leading to a temper of mind the very reverse of it, have given the greatest countenance and support to that antichristian system, which has so long subjected this part of christendom to the usurpations of the court of Rome.

A system

A system of opinions, abuses, and habits, which had been taking root, and extending themselves, for more than a thousand years, cannot be expected to be reformed at once. Those who are more eminently stiled *Reformers* cannot, therefore, be supposed to have done more than a part, though a glorious and distinguished part, in this great and necessary work. And it behoves us, who come after them, not to keep the very ground which they occupied, but rather to be following their example, and advancing the work which they began.

Few men in a private station of life are justly entitled to a greater share of praise in this respect than your late excellent minister Mr. Bourn; who with the integrity, zeal, activity, and perseverance of an apostle, stood forth early the champion of gospel truth, and boldly opposed the progress of whatever he apprehended to be error. His light, my brethren, you now enjoy and rejoice in. Let us then pursue the path in which he led the way, especially as by his invaluable labours, and those of others before us, the
task

task is much easier, and less hazardous, now than it was in his time. Like him, let us rejoice if we be *counted worthy to suffer shame*, reproach and abuse, or even more than this, in so noble a cause (a).

Of these corrupt doctrines, the seeds of which were sown in a very early age, none gives so much just cause of alarm, and there-

(a) Mr. Samuel Bourn, father of the Rev. Mr. Bourn of Norwich, was born at Calne in Wiltshire, and was one of the first ministers at the New Meeting in Birmingham, to which he removed from Chorley in Lancashire, in 1732. He was succeeded by my immediate predecessor the Rev. Mr. Hawkes, the Rev. Mr. Blythe having been pastor along with him.

He greatly distinguished himself by his zeal against the doctrines that are generally termed *Calvinistical*, and by his firmness in encountering great opposition from the bigotry of his time. He was indefatigable in the discharge of his duty as a minister, especially in his attention to the younger part of his congregation, and he was also unwearied in his endeavours to serve the industrious poor wherever he lived.

He was attacked with a paralytic disorder in the pulpit, on the 17th of March 1754, and died on the Friday following. See a short account of his life prefixed to his *Twenty Sermons*, published by his Son. May my *course* and *latter end* be like his!

fore ought more to excite the zeal of the truly enlightened friends of pure christianity, and who wish well to its propagation among Jews and Mahometans, than that relapse into *idolatry*, with which many who call themselves christians are justly chargeable; an idolatry similar to that which it was the great object of the Jewish and christian religions to overturn. For, in consequence of the worship of saints and angels in the church of Rome, the true God is almost as much lost sight of as he was in the heathen world, who worshipped stocks and stones, under the notion of their being emblems or representatives of the divinity.

Though this idolatry proceeded till it came to the worship of a piece of bread, as supposed to be the real body and blood of Christ, it began with paying divine honours to Christ himself; who though the most distinguished messenger of God to man, himself uniformly asserted the proper unity of the divine nature, and spake of his *Father*, exclusively of all other persons, or beings, as *the only true God* (John xvii. 3) *his father*

as well as *our father*, and *his God* as well as *our God* (John xx. 17) and whose highest title is *the mediator between God and man, the man* Christ Jesus. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Observe the apostle says *the man*, not the God, or the God-man, or super-angelic being, but simply *the man Christ Jesus*. Though he reigns, he only reigns in subordination to that great Being who *put all things under his feet*, and to whom he must at length resign his delegated authority, that *God*, the only living and true God, even the Father, *may be all in all*. 1 Cor. xv. 28.

In agreement with this, and with no other idea concerning Christ, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of our Lord as being, *in all respects, like unto his brethren*; and he is elsewhere stiled *our elder brother*. In agreement with this we also read that *as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead*. 1 Cor. xv. 21.

Our Saviour, therefore, differs from us not with respect to his *proper nature*, but only in the great perfection of his character, and in divine communications. Agreeably
to

to which, he himself expressly disclaims all power originating with himself; saying that *the words which he spake were not his own but the Father's that sent him*, and that it was *the Father within him that did the works*, (John xiv. 10) that is the miracles which he wrought. Now what truth could there have been in this, if he had done these things by any proper divinity, or indeed any extraordinary power of *his own*, independent of that of his father?

After the worship of Christ, the worship of his virgin mother was a very easy consequence; and then, so wide a breach being once made in the doctrine of the divine unity, there entered an innumerable host of men and angels, and, in times of ignorance and superstition, many names of mere heathens, and some absolute nonentities.

It is well known that it is this doctrine of *a multiplicity of persons in the deity*, or, which is the very same thing, a multiplicity of Gods, at which Jews and Mahometans chiefly stumble. It is the doctrine of the proper divine unity that they are continually
upbraiding

upbraiding the christian world with departing from ; and while they consider christians as idolaters, it is no wonder that the christian name is held in abhorrence by them, and that their conversion is effectually prevented.

For these important considerations, though it has been, and will be my general practice, to confine my addresses from the pulpit to the enforcing of such doctrines and duties as all christians are agreed in acknowledging, and which are certainly of the greatest importance to the happiness of individuals in this life, and the next ; I shall not fail, on all proper occasions, to hold up to your view, with its proper evidence, and as much energy as I can give to it, this great doctrine of the *proper unity of God* ; and also some others nearly connected with it. I mean such as exhibit the moral character and government of God in such a light as shall make us rejoice in the consideration of our being the subjects of it ; in opposition to such opinions concerning the divine nature, and his government over us, as tend to make us regard him as an object of horror.

It cannot be too generally known, that there are christians, and societies of christians, by whom such doctrines are reprobated, with whom the *one only living and true God* is the sole object of worship, and who consider him in a character that they would respect and love in a parent, a judge, or a sovereign.

It is our duty, not only to search for the truth in matters of such consequence as this, but to bear the most public testimony to it. In God's time, that testimony will have its weight; and they who uniformly and steadily hold it forth, will hereafter be considered as preachers of the gospel, and propagators of it, even to the ends of the earth. For it is only to be expected, and indeed it is only to be wished, that christianity should become the religion of the whole earth, when it shall be purged from the corruptions which at present deform and disgrace it.

In this case, much more may be expected from us Dissenters, than from the members of any civil establishment of religion in the
world;

world; because we are in more favourable circumstances, both for the discovery of truth, and the open profession of it. We, my brethren, are happily free from that vast weight of prejudice, in which every member of an old establishment is necessarily educated. And if, in uncommonly favourable circumstances, their minds should be enlightened, their *testimony* in favour of such a truth as this can have but little weight, while they continue where they are. The conviction of even the majority of such members might be far from procuring a change in creeds and forms of worship, which had been fixed by public authority, in the time of their remote ancestors.

On this account I hold it a point of duty and conscience, not to attend, except in the character of a stranger, any worship in which any other than the one true God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the object of religious homage. It is, in fact, the same consideration that makes all religious protestants scruple to join in the celebration of

the mass. It is paying divine honours to *a creature*. And whether this be done to a *wafer*, or to a *man*, the difference is not *in kind*; and with respect to *degree*, all creatures are equally as nothing when held up in competition with the great creator of all things, who alone is infinite and supreme.

For these reasons when, of late years, I was without any ministerial charge, in preference to all other societies, several of which I could have attended with great satisfaction, I joined myself as a member of, I believe, the only christian church in this country, and in our times, that was expressly, and originally, formed on unitarian principles. And in every situation I shall consider it as my glory, to have been in fellowship with that society, and still to keep up an occasional communion with it (*b*).

(*b*) All who are acquainted with me will know that I mean the *Unitarian* congregation, formed by the Rev. Mr. Lindsey (*quo mihi non devinctior alter*) in Essex-street, London. I shall add nothing farther concerning him, or his undertaking, lest I should be suspected of exaggeration.

I chuse

I chuse to deliver myself in this explicit manner, at this time, with respect to the proper *unity of God*, and the *proper humanity* of Christ, both on account of the great importance of the subject, and as a specimen of the perfect freedom with which I shall always lay before you my real sentiments concerning any article of doctrine that I shall think of importance to propose to you. I do this both that you may not be deceived in me, and that I may not be deceived in you, but that I may know in time on what ground I stand. But I am confident that with respect to the *object of worship*, in which it certainly behoves all who perform their devotions together, to be agreed, we shall not differ; and all other matters are of far inferior consequence.

Think not, however, my brethren, that the most fervent zeal for what is apprehended to be the genuine doctrines of the gospel, is at all inconsistent with true christian charity, which always judges of particular persons according to the advantages they have en-

joyed, and of the final state of men by their *sincerity* only. And for my own part, I have no doubt, but that, though the church of Rome be the proper *antichrist* of the apostles, not only innumerable zealous papists, but even some popes themselves, and since the time of the reformation, will sit down with Luther, with Calvin, and with Socinus, in the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Known unto God alone are the hearts of men; and the man who honestly pursues truth, and who acts according to the best lights that God gives him an opportunity of acquiring, will be he whom the God of truth and uprightness will approve; and none will suffer a greater or more just condemnation, than those who *hold the truth in unrighteousness*.

Much rather would I be in the case of many worthy persons in the church of England, or the church of Rome, who at the same time that they are fully sensible of the corruptions and errors of the system in which they are entangled, are not able to break
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their chains ; than, from a spirit the reverse of that of the gospel, make an improper use of my own liberty, by insulting them. Many, very many, it cannot be doubted, would have the courage to die at a stake, in times of serious persecution, who in such times as ours, have not the *mental fortitude* to act the part of a Robertson, a Jebb, an Evanston, or especially a Lindsey. No person educated a dissenter can pretend to such merit as this, because none of us have been in their circumstances ; and I hope there may be great merit in human characters far short of theirs.

On this account, the considerations which I urged in the beginning of this discourse, on the uses of christian societies, as a means of preserving purity of manners, are of infinitely more importance than any thing that respects the mere profession of the truth, on which I have now been insisting. Indeed, it is the former alone that can give much weight to the latter.

In many matters of speculation, you and I, my christian brethren, may judge very differently, as you will from one another,

if you judge for yourselves at all. But this circumstance, instead of quenching christian charity, ought to be considered as a proper trial and exercise of that most valuable christian virtue. I shall, as I trust I have hitherto done, devote myself to the pursuit of truth; and I shall not fail to lay before you, with the best evidence that I can collect, every thing that shall appear to me to be of any moment to you, as members of a christian society; and I shall cheerfully rely on your candour with respect to any articles in which you may think me to be mistaken.

I trust that, notwithstanding every possible difference, we shall *live in love and peace, provoking to love and to good works*, a pattern to other societies of a zeal for truth, but of a greater zeal for virtue; walking in every statute and ordinance of the Lord, if not blamelessly, at least honestly; that the *God of love and peace* may be with us, and that when our present relation to each other shall cease, we shall have so acquitted ourselves during the continuance of it, that we your ministers shall be able to present many of
you,

you, together with ourselves, before *the coming of his glory with exceeding joy*; and that we shall then make part of that church of Christ, which shall be gathered from all *nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, compleat in Christ their head.*

May his name be honoured, may his church be purged from all the corruptions which at present defile, disgrace, and confine it; and then may the Jews, together with *the fulness of the Gentiles*, flow into it; that *all the kingdoms of the world may become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*, and he may *reign* till that time shall come, when he shall *give up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.* To him, as supreme over all, be glory for ever, Amen.

The

*The proper Constitution of a Christian Church,
considered in*

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE

NEW MEETING, IN BIRMINGHAM,

NOVEMBER 3, 1782.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A PREFATORY DISCOURSE,

Relating to the present State of those who are called
RATIONAL DISSENTERS.

PREFATORY DISCOURSE.

THOUGH I formerly published an *Essay on Church Discipline*, yet, as I wish to draw more attention to the subject, I willingly comply with the subjoined request of the society I have the happiness to serve, to publish this *Sermon*, which has the same general object. I cannot help thinking that an attention to the original constitution of christian churches, and the business proper to them, would greatly contribute to supply what is wanting to the flourishing state of what I must consider as the most respectable part of the body of professing christians: for such I ought to esteem those with whom I chuse to rank myself.

It has long been complained of, that, notwithstanding the converts, which it cannot be denied, are continually making to the principles of the
rational,

rational, or *Unitarian Dissenters**, both from Dissenters of various denominations, and also from the established church; yet their societies do not flourish, their members have but a slight attachment to them, and easily desert them, though it is never imagined that they desert their principles. The case is no where so striking as it is in London, though it is sufficiently so in many parts of the country.

A fact so remarkable as this cannot escape observation, and persons of a speculative turn cannot help forming some conjecture or other concerning the cause of it; especially as this is not the case, at least, not in so great a degree, with those who profess any other form of religion. Jews generally continue Jews, and Mahometans continue Mahometans; Quakers seldom desert their friends, and neither the Independents nor the Baptists leave the societies to which they belong, unless they change their opinions. And yet, though it

* Though I use the term *rational* and *Unitarian Dissenters* as synonymous, most of the observations in this discourse relate to those Dissenters who have only rejected the doctrines of *Calvinism*, as well as to those who have rejected the doctrine of the *divinity of Christ*. Indeed, whole congregations who would not scruple to avow themselves Unitarians are not many. But as a few years ago there were hardly any, it may be hoped that some years hence there will be more, both in London, and in the country.

is no vanity to say that the Unitarian Dissenters consist, for the most part, of men of reading and reflection, they have not that attachment to each other, or to their respective societies, that christians of other denominations have.

One cause certainly is, that though Unitarian Dissenters are not apt to entertain any doubt of the truth of their principles, they do not lay so much stress upon them as other christians do upon theirs. Nor, indeed, is there any reason why they should, when they do not consider the holding of them to be at all *necessary to salvation*, which other christians often do with respect to theirs. They, therefore, take much less pains to make profelytes, and are less concerned to inculcate their principles upon their children, their servants, and their dependents in general.

Besides, it cannot be denied that many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool unbiaffed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. Though, therefore, they are in a more favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, they are not likely to acquire a *zeal* for what they conceive to be the truth. Consequently, when they are satisfied with respect to any controverted question,

question, concerning which they may have had the curiosity to make some enquiry, they presently dismiss the subject from their thoughts; and thus never reading or thinking about it, except when it is casually mentioned, they are not in the way of being interested in it, and cannot be expected to make any great sacrifices to it.

From this principle it is, that great numbers becoming Unitarians in the church of England, and even among the clergy, do not feel the impropriety and absurdity, to say nothing more harsh, of continuing to countenance a mode of worship, which, if they were questioned about it; they could not deny to be, according to their own principles, idolatrous and blasphemous. Such persons, also, having no zeal for speculative religion, merely because they have no zeal for religion in general, their moral conduct, though decent, is not what is deemed strict and exemplary.

From a just aversion to every thing that looks like hypocrisy, and preciseness, they rather lean to the extreme of freedom and fashionable dissipation. They are not altogether destitute of religion, but they do not value themselves upon it, and do not wish to become the subjects of conversation, or to draw any particular notice upon themselves on that account. They would be ashamed to abandon their religion, but they
neither

neither themselves think, nor do they wish others to think much about it.

To persons who consider human nature, and what usually takes place in similar circumstances, this cannot be thought at all extraordinary. It may easily be conceived, that persons who trouble themselves very little about religion or christianity, and therefore on whom the principles of it can have little practical influence, may yet have the good sense, if they should be led to turn their thoughts to the subject, to perceive that Christ, who had nothing in his external appearance different from that of any other man, who always disclaimed any superior powers of his own, and who expressly asserted that his *Father was the only true God* (which might be seen on a very slight inspection of the gospel history) could not be the supreme God himself, or the maker of the world in any sense of the word. The connexion between this simple truth, and a regular christian life is very slight.

It requires very particular *attention* to the doctrines of the gospel, and the great object of it, viz. the revelation of a future life, before it can, in the nature of things, impress the heart, and change the life. And men of the world, though of good understanding, and some reading, may well be supposed to stop at the mere speculative

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truth. There must, no doubt, be great numbers in this situation in Dissenting congregations as well as elsewhere. Were all the speculative Unitarians in the church of England to become ferocious christians, and consequently think it their duty to leave it, the desertion would be very conspicuous and alarming.

In fact, there is no greater reason to complain of the lukewarmness of the generality of Unitarians, than there is of the generality of christians of all denominations. There are few persons in comparison in this country, and indeed in Europe, but who are nominally believers in christianity, and who would be affronted if their faith should be called in question; and yet the bulk of these professing christians are nothing more than christians *in name*. In the course of their lives they give very little attention to their principles, and whatever virtue or good conduct they may have, it is the mere effect of habit, and of the general influences to which they are exposed, derived ultimately, I doubt not, from the christianity of their parents, and that of preceding generations, but not immediately from any christianity of their own.

We shall the less wonder at this being the case at present, when, if we look back into history, we shall find that it was the same even at the first promulgation

promulgation of christianity, when every professing christian was so from himself, and without having been educated one. In our Saviour's own life time, great numbers, probably the bulk of the people of the Jews, were satisfied that he was a real prophet, and after his resurrection, that he was the Messiah, and therefore ought to have ranked with christians; but yet, through fear, shame, or some other sinister influence, did not openly do it. Also, in those who did join themselves to the society of christians, there were all degrees of faith and of firmness; and probably few of them, in comparison, would have had the courage to be martyrs. In order, therefore, to form a just estimate of the number of those whom we should now call christians, or who believed the resurrection of Christ, we must, in the first place, make great allowance for those who would not bear much suffering, or persecution, for the sake of Christ, which in those times was almost unavoidable, and a still greater allowance for the numbers of those who, in such perilous times, contented themselves with thinking well of the christian cause, without ever joining it at all.

At the time of the reformation, many persons were sufficiently convinced of the absurdity of the popish system, and of the tyranny of the church of

Rome, who yet acquiesced in it, without finding themselves disposed either to *do* or to *suffer* much for the sake of a reform. Many, who had the courage to join the reformers, where they could do it with little danger, were only men of good understanding, but immersed in all the vices of the times, and were a disgrace to the reformation. Of this, Erasmus made great, and probably just complaint. "We have been stunned long enough," he said, "with the cry of gospel, gospel, gospel. We want gospel manners." Jortin's life of him, p. 442.

It is, therefore, nothing extraordinary, if a great number of the Unitarians of the present age be only men of good sense, and without much practical religion, while others of them who do give proper attention to their principles, as christians and Unitarians, are, as their enemies must acknowledge, the most exemplary of men. Upon the whole, considering the great mixture of spiritual pride and bigotry in some of the most zealous trinitarians, I think the moral character of the Unitarians in general, allowing that there is in them a greater apparent conformity to the world than is observable in the others, approaches more nearly to the proper temper of christianity. It is more chearful, more benevolent, and more candid.

candid. The former have probably less, and the latter, I hope, something more, of a real principle of religion than they seem to have.

These Unitarians, however, wanting a sufficient degree of zeal for their principles, and not valuing themselves upon them, cannot be supposed to have much attachment to the christian societies to which they nominally belong, or to inculcate their principles with much earnestness upon their children. These, therefore, having never heard much upon the subject, and much less than their parents, will not be so well established in their principles as their parents are, and will be still less attached to christian societies. In these circumstances, a marriage into a family in which other principles are professed with more zeal, or such an increase of fortune as shall raise a man above the level of his fellow worshippers, and thereby lead him into other connexions, will be sufficient to carry him, Unitarian as he may be in principle, into the established church, or make him neglect public worship intirely. As to those Unitarians who both understand their principles, and feel the importance of them, there is no danger of their ever forsaking them, or the societies of professed Unitarians to which they belong.

This being, I apprehend, the state of the fact, two things seem to me to be wanting to the good

and permanent state of our societies. The first is, that care be taken to instruct our children in the principles that we profess, and to bring the subject frequently before them; which alone can beget an attachment to them, like to that which we perceive in the children of Mahometans, Jews, Papists, and the foreign Protestants. We must contrive to introduce these things into the daily or frequent employment of our children; and though this may be sometimes even irksome to them, yet, within certain bounds, it will contribute to make them less able to do without their religion. It will in time be of so much importance to them, that nothing else will be able to supply its place. But to expect this effect without the necessary preparation for it, in the previous instruction and habits of their lives, is to sit still and look for miracles.

Now, we can never reasonably expect that this careful instruction of youth, though it be the proper duty of parents, will ever be sufficiently attended to by *all* parents, unless it be an express object in the christian societies to which they belong. But when once it is well understood to be the standing rule of any christian society, that all the children belonging to it are to be instructed, and regularly examined in the principles of christianity, the parents will be ashamed of their deficiencies,

iciencies, and will be reminded to exert themselves in order to prevent that reproach; because it will, in fact, fall upon themselves. However, let the parents be ever so remiss, the business will be done in some degree or other, even independently of them.

In this obviously important business, the rational or Unitarian Dissenters have been strangely negligent; and yet a tolerable apology may be made for the past conduct of the ministers, as far as the neglect has been theirs. Till very lately, few of them have been at liberty to make use of any other forms of instruction, than such as have contained principles which they could not inculcate with a good conscience, and therefore when the business was not absolutely insisted upon, they chose to decline it; leaving to the parents, what is, no doubt, their duty, but which, when neglected by the minister, will too often be wholly neglected by themselves.

Foreign Protestants, I believe, of all denominations, pay the strictest attention to this business of the religious instruction of their children and youth, and they find the happy effects of it. In Geneva, I am informed, that all persons, without regard to rank or fortune, are put into a course of catechetical instruction, from twelve to fourteen years of age, after which they are always examined

by the pastor, and then constantly become communicants, or receive the Lord's Supper, which they afterwards never neglect.

Being at Strasburgh, in the year 1774, I had the curiosity to go into one of the Lutheran churches at six o'clock in the morning, and at that early hour I found three ministers doing duty in three different parts of the church. One of them was instructing a class of young children, another one of bigger boys and girls, and the third, a class of young women, full grown. In another church I found two ministers so employed, and this on a week-day. I was much struck, and hope edified by the sight. I was informed that this business of catechizing is indispensable with all the Lutherans, and that, as in Geneva, they all become communicants at the age of fourteen, or even younger. Both these things tend to produce an attachment to their religion, and make them less liable to desert it, or their respective churches.

As the cause of our past neglect is now happily removed, by the more liberal turn of our congregations (a turn which perhaps, however, they would not have acquired so soon, if the rigid institutions of our ancestors had been kept up) so that ministers are at full liberty to adopt whatever methods of instruction they shall themselves
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most approve, it may be hoped that a sense of the importance of this attention to children and young persons will again strike us, and that the effects of it will be as happy, and as conspicuous, with us as it is with others; enforcing and perpetuating liberal principles, together with a regard to what is most practical and useful in the religion we profess. Could this attention be given by the clergy, to all the children belonging to the established church, how much profligacy, both in the higher and the lower ranks of people, might it not prevent? We might then travel and sleep with more security than we can do at present, especially in the neighbourhood of the metropolis.

In no part of the christian world, perhaps, is the instruction of the common people so much neglected as it is in this country. Mr. Richards, in his *Tour to Petersburgh* through Germany, says, p. 143, “The carriers in general are sober and
 “ careful, and it is usual in this part of the world
 “ (viz. between Dantzick and Berlin) to join in
 “ prayer and other devotions, in the morning,
 “ on the roads, and often at other times. Reli-
 “ gion does not seem here the effect of hypocrisy
 “ or enthusiasm, but the natural consequence of
 “ early endeavours in parents to instil religious
 “ notions into their children.”

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If it should be inconvenient to some families for the children to attend the constant instructions of the minister, as on account of many of them being educated from home, there might at least be *annual examinations*, for which the children should prepare themselves, that both the minister, and the congregation at large, might have the satisfaction to know that the instruction of all the children and youth belonging to them was not wholly neglected, notwithstanding any circumstances that might be rather unfavourable to it.

The second thing wanting to the coherence of the members of our societies, I apprehend to be the restoration of the office of *elders*, whose business it was to give due attention to every thing in which the welfare of the society was concerned, and especially to give admonitions and reproofs, when they were apprehended to be necessary. Some time ago dissenting ministers, getting a more liberal turn of thinking than the generality of their hearers, found themselves incommoded by these elders, and therefore suffered them, wherever they could, to be dissolved. But the consequence of this has been, that our congregations have become mere *audiences*, the members of them having little attachment to each other, except in their preference of the same preacher; an inconvenience

venience on which I have enlarged in my *Essay on Church Discipline*, and also in this discourse.

To create an attachment to any cause, we must, if we consult human nature, make it a constant object of attention to all who profess an adherence to it, by giving them something to do with respect to it, and also something to hope, and something to fear. Was it ever known that any man became attached to any kind of society in which he was a mere cypher, in which he had no sphere of action, and when nothing that he did had any chance of being heard of, or of being mentioned to his praise, either in the society, or out of it? And yet this is generally the case with our societies, except on the change of a minister, when a few persons have an opportunity of distinguishing themselves by the support of their favourite candidates.

Many persons are too fearful of giving offence, and are perhaps apprehensive lest they should disgust and lose some of the society, by the exercise of any thing like church discipline, concerning which they have entertained a frightful idea, from having heard of the abuses of it. But if we abandon every thing that has been abused, we must give up christianity itself. In consequence of these apprehensions, however, let a man behave

ever so ill in some of our societies, and become ever so great a disgrace to us, there are many who would never disclaim, or even censure him; not considering, that for one that they might lose through a disgust of this kind, they now lose ten through indifference.

In this course things have proceeded with us till the whole business of admonition, which in all societies cannot but be often requisite, is now wholly left to the minister; and by him, for very obvious reasons, it can never be expected to be applied. Indeed, considering the situation of dissenting ministers, it is wonderful that they should have the virtue to struggle with their other difficulties, and those arising from a narrow and insufficient income, at the same time; and yet the circumstances of the dissenting laity in this country are such, that, obliged as they are to contribute their full share to the expence of an enormous establishment, from which they derive no advantage, greater exertions in favour of their ministers cannot be expected of them.

In this situation, let the ministers be ever so excellent, and willing to do their duty, they are but *men*, and therefore exertions more than human cannot be expected of them. It is unfortunate also, that the remains of a superstitious veneration
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for the ministerial character, have been the means of preventing them from receiving that assistance in some parts of their work, which other members of the society might, with peculiar advantage, give them.

The inconvenience of our present system, if it can be called one, is peculiarly visible in the metropolis; for in the country, at least in this part of it, there is more of the appearance of christian churches, and therefore we keep together better. There Dissenters are little more than *hearers* of this or that particular person, whom they pay for his services, and who may therefore be expected to study their *good will*, more than their *edification*. In this situation, without more disinterested virtue than we ought to expect in man, he will naturally attend most to the more ostentatious duties of his office, and neglect the rest. Of course, all regular instruction of youth has long been forgotten among them; and the consequence is, that the present generation, having been brought up with little knowledge of their principles as Christians, Protestants, or Dissenters, have little attachment to them; and mixing with the wide world, they are soon lost to every thing that is good or great, without its being considered as any person's particular business, in the language of scripture, *to seek and to save them*.

Dissenters

Dissenters in London, having no connexion with one another, and having nothing to do with their minister, except in the character of a *preacher*; come at length to attend to nothing but his eloquence and delivery; and if these are not sufficient to keep them attached to any place, they go for their *entertainment* (for it deserves no other name) elsewhere; and in this way, acquiring a false and fastidious taste, they become, at length, indifferent to every thing of the kind; and indeed it can be no wonder, for then it is a poor object.

It is said, that in London children and young persons cannot attend the catechetical instructions of the ministers, on account of their being educated from home. Admitting this to be the case, some degree of attention might be given to them, at least, in the way of general examination, at the season of their usual return from school. But what is become of that class of people who cannot afford to send their children to distant schools? It is observed, that some congregations in or near London, consist, for the most part, of persons of fortune, and their servants. Can those most important classes of men, the lowest and the middle ranks, have been lost to the Dissenters in any place, without there having been some fault in the constitution or government of our churches. If these people, which constitute the basis of the
great

great pyramid of human society, be vanished, the whole superstructure may justly be expected to subside, and disappear in due succession.

Now, however, before it be too late, is the time to revive an useful church discipline among us. I trust we shall do so when we have sufficiently reflected on the subject, and that we shall experience the happy effects of it. But being a thing that, of late, we have not been used to, it will require peculiar discretion at the outset, and therefore it may be adviseable to do it by degrees; and the easiest of all introductions, is to apply it to the sole purpose of giving the minister some assistance in the business of catechizing. This also will be the means of establishing and securing the advantage of it to posterity. For when there shall be persons appointed, whose business it will be to see that the children and young persons are properly attended to, it will become a measure of the congregation itself, and will no longer depend upon the inclination of any particular minister. Future ministers will then have no choice, but that of the method and form of doing it, and in this they should by no means be dictated to. The thing itself must then be done, since it will be as much expected of them as preaching, being in reality of more importance in itself.

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To prevent all possible abuse of the institution of Elders, I should think it advisable that they be chosen *annually*, and by *ballot*; and let it also be generally understood, that all the best qualified members of the society shall serve, though not regularly, in *rotation*. There is no reason either in the nature of the thing, or that can be drawn from the scriptures, that the office should be for life. The idea of a *fixed spiritual character* has been the source of great abuse. The people who *create*, must likewise have a power to *change* their own officers. They give them no qualifications, but only make trial of those they have. If any persons appear to be peculiarly well qualified to serve the society in this capacity, they will naturally be chosen again and again; and there is no reason why the people should not be served in what they think the best manner; but let them always have the power to undo what themselves have done, if they should wish to do it.

The congregation at the New Meeting in Birmingham, having (in consequence of the singular zeal and exemplary conduct of my predecessors, and my excellent colleague, whom I may reckon among them) attained to a degree of liberality of sentiment, hardly equalled in any other place, is in circumstances peculiarly favourable for the measure

measure that I would recommend. There being no material difference of opinion between the ministers and people, and the ministers having the most perfect confidence in each other and in the people, they can have no reason to apprehend the least inconvenience to themselves from any scheme that has the good of the society in general for its object. Neither the business of *catechizing*, nor the office of *Elders*, can have any thing formidable to them. This latter can only operate to aid them in the execution of what they may devise for the common good.

In these singularly favourable circumstances, it would, certainly, be highly blameable, not to take the advantage that is hereby given us, either to revive any truly valuable institution, or to devise any new one, that may promise to be useful to ourselves, and thus serve as an example to others. And I hope that, considering the effects of prejudices and habits of long standing, we have not been negligent, and that we are manifestly in a progress to a state of still greater improvement. I do not mean by forming more new institutions, but by the natural operation and effect of such as have been formed already. By the last, to which this discourse relates, sufficient provision will, I hope, be made for the most substantial benefit to the society in all future time.

The most important objects being now gained, there is less reason to be solicitous about any thing farther. And whatever may hereafter be thought expedient will, by this means, be more easily carried into execution than any thing that has been done already. I trust that ministers and people will have no other study or ambition but *to build one another up in the holy faith whereof we make profession, and to provoke unto love, and to good works.*

BIRMINGHAM, NEW MEETING-HOUSE,
November 24, 1782.

REV. SIR,

WE, the subscribers to this place, are now assembled in consequence of the Sermon you have delivered us upon the constitution of a christian church, and in conformity with the proposal you then made, we have proceeded to the choice of twelve persons to superintend the affairs of the congregation.

Under a full persuasion that the Sermon alluded to may be extensively useful to our Dissenting brethren in general, we cannot but wish its publication,

lication, and do now very chearfully concur in expressing this wish; not doubting of its meeting a candid acceptance, and also a chearful compliance, unless you have substantial reasons for declining it.

Permit us, Sir, to embrace this opportunity of conveying our united thanks for your exemplary diligence, in the Pastoral office, and particularly in the truly important work of catechizing and lecturing the children and youth of the congregation. Your unparalleled assiduity and labour in this great duty, entitles you to our warmest and affectionate gratitude; and whilst we desire to assure you, that we have a deep sense of the obligations you have thereby laid us under, you will give us leave to add our fervent wishes, that the good success which already dawns upon these labours, may go on to increase still more abundantly, and that generations to come may rise up and call you Blessed.

Signed in the name,

And on the behalf of the Congregation,

J O S E P H S M I T H.

This voluntary testimony from the christian society I now serve (and which, I trust, I shall be more and more solicitous to merit) together with a similar one from the congregation at Leeds, on leaving that place, I think more truly honourable, than the thanks of our House of Commons to an admiral or general. I hope, however, I shall have a still greater respect to the plaudit of our common master, whose commission, by which the conduct of all ministers of the gospel should be governed (John xxi. 15.) is to feed his *lambs* as well as his *sheep*.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.

REV. iii. 2.

IN the first discourse that I addressed to you, after my acceptance of the invitation with which you honoured me, to undertake the pastoral office among you, in conjunction with my worthy colleague, I took the liberty to point out the proper objects of all truly Christian Societies, and to give a general idea of what appeared to me to be the best method of gaining them, with a reference to some things relating to the constitution of a christian church, on which I intended to explain myself farther at some future opportunity; and on that subject I shall now take the liberty to discourse more fully. What I shall now propose is, in fact, a continuation of my first discourse, and also of another that I delivered on the subject of *religious knowledge,*

in which I proposed the *system of catechising*, that has since been carried into execution; having purposely given you a proper trial of part of the plan before I proposed the remainder.

Something, I observed, and indeed much, was to be done by your ministers, but that more depended upon yourselves. The business of *instruction*, both promiscuous to all descriptions of persons from the pulpit, and what, for my own part, I deem to be more really useful still, the instruction of young persons of different ages separately, is almost all that can be undertaken with propriety, and good effect, by any persons in the situation of *ministers*. But there are duties (which yet we find in the New Testament to be indispensable in the members of the same society) which can only be well done by those who are in a situation very different from theirs.

Now it is the duty of us, your ministers, freely to propose to you whatever we apprehend to be for your advantage as a christian society, only requesting your candid attention

to what may be offered in its favour, that you would then judge for yourselves, with the same freedom with which we propose, and either adopt or neglect what may be recommended to you, as you yourselves shall think fit. But we must take it for granted that, as you have formed yourselves into a christian society, it is your serious wish that the proper *ends* of such a society be answered among you. Why else do you call yourselves christians, and assemble here as such? We can therefore only differ about the *means*.

Whatever society a man voluntarily makes himself a member of, he ought to study the improvement and flourishing state of it, and endeavour to make it answer its proper end in the best manner. This you would do, of course, as members of a philosophical society, or of any corporation, or civil society. In these circumstances you would study the original constitution of that society, and if any hurtful innovations had crept into it, you would think it your duty to restore it to its first principles, and at all

events make it to answer its proper purpose.

On the same maxims we ought to act as members of *christian societies*; and considering that our object, as christians, is of infinitely more moment to us than any thing that we can have in view by philosophical or civil societies, we should study the principles of christianity, and the constitution of christian churches, with more attention than we do any thing else, and labour more to bring them to their proper perfection.

No doubt can be entertained of the use and propriety of the original constitution of christian churches, since they were founded by the apostles themselves; and their regulations were by no means of a temporary nature, confined to their own age, but were such as, from the nature of things, and of man, must be of equal use in all ages. I shall therefore, on this occasion, give you a general idea of the principles on which christian churches were originally formed, and the out line of their primitive constitution, with the advantages resulting from it;
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and I shall then represent what it is that we suffer by our deviation from their plan, and what I think may be adviseable for us to do in our present circumstances.

Since christianity, like any other religion, consists of *doctrines*, which all christians believe, and those who are not christians do not believe, it is evident that no person can be a proper member of a christian society who is not a christian in principle. Though, therefore, a heathen, or a mahometan, a deist, or an atheist, should, for any particular reason, chuse to attend the worship of this place, and contribute to the support of it, you could not consider him as a proper member of your society. You meet here as *christians*, and therefore cannot consider any other than a christian as one of your body.

But this was not the only thing that the apostles consulted in forming christian societies. They chiefly respected the ultimate and proper object of christianity, which was the forming good men, men fearing God, and conscientiously discharging the moral duties

duties of life, as preparatory to that immortal state, which it was the great object of christianity fully to reveal to us. Without this they considered a man to be as effectually unqualified for being a member of a christian society as if he had been an unbeliever; because his nominal belief of christianity had no proper influence on his behaviour in life.

Our Saviour himself has fully authorized us to consider any person, how nearly soever connected with us (for he uses the term *brother*) who obstinately resists reasonable admonition with respect to his moral conduct, as *an heathen man and a publican*. Also, the man at Corinth who had married his father's wife is not said to have been an unbeliever in christianity (indeed in those days there was no temptation for any such persons to join themselves to christian societies) and yet the apostle Paul gives the most peremptory orders to excommunicate him, and to disclaim all connexion with him. All christians ought to be persons whose *light should shine before men, that others may see their good works.*

works. They ought to *provoke to love and to good works, and not suffer sin in each other*; making converts to christianity by their lives, no less than by their doctrine, and arguments.

Whatever, therefore, gives public offence or scandal, tends to defeat the principal end of christian societies, according to the idea that the apostles evidently had of them. And in all the primitive times we find that the most rigorous attention was given to the conduct of all professing christians. Every person whose conduct in life was deemed to be unworthy of his christian profession was as certainly disowned by them, as if he had renounced the belief of christianity; nor was he ever re-admitted to the privileges of any christian society, till, by a due course of penitence, the cause of scandal was deemed to be removed.

Pliny, a civil magistrate under the emperor Trajan, about seventy years after the death of Christ, giving an account of the christians to his master, from the information of those who during the persecution

had deserted them, says, that they were persons who bound themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness (with which in those times they were generally charged) but not to be guilty of theft, robbery, adultery, or other immoralities, which he particularly enumerates; so that it was not so much the belief of any particular tenets, as the practice of virtue, that made a person a proper member of a christian society in that early age. This discipline cannot be denied to have had a most extraordinary effect for several centuries, and indeed the extreme rigour of it was one of the causes of the fatal relaxation of all proper discipline in after ages. But when so many causes contributed to the corruption of the *faith* of christians, it could not be expected that their *discipline* alone should remain pure and uncorrupted.

It has pleased God, by the light of the *reformation*, to remove many of the abuses both in doctrine and discipline, and we now see christian churches assuming a different and better appearance. But it could not be
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expected that any set of men, in any age, should be able to rectify such a multiplicity of abuses as had deformed our holy religion in the dark ages of popery, and which had in a great measure defeated the proper end and object of it.

Our ancestors, the *Puritans*, removed still farther from the doctrine and discipline of what had been called the *Catholic church* than those who framed the constitution of the church which is by law established in this country. We, the protestant dissenters of this age, have improved, as we think, upon their system of *doctrine*, but we do not seem to have given so much attention as we ought to have done to matters of *discipline*; and for want of this many of the most valuable ends of christian societies are but imperfectly obtained among us. Indeed, we are so far relaxed in this respect, that we want the necessary principles of *union* and *permanency*, which all societies should consult. For christian societies should govern themselves by the rules of human prudence and policy, as well as other societies. It

was sufficient for christianity to have been established at first by miracles, and it must now support itself by its own evidence, and the wise constitution of its churches.

If you ask what was the constitution of the christian churches in the time of the apostles, I answer, it may easily be collected from the New Testament, and it appears to have been extremely simple and effectual with respect to its object. Wherever a number of persons were brought to embrace christianity, so that a *church* could be formed, the apostles directed that *elders* should be ordained for the instruction and government of that church. The number of them was indefinite, but they consisted of the most knowing and prudent of the members, and in general they were also persons of property and natural influence in the place. If the church was large, they also chose younger persons, whom they called *deacons*, to attend to things of an inferior nature. Every thing relating to the instruction or government of the church was determined by the elders in ordinary cases, but the people at large had
votes

votes in all cases of consequence. In the New Testament these elders are promiscuously called *bishops* or *overseers*, and at first none of them had any pre-eminence or authority over the rest. Afterwards this title of *bishop* was appropriated to one of the elders, who presided at their meetings, but who had no more real power than any of the others.

In the ordinary meetings of christians the scriptures were read, and also explained, if any person present was thought qualified to do it, hymns were sung, prayers were made, and in early times the Lord's supper was always administered.

How these primitive bishops rose to the rank and power of bishops in the church of Rome, and one of them to be Pope, claiming all power in heaven and earth, how these elders came to be the same with those who were afterwards called *priests*, and how the deacons likewise came to have a similar *sacred character*, in consequence of which the *clergy* and *laity* were considered as classes of men totally different from each other, and to be

be governed by different laws, I shall not attempt to show in this place. Divine Providence suffered the abuses, enormous as they were, to arise from natural causes; and by natural causes also, and the use of human endeavours, it has pleased the same divine Providence that the abuses should be rectified. But much of them still remains, and of the inconveniencies that must ever attend them, even among us who call ourselves *rational dissenters*, and who have receded the farthest from the church of Rome, and the maxims of it.

It was in consequence of the great distinction between the *clergy* and the *laity*, that the former, instead of being considered only as men who are chosen to a certain office by the people (an office which they were equally qualified to fill before their appointment to it) were regarded as men who had a peculiar *character*, and peculiar *powers*, conferred by God himself, in a supernatural manner, in the ceremony of consecration; so that the sacraments of the church (the virtue of which was immoderately magnified) were
not

not deemed to be valid, unless they should be administered by a priest, regularly ordained for that purpose.

Now are we Dissenters entirely free even from this superstition? How few congregations are there, who would permit their own ministers, persons regularly educated to their office, and who have preached with universal approbation among them for many years, to baptize their children, or to administer the Lord's supper, before they were formally ordained. This is a great disgrace to most of our congregations. And how many more are there who would be shocked at the thought of having their children baptized by any layman, though he should be ever so good a christian and even learned? And yet we find that in the times of the apostles, this business of baptizing was considered as a kind of work inferior to that of preaching. For Paul says, *I was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*

In some respects those who are called rational dissenters lay more stress upon the ministry of persons regularly educated than

others do ; so that when their numbers are too small, or their funds too low, to maintain such a person, rather than serve themselves by reading the scriptures, proper discourses, and prayers (for which sufficient helps might easily be procured) they dissolve themselves, and suffer the cause of religious truth and religious liberty, which they really value, to become extinct in the place.

In places where there may happen to be only two or three families of unitarians, or rational dissenters, what a foundation would be laid for the propagation of their principles, if they could so far get over this prejudice, as to form a *regular society*, and serve themselves in all the offices of a christian church, without the aid of a person who has no more of a *spiritual character* than themselves ; and when they could readily command the labours of the ablest christian writers for their ordinary edification ? But so used are they to the idea of the necessity of a regularly educated minister to the constitution of a christian society, that being unable to procure such a one, they either
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join in modes of worship which they themselves think to be idolatrous and impious, or by frequenting no public worship, do in fact cease to make any proper profession of christianity at all. I hope that we shall, in time, grow wiser; and, as we reflect more upon the subject, shall consider the greatness of the evil, and apply the proper remedy for it.

What is it but superstition, or habits originally formed by superstition, that has made the service of regular ministers to be deemed so very necessary, that if any minister be indisposed, or necessarily absent from his place, the congregation should either engage the services of another minister, or not meet for public worship at all? No such idea would have occurred in the primitive age of the church. The weekly assemblies of christians did not then depend upon the presence of any one person of their society, or any number of them. A regular christian church ought to be a standing body, and to keep up its weekly meetings for prayer and their common edification,

independently of any circumstance of this kind. There ought to be a sufficient number of substitutes for every duty and office; and nothing can be more easy in any society, if it consist of persons capable of reading only.

If the scriptures only were read in christian societies, and the members of them edified themselves by singing, they would meet to very good purpose. But in this age the most excellent discourses are easily procured, suited to the taste of any christian society, and also prayers as proper for the purpose of christian worship as any you can reasonably expect from your ministers. And it is certainly great weakness not to be able to join in such prayers, truly excellent in themselves, merely because they are recited out of a book, or by a person not regularly educated. What is the Lord's prayer, but a form, either recited from a book, or repeated from memory? And it is to be hoped you are not less devout during the recitation of this prayer, than in any other part of the service of the Lord's day.

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I am far from denying the use of learned and able ministers in christian churches. I wish there were more than there are, in all places, where they could be maintained, or where they could maintain themselves, with respect. For living instructors are, in many respects, preferable to dead ones. But the living instructions of dead men are certainly preferable to none. What are the scriptures, but the writings of men who are now dead, but who, *though dead*, may be said *still to speak* to us ?

But where there are regular ministers, there is much work to be done in christian societies, if we consider the proper uses of them, as explained before, for which ministers are by no means, in general, the best qualified ; especially if they be dependent, as they commonly are, upon the people for their support. I mean the truly christian duties of admonition and reproof, and the disagreeable, but sometimes necessary, business of excluding unworthy members. And certainly a christian society is not such a thing as that any person who pleases may

say that he belongs to it, and no one has a right to say that he does not, though, under that character, he does whatever he chuses. It is a prostitution of our own characters, as christians, to suffer such things.

This important work of admonition, when persons begin to relax in their conduct (in which case it is most useful) can only be done, with any prospect of success, by persons who are in habits of friendship and society with the person to be admonished, and who have some natural influence over him, which may not happen to be the case with ministers. Nay, from their studious and retired mode of life, which is generally allowed to suit their character, they are often the last persons to hear of such things; and this is a reason for their not being expected to interfere in this business, without regard to their dependent situation.

Now, how valuable a provision would it be in every congregation, especially one in which there should be numbers of young people, to have some of the most discreet
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members of the society, and who, on account of their age, character, or fortune, should have the most natural influence in it, to consider it as their *proper business*, either to admonish such persons whose conduct they thought required particular attention, or to look out for some other person, who, according to the nature of the particular case, might be more likely to do it with effect; or who, if they perceived any master of a family to neglect the instruction of his children, or to be inattentive to the good conduct of his servants, should consider it as their duty to admonish him on the subject. We see through life that what is equally every persons business, is, in fact, never done by any person.

What greater attention also might it not be expected that both young persons and their parents would give to their conduct, when they considered themselves as members of a society in which there were persons whose proper duty it was to watch over them, and admonish them. There are many masters of families who would think

themselves happy in having such an aid to their own authority. Besides, the known constitution of such a society would, in many cases, do the business of itself, without any actual interference of the elders; as all persons would naturally be careful to give less cause of reproof, when they knew that, if it was given, the reproof might certainly be expected.

Let the minister be considered as one of this body of elders, and be expected to serve the congregation in this way, as well as by his public instructions, whenever he shall have opportunity; but by no means let it be considered as a duty incumbent upon him only. This seems to be the idea at present, as far as such services are expected at all. But if you consider his situation, you must be sensible that it is laying a burden upon him to which he is altogether unequal.

There have, indeed, been times and circumstances, in which single ministers, independent in fortune, and with a knowledge of human nature and of the world, not commonly

monly to be expected of persons in their situation, and when the respect for the ministerial character was greater than it is now, were sufficient for this work, and exercised a paternal care and authority over a whole congregation; but those times, and those men, are no more, though they are as much wanted as ever. Younger men have succeeded them in their nominal capacity, but it was naturally impossible that they should succeed to their authority and influence. Now, what is wanting for this purpose is a pastoral care and authority that shall never die, depending upon persons whose numbers may be constantly kept up; for then their authority, and use, will be permanent.

If now, I were asked, what I should think might be done by such a society as this, who were sensible that all the proper benefits of a christian society were not enjoyed by them, in consequence of not having kept up to the original constitution of a christian church, as described in the writings of the apostles; I would take the liberty to answer,
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that, in a society of this extent, ten or a dozen persons might be chosen annually by the rest, with the stile and characters of *elders*, that they should meet occasionally, to consult about any thing that occurred to them for the good of the society; and when any thing happened that they deemed to be worthy of their interference, they should settle among themselves how to act in it to the best advantage.

If I were farther asked, what kind of business I would wish them more particularly to attend to, I would answer that, besides what may be collected from what has been already advanced, there is one business of obvious utility, in which they might interpose their advice and admonition with the greatest effect, and with very little danger of giving offence, or incurring censure; and that is giving a proper kind of attention to the business of *catechizing*, as now established in this congregation; as I presume that, from your experience, you are sufficiently sensible of the utility of it, and are desirous to have it kept up in future time, at least in the
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junior classes. For with respect to the higher class, consisting of young men and young women of full age, it will perhaps be always best to have it considered as quite voluntary, both on the part of the teacher and the pupils. But that kind of instruction which may always be given to persons under fifteen or sixteen years of age, while they are wholly dependent on their parents, should be considered as indispensable. There will, therefore, be always the greatest propriety in your elders receiving from the minister who catechizes the names of all that attend those two classes, and in admonishing the parents of those children who either do not attend at all, or attend irregularly; and this can hardly be taken amiss by any person. Let it not be considered as at all incumbent upon the minister to look out for proper pupils. It should be deemed enough for him if he do his duty when they do attend.

But if it was once the established rule of the place, that all the children and young persons belonging to it were expected to attend these catechetical lectures, your elders
would

would soon have very little trouble about it. With a little assistance of this kind at the first, the constitution itself will gain its own object. If you should think proper to appoint the elders now recommended, and they should, at first, take nothing upon them more than this duty, I should think the appointment would answer a very valuable purpose. Your latest posterity would thank you for it. They might act afterwards, in other cases, as their own prudence should direct them. It is not at all to be apprehended at this day, that they would attempt too much. The extreme of *negligence* is much more to be feared than that of *exertion*.

Some of you may say that the *novelty* of what is now proposed (though in fact it is the revival of an ancient institution) will offend many. I answer that nothing of this kind can be done without the intire approbation of the society, that is, of a great majority of it; and if you be wise, you will not be moved by the objections of a few. Besides, the mere number of a society, supposing this to be affected by such a measure,

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sure, is a poor object of pride. It is the good internal state of any society, and its effectually answering the ends of it, that is the proper object of pride, if the word ought to be used on this occasion.

Besides, in one way, the experiment has been sufficiently tried. How are the congregations of rational dissenters kept up in their present undisciplined state? To judge by appearances, we run no great risk of losing any thing by a change of measures. Seeing then to what many of our congregations are reduced, in point of numbers, in the course of the last half century, let us take warning in time. And, happily, the remedy is easy, and in fact nothing *new*. For, besides that it is only the original constitution of christian churches that I now wish to re-establish, a regular church discipline was always practised both by the Presbyterians and Independents at the time of their separation from the established church, though (for the reasons which I have explained at large in my *Essay on church discipline*) it has grown into disuse. However, while it subsisted,

sisted, it had many good effects, and we now certainly feel the want of it.

Other christian societies have still a regular discipline, and some of them flourish chiefly by means of it, even though it is by no means so perfect as might be wished. The Quakers have no provision for any thing that we should call *instruction*, and yet the most valuable end of christian societies, namely, an effectual restraint upon vice, is gained among them by discipline only. Let us join our advantages to theirs, and make an experiment of the result. It will be easy to revert to what we now are, if we should find the alteration at all inconvenient.

It may be said that the election of regular officers may excite *emulation*. But is every degree of that disposition a real evil? The office of *elder* appears to have been eagerly wished for in the time of the apostles, and yet Paul encouraged the desire of it. Whatever is capable of producing evil, is likewise capable of producing good; and with prudence and good sense, it may produce little but what is good. Where christianity is concerned,

concerned, and the object contended for (if there should be any thing that can be called *contention* in the case) is no worldly emolument, but a place of real duty and responsibility, and what will, in its own nature, be an obligation to greater strictness in a man's own conduct, no great evil is to be apprehended. The wealth and the power which corrupted the elders in former times are entirely out of the question with us; and in all cases when the cause ceases to operate, the effects are not to be dreaded. I am afraid you will find more readiness to decline, than to court, such preferment as this.

As a motive to this particular society, to adopt what is now recommended, let me add that you have already distinguished yourselves by several things, which I hope you will always think much to your honour; and in consequence of which you are an object of emulation to other congregations, as in the example you have set of a *standing library* for the use of your young persons, and especially in the example of more *general* and more *early communion* than has been usual
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among Dissenters, and which, from the progress which has been already made, will soon, I hope, become universal among you. And from this, connected, as I would wish to have it, with the regular instruction of all the children and youth belonging to you, we cannot but expect the greatest advantage. Let us then improve upon the example that we are now setting to others. It is our duty, as societies, as well as individuals, to *provoke to love and to good works*; and the good that you will by this means do to others, and to posterity, namely, by your example and indirect influence, will, in some measure, be considered as effected by you, no less than what is done by your own direct endeavours.

To conclude. It is our duty, however, as your ministers, to propose to you whatever we think to be for your honour and advantage. It is your duty to hear, to judge, and to decide; and remember, it is not our interest, but yours, that is the object of it, and not yours only, but that of your posterity. To add what I observed when I proposed

posed to you the lectures that are now established for the instruction of your youth.

“ It is my ardent wish, not only that you
“ continue to be what you now are, a re-
“ spectable society of christians, protestants,
“ and dissenters, but that you should con-
“ tinually improve in whatever can justly
“ intitle you to respect, that is, in a tho-
“ rough knowledge of what relates to your
“ profession as christians, protestants, and
“ dissenters, and, in a conduct in life be-
“ coming and recommending that pro-
“ fession. More especially is it to be wished,
“ that sufficient provision may be now made,
“ and before it be too late, that an attach-
“ ment to those great interests may not die
“ with yourselves, but that you may have
“ the satisfaction of seeing a still more per-
“ fect knowledge of them, and a propor-
“ tionably greater zeal for them, in the ge-
“ nerations that will come after you.”

As a general motive to exert ourselves in every thing relating to our profession as christians, let us habitually consider the great object of our profession, the revela-

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tion of a future life ; and study, above all things, to approve ourselves the faithful servants of an *absent master* ; that when he shall return, and take an account of all his servants, we may be found *watching* and especially *strengthening the things that were good, that were ready to die*. Thus shall we secure his approbation, and what is the end of all, the approbation of *his father and our father, and of his God and our God*.

*The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry
in Matters of Religion:*

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

Congregations of the Old and New Meeting

O F

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS at BIRMINGHAM.

NOVEMBER 5, 1785.

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MATT. xiii. 9.

He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

IN these words our Lord several times addressed his audience, in order to summon their utmost attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make use of their reason, in a case in which it was of the greatest consequence to apply it, and in which they were likewise capable of applying it with the greatest effect, viz. the investigation of religious truth. *Hear and understand* is another of his modes of calling the attention of his audience to the instruction that he gave them. And when he thought them deficient in their attention to his doctrine, and they did not appear to understand what he laid before them, he was not backward even in his reproaches on that account. *Are ye yet a'so without understanding? Do ye not yet understand?* His language that he once made use

of; evidently implying some degree of surprize and displeasure. Matt. xv. 16, 17. And even in a case of considerable difficulty, viz. the right application of scripture prophecies, he said to the two disciples going to Emmaus, *O fools, and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken.* Luke xxiv. 25.

The apostles continued the same earnest addresses to the reason of their converts, and Paul in particular gave the greatest exercise to the understandings of his hearers and readers, by very abstruse argumentation on subjects relating to religion. His epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, are chiefly argumentative; and those to the Corinthians, and some others, are very much so. For, after the death of our Saviour, new cases had occurred, and new difficulties had arisen, for which the instructions he had given them were not sufficient. And had the apostles continued to live to the present day, other cases would, no doubt, have occurred, in which their own reasoning powers, and
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those of their disciples would have found continual exercise.

Indeed, it seems to be the design of Providence that the present state should be a theatre of constant exercise and discipline, and that not of our passions only, but also of our understandings, that we may make continual advances in knowledge, as well as in virtue; to prepare us, no doubt, for our proper sphere of action in a future world; in which, we may assure ourselves, we shall find abundant exercise, as for the moral virtues that we acquire here, so also for that habit of patient inquiry, and close investigation of truth, and likewise that candour with respect to those that differ from us, which it is our duty to acquire and cultivate here below.

Man is a creature whose distinguishing excellence is the reason which God has given him, no less than his capacity for moral virtues. The perfection of man, therefore, must consist as well in the improvement of his reason, and the acquisition of knowledge, as in the attainment of all

moral virtue. We should then always keep our attention awake to every interesting subject of discussion; and whenever religious truth is directly or indirectly concerned, imagine that we hear our Saviour himself calling out to us, and saying, *He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

The subject of *free inquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and especially as one of the usual topics of the fifth of November, on which it is customary to call the attention of Protestants to the use of their reason in matters of religion, in order to vindicate the principles of the reformation; and also farther to assert our liberty of dissenting from the established religion of this country. This has been done so often, that many persons may think it a worn out and useless topic. They may think that the reformation has been abundantly vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but to rejoice in that liberty in which the exertions of our ancestors, and the favour of divine providence, have made us free. Dissenters also may think the principles of their dissent
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from the establishment of their country sufficiently vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but joyfully to acquiesce in our greater liberty; only being ready to oppose all attempts that may be made to encroach upon it.

This, however, is the language of those who think they have acquired all useful religious knowledge; whereas it is probable that this will never be the situation of man, not even in a future world, and much less in this. In nature we see no bounds to our inquiries. One discovery always gives hints of many more, and brings us into a wider field of speculation. Now, why should not this be, in some measure, the case with respect to knowledge of a moral and religious kind. Is the compass of religious knowledge so small, as that any person, however imperfectly educated, may comprehend the whole, and without much trouble? This may be the notion of such as read or think but little on the subject. But of what value can such an opinion be?

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If we look back into ecclesiastical history, (which is itself a study no less useful than it is immense, and despised by none but those who are ignorant of it) we shall see that every age, and almost every year, has had its peculiar subjects of inquiry. As one controversy has been determined, or sufficiently agitated, others have always arisen; and I will venture to say there never was a time in which there were more, or more interesting objects of discussion before us, than there are at present. And it is in vain to flatter ourselves with the prospect of seeing an end to our labours, and of having nothing to do but to sit down in the pleasing contemplation of all religious truth, and reviewing the intricate mazes through which we have happily traced the progress of every error.

If, indeed, we confine ourselves to things that are *necessary to salvation*, we may stop whenever we please, and may even save ourselves the trouble of any inquiry, or investigation at all. Because nothing is absolutely
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necessary to acceptance with God, and future happiness, in some degree, besides the conscientious practice of the moral duties of life. *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* But, certainly, we may mislead ourselves if we restrict our enquiries by this rule, as, according to it, christianity itself may be said to be unnecessary. For do any of us think that a virtuous heathen will not be saved? Paul says, that they who are without the law of Moses shall be judged without that law. They have the law of nature, and of conscience, and will be judged by that. But, notwithstanding this, he thought it a great privilege to be a Jew, and a greater still, as it certainly is, to be a christian; and there were questions relating to christianity to which he thought it proper to give his own closest attention, and to invite the attention of others. The manner in which he addresses the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the christians of other churches, on the subject of *false doctrine*, is equal in point of energy

energy with the language of our Saviour, *he that has ears to hear let him hear*; and that of the apostle John, in whose time error had spread wider, and taken deeper root, is still stronger. Do not these great examples then justify the most vigilant attention that we can now give to the purity of christian doctrine?

As new errors and mistakes are continually arising, it is of importance that these be corrected, even to keep the ground that we have already got; and it may well be presumed that the great corruption in doctrine, discipline, and worship, which began in the very age of the apostles, and which kept advancing for the space of near fourteen hundred years afterwards, may furnish matter for the laborious and spirited enquiries of a later period than ours. We have seen, indeed, the *dawn* of a reformation, but much remains to the light of *perfect day*; and there is nothing that we can now allege as a plea for discontinuing our researches, that might not have been said with equal plausibility at the time by Wickliff,

liff, by Luther, or by later reformers, who stopped far fhort of the progress which you who now hear me have made. We think that they all left the reformation very imperfect, and why may not our posterity think the same concerning us? What peculiar right have we to say to the spirit of reformation, *So far shalt thou go and no farther.*

Luther and Calvin reformed many abuses, especially in the discipline of the church, and also some gross corruptions in doctrine; but they left other things, of far greater moment, just as they found them. They disclaimed the worship of saints and angels, but they retained the worship of Jesus Christ, which led the way to it, which had the same origin, and which is an equal infringement of the honour due to the supreme God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another. Nay, the authority of the names of those reformers, who did not see this and other great errors, now serves to strengthen and confirm them. For those doctrines of original sin, predesti-

tination,

tion, atonement, and the divinity of Christ, which deserve to be numbered among the grossest of all errors, are even often distinguished by the appellation of *the doctrines of the reformation*, merely because they were not reformed by those who have got the name of *the reformers*; as if no others could have a right to it but themselves; whereas, excepting the doctrine of *atonement* (which in its full extent was an error that originated with the reformers themselves, who were led into it by an immoderate opposition to the popish doctrine of merit) they are, in fact the doctrines of the church of Rome, which Luther and Calvin left just as they found.

It was great merit in them to go so far as they did, and it is not *they*, but *we* who are to blame, if their authority induce us to go no farther. We should rather imitate them in the boldness and spirit with which they called in question, and rectified, so many long established errors; and, availing ourselves of their labours, make farther progress than they were able to do. Little reason have

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we to allege their name, authority, and example, when they did a great deal, and we do nothing at all. In this, we are not imitating *them*, but those who opposed and counteracted them, willing to keep things as they were, among whom were many excellent characters, whose apprehensions at that day were the very same with those of many very good and quiet persons at present, viz. the fear of *moving foundations*, and overturning christianity itself. Their fears, we are now all sensible, were groundless, and why may not those of the present age be so too ?

Dissenters, who have no creeds dictated to them by any civil governors, have, nevertheless, at this day no less need of such admonitions as these than members of established churches, because they may have acquired as blind an attachment to the systems in which they were educated as the members of any establishment whatever, and may be as averse to any farther improvement. Indeed a similar temper is necessarily produced in similar circumstances, while human nature

ture is the same in us all ; and therefore a person educated a dissenter may be as much a *bigot* as any person educated a churchman, or a papist ; and if he now be what he was brought up to, the probability certainly is, that had he been educated differently, his prejudices would have been no less strong, though intirely different ; so that the rigid dissenter would have been as rigid a papist or a churchman.

No person whose opinions are not the result of his own serious enquiry can have a right to say that he is a dissenter, or any thing else, *on principle* ; and no man can be absolutely sure of this, whose present opinions are the same with those that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he sees sufficient reason for them, and retains them on conviction. This, however, is all that can be expected of any man. For it would be most absurd for a man to adopt new opinions, opinions entertained by no person besides himself, merely for the sake of proving that he has actually thought for himself. But
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still, thinking as others have thought, and for reasons which others have given, is no *proof* of a man having thought for himself, and therefore will not authorize his censuring of others. Such a person *may* have the true spirit of enquiry, he may have exerted it, and have found the truth; but he is incapable of giving that satisfactory *evidence* of it which can be given by one whose present sentiments are different from those in which he was educated, and which he could not have learned but from his own researches.

How few then of those of you who were educated dissenters can have a right to say that you would have been dissenters if you had *not* been so educated. It is more than I would presume to say concerning myself. If those persons who now dislike the spirit of innovation were to go back in history, and place themselves in every age of reformation; still censuring that spirit which always gave offence in its day (being always the rebellion of *a few* against the authority of *the many*) they could not stop till they

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came to the heathenism of our barbarous ancestors. For it was the bold spirit of inquiry that made them christians.

Let all those who acquiesce in any system in which they were educated, or which they have learned from others, consider that, in censuring more modern innovators, they are censuring the *spirit* and *example* of the very persons whose opinions they have adopted, and of whose name they make their boast: and that if it had not been for that very spirit which they now censure, only exerted a century or two ago, their own opinions would have been very different from what they now are. They ought, therefore, to respect the *principle*, even though it should lead some into error. If the spirit of inquiry that carries some to Socinianism be wrong, that which carries others to Arianism is no less so; and if Arminius is to be condemned for abandoning the doctrine of Calvin, Calvin himself must be condemned for abandoning the doctrines of popery. It is the *spirit of inquiry* which, if error be established, necessarily leads to *innovation*,
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that every man who ranks himself with any class of christians now existing, must commend in some person or other. And if it was really commendable in the person whose opinions he adopts, it cannot be censurable in the person whose opinions he does not chuse to adopt. The same spirit of inquiry is in itself equally commendable, or equally censurable in all, and whether it lead to truth, or to error.

It will be said, Is it not possible for the spirit of inquiry and innovation to be carried too far? Does liberty never degenerate into licentiousness? Admitting this, who is the proper judge in the case, when all are equally *parties*? The Papist will say that the Protestant has gone too far, the Calvinists will say that the Arminians are to blame, Arminians will condemn the Arians, and the Arians the Unitarians, and even some Unitarians may condemn those of their body, who, differing from them in some respects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter get, some other name.

In fact, there is no reason to be alarmed at all in the case. Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free scope be given to inquiry. It is very little advantage that any superiority of ability can give to the cause of error, and cannot be of long continuance; not to say that the probability must always be, that a man of superior ability will discover the truth sooner than one of inferior talents; industry, and all other qualities being equal between them.

But the consideration that will perhaps contribute most to allay the apprehensions of serious and well-intentioned persons, with respect to all theological controversies, is that nothing on which future happiness depends is concerned in any of them. Much more than has yet been called in question may be given up without abandoning christianity; and every thing that has yet been done towards stripping our religion of its foreign incumbrances has contributed to make many value it the more; and consequently, by giving it a firmer hold on men's
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understanding and belief, tends to give it a greater influence over their affections and practice.

There are, likewise, some other considerations, by means of which those persons who are not themselves much given to speculation, and who are apt to be alarmed by the suggestions of others, may relieve themselves from the fears they entertain on these occasions. One is, that no principle or tenet is really dangerous that does not affect mens' belief in the righteous moral government of God, and a state of rewards and punishments hereafter ; because this is that religious principle which has the greatest influence on the conduct of men. Other principles, indeed, have an effect, in contributing to make us regard our governor and judge, and the maxims of his administration, with more satisfaction, and therefore may make religious obedience more pleasing, and they deserve our zeal and attachment on that account. Other principles again tend to make our religion approve itself to the reason of mankind, by removing

from it what is manifestly absurd, or highly improbable and revolting ; and therefore may recommend christianity to those who are at present prejudiced against it, and they deserve a large portion of our zeal on that account. But still the great thing, with respect to the professor of christianity himself, is his firm belief in a righteous moral government, and a future state of retribution, because these are the things that chiefly influence mens' conduct.

In reality, there cannot be any better rule of judging in this case than that of our Saviour, *By their fruits shall ye know them.* Consider then the tempers and conduct of those persons whose opinions are said to be dangerous. Are they worse than other persons? Have they less piety towards God, or less good will to men, or are they more indulgent to their appetites and passions? If this cannot be said of them, but on the contrary, their conduct be as unexceptionable, and exemplary, as that of other christians, assure yourselves that there is no more real danger in their principles than in those
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of others. They cannot be bad principles with which men lead godly, righteous, and sober lives.

I do not, however, desire you to be determined by the observation of a single person, or of a few persons; because there may be causes of their good conduct independent of their principles; as there may be causes of bad conduct in those who hold good principles. But observe the general character of the sect, or denomination, whose principles are censured; and if it be not worse than that of others, assure yourselves that, whatever may be the vices or virtues of individuals, the general principles of the sect are not more unfavourable to virtue than those of other christians; and therefore, that there is nothing in them that ought to give you any alarm.

But if, independent of practical consequences, you consider speculative principles only, and all your fears be for *Christianity*, it should be considered that every man is a christian who believes the divine mission of Christ, and consequently the truth of his

religion. And, for the reason given before, the only essential article of his religion is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Who Christ himself is, personally considered, is not, of itself, of any consequence, but only whether he be sufficiently authorized by the *God of truth* to teach what he did teach in his name. If such doctrines be taught concerning Christ, personally considered, as men of sense will not readily believe, if it be insisted on that he is almighty God, the maker of the world, or any thing else that will seem to be either impossible or highly improbable (by which many persons may be indisposed to receive christianity, and especially the great bodies of Jews and Mahometans, who keep strictly to that most important doctrine of the *unity of God*) every rational christian ought on that account, as well as others, to exert himself to refute such notions, and to prevent the spread of them. But still we ought to bear in mind, that any man is intitled to the appellation of *a christian* who believes that Christ (whether he was himself God, or
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man, or something between God and man) had a commission from God, that he died and rose again ; and who, in consequence of it, expects a general resurrection and a life of retribution to come.

But should free inquiry lead to the destruction of christianity itself, it ought not on that account to be discontinued. For we can only wish for the prevalence of christianity on the supposition of its being *true* ; and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true. But every man who is himself a serious believer in christianity, must have the most perfect confidence in its truth. He can have no doubt of its being able to stand the test of the most rigorous examination, and consequently he can have no motive to be unwilling to submit it to that test. None can well be enemies to free inquiry but those who, not believing christianity, or at least strongly suspecting that it may not be true, yet wish to support it for some private and interested considerations ; like those who lived by the
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trade of making shrines for the goddess Diana, who were interested in the support of her worship at all events, whether they themselves believed in her divinity or not, because *by that craft they got their wealth*. But this is an argument that cannot much affect any besides members of civil establishments of religion. You, my brethren, have no interest whatever in the support of christianity, if it be false; and your ministers very little. We, therefore, as dissenters, shall be absolutely inexcusable if we be not friends to free inquiry in its utmost extent, and if we do not give the most unbounded scope to the use of our reason in matters of religion. It is the great principle on which our cause rests, and without which it can never be worth supporting at all.

By all means, then, be so far consistent, as christians, as protestants, and as dissenters, as to give the greatest encouragement to free inquiry in matters of religion. Do you, who have leisure and capacity, study the subject of religion, the nature of its evidences, and every circumstance relating

to it. No subjects of inquiry or speculation, within the reach of the human faculties, are so great and interesting as those which, in the most distant manner, relate to the revelation of the will of God to men, respecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. The ultimate object of the whole scheme gives a dignity to comparatively little things belonging to it; and no studies, are in their nature, capable of becoming more pleasing and satisfying to the mind than those of theology. For this I may venture to appeal to the experience of all those who, in consequence of having a taste for these studies, as well as others, and of having made real proficiency in both, are the only competent judges in the case. Their being the chosen studies of Newton and Locke, for the greater and more valuable part of their lives, clearly shews that they considered them as superior to those of mathematics and natural philosophy in the one case, and of metaphysics, and various other liberal pursuits, in the other. Compared with this testimony, so emphatically given,

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by the actual employment of their time, how contemptible is the opinion of men whose studies have been confined to polite literature, natural science, or that of men of the world, who cannot pretend to any knowledge of the subject on which they pass their hasty censures. You who have fortune, but little leisure, or capacity, for such inquiries yourselves, at least encourage them in others. Give assistance to their labours, and you will have a better right to enjoy the fruits of them, though you may not be qualified, in any other respect, to contribute to their success.

Do you, in general, who are private members of christian societies be, at least, so far the friends of free inquiry, as to throw no obstructions in the way of it. Allow your ministers the liberty that you take yourselves, and take no umbrage if, in consequence of giving more attention to matters of theology than you have leisure for, they should entertain opinions different from yours, provided that your agreement on the whole be such, as that their services are useful and edifying
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to you. After a laborious and perhaps hazardous course of inquiry, of the difficulties of which you can hardly be aware, it is no great hardship upon you to give them at least a dispassionate and attentive hearing. They cannot *force* any opinions upon you. You will still have the power of judging for yourselves; and without hearing you cannot have even the means of forming a right judgment. And where an agreement cannot be had (and few persons who really think for themselves will agree in *all* things) you may exercise that mutual candour, which is of more value than any agreement in speculation.

If your ministers be men of sense, and have any knowledge of human nature, they will not trouble you, from such a place as this, with speculations into which you cannot enter, or the discussion of questions that are not of some importance to our common christianity. But you may easily suppose, that, giving more attention to speculative religion than you have leisure to do, they may see the importance of certain articles in
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a stronger light than you will at first be aware of; and that will justify them to themselves, and ought to justify them to you, if they propose those articles with such evidence as strikes their minds in their favour, and with a zeal which they may think they deserve. It is indeed their duty, in the fight of God, to inculcate upon you whatever they shall think to be of importance to you, as members of christian societies, whether you receive it well or ill.

There are many things which they may think to be highly interesting *in speculation*, and proper for your consideration in your closets, which they would not think of proposing promiscuously from the pulpit, not being of sufficient importance, and the minds of all not being sufficiently prepared for them. But there are some errors of a speculative nature, such as those respecting the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, which have taken deep root among common christians, and which are perpetually inculcated from other pulpits, with respect to which it becomes us to oppose

pose zeal to zeal; and every man who has *ears to hear* should be called upon to *hear and understand*; because every man who has ears to hear, and the most common understanding may be made to see the absurdity and the mischievous consequences of such doctrines. The minds, therefore, of the commonest people ought to be enlightened, and their zeal excited, with respect to them. Let it appear that we, as well as others, despise what we think to be despicable, and abhor what we think to be shocking.

Let those, on the other hand, who are bold in speculation, bear with those who are not so, especially those who are in years, and who have not been much in the habit of diligent inquiry. God does not give the same disposition to every man; nor indeed does the purpose of his providence admit of it. Long prejudices are also always, or at least generally, to be treated with tenderness. Besides, as it is happy for the cause of truth that some should be forward in speculation, it is no less happy that others should be backward to receive new opinions;

nions; as, in consequence of this, every thing is more thoroughly canvassed; and it is only after a due course of discussion, in which every objection shall be brought forth, that there can be any probability that the reception of any truth will be lasting. A truth that has never been opposed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering assent, which is given to that which has stood the test of a rigorous examination.

As we call upon every man that has ears to *bear*, that is, to *judge*, we must be prepared patiently to bear with the result of that judgment, whatever it is. If we invite examination and discussion, we should take the consequences of it, without complaining. If the cause for which we contend be a good one, it will stand its ground; and if otherwise, we ourselves ought to rejoice in the fall of it.

To conclude, whether, in searching after truth, or in judging of it, let us give one another all the aid and assistance that we can; remembering that we are all frail and fallible creatures, liable to mistakes, and to
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faults more dangerous than any mistakes. Let it, therefore, be our greatest care *to provoke unto love and to good works, to exhort one another daily, while it is called to day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

With respect to *opinions*, the time is coming that will try every man's work what it is, whether we are now building upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with suitable and durable materials, or such as will not bear the fire. And, with respect both to speculation and practice, let it be our great object so to acquit ourselves here below, in the absence of our Lord, that when he shall return, and take an account of his servants, we may be found of him without spot and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

*Reflections on the present state of Free Inquiry
in this country.*

I PUBLISH the preceding discourse in part to oblige those before whom it was delivered; but chiefly because I do not think that the generality of even the more liberal minded christians in this country have as yet given sufficient attention to the sentiments inculcated in it. This I perceive by the alarm that has been taken at some free but important discussions in the last volume of the *Theological Repository*. It was a willingness to convince such persons how groundless were the apprehensions they have expressed on this subject, that led me to the train of thought which runs through this discourse; though it will be perceived that I had likewise a view to another class of persons, who despise all such discussions as those which I now allude to.

It has been too much the disposition of all christians to imagine that those who think a little more freely than themselves are ready to abandon christianity itself, together with their peculiar notions concerning it. They are so fully persuaded that their own opinions are contained in the scriptures,

that they cannot separate the idea of renouncing the one from that of renouncing the other. But a little observation, and reflexion on what has passed of a similar nature, might satisfy them that their apprehensions have no solid foundation; their own peculiar notions not having, in reality, that necessary connexion with christianity which they imagine them to have, from not considering how few the essentials of christianity are.

From want of distinguishing essentials from non-essentials, the Roman Catholics have thought that there can be no christianity besides their own; and too many of the several sects of Protestants think the same with respect to their peculiar tenets. Many Arians (themselves held in abhorrence by Athanasians) have said that they could not consider Socinians as christians; and some are now unreasonably apprehensive that those who disbelieve the miraculous conception, or the plenary inspiration of Christ and the apostles, in cases with respect to which the object of their mission did not require inspiration, are in danger of rejecting christianity; though they are as firm believers in the divine mission of Christ (which alone properly constitutes a christian) as themselves. This is the more extraordinary, as the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is, I believe, universally disclaimed by all who are called

rational christians. But of what use is it to give up that doctrine, if we are never to avail ourselves of our opinion with respect to it, and do not thereby find ourselves at liberty to examine with perfect freedom narratives and reasonings which are confessedly not infallible, and in which therefore there may be mistakes. Besides, it is an allowed maxim with us, that the fewer blemishes of any kind we leave in our religion, the greater service we render it. But it is no uncommon thing to admit general *principles*, and yet startle at the natural and necessary *consequences* of them.

I am sensible that the present times are in more respects than one unfavourable to theological discussions. Very many, of whom better things might be expected, are averse to them; thinking them altogether useless, or perhaps dangerous. They are persuaded that their own opinions (which they have adopted without giving themselves much trouble about the matter) are perfectly rational, that the truth of them must be admitted whenever they are fairly proposed to the mind, and that all we have to do is to apply them to their proper practical uses; and to the inculcating of these they would have all discourses from the pulpit, and from the press too, to be confined.

A great majority of every denomination of christians have always had this dislike of specu-

lation, and therefore it is not at all extraordinary that there should be so great a proportion of them among those who think more rationally than their ancestors, and who therefore rank themselves in the class of *rational christians*. Their opinions are not what they have investigated themselves, but what they have received from others, as much as the Roman Catholics have theirs. It may therefore be expected that they should be affected in the same manner towards them. Laborious inquirers after truth are but few in any community, nor is there any occasion that they should be numerous. It is only to be wished, that those who take no pains to inquire themselves would throw no obstacles in the way of him who does, and have the same indulgence for his feelings, that he has for theirs.

In another respect, also, the times in which we live are unfavourable to free inquiry in matters of religion. We are not, indeed, *persecuted* for our religious principles, and few persons have even much scruple of openly declaring what they think; but the influence of habit, of fashion, and of connexions, in these peaceable times, is such, that few persons, very few indeed, have the courage to *act* agreeably to their principles, so as to rank themselves, and to appear, in that class of men to which they really belong. They content themselves, as
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the heathen philosophers did, with *thinking with the wise, and acting with the vulgar*; a conduct certainly unworthy of a christian, who ought to sacrifice every thing to *truth, and consistency of character*. There is this good, however, arises from the evil, that such persons allow themselves more liberty in speculation than they probably would do, if they thought themselves bound in conscience to do what I should call acting agreeably to their principles; and by this means the foundation is gradually laying for a future change in the more public aspect of things.

The converts that are daily made to the unitarian doctrine, and who for the present continue members of trinitarian churches, may in time be sensible of the obligation they are under to withdraw themselves from that mode of worship; or, if not, they will always be ready to join their influence to forward any attempts that may be made towards a farther reformation. And when the generality of those who really read and think shall become unitarians (and those who do not read or think for themselves, are sure to follow their leaders, and of course join every majority) a small change in the political state of things in a country, such as no man can foresee before it actually takes place, and which may be at no great distance, may suffice to overturn the best compacted

establishments *at once*, before the bigotted friends of them suspect any danger. And thus the system which had stood for ages, without any visible marks of ruin or decay, may vanish, like an enchanted castle in romance. For then men, whose minds were already emancipated, will in a moment find themselves at liberty in all respects, without any motive whatever to engage them to give their support to error and superstition. Circumstances may even arise in which the most indifferent may feel themselves inspired with courage, and become warm advocates for those principles which they now hold in perfect silence, hardly speaking of them to their nearest friends. How many are there already *speaking out*, who some time ago were almost afraid to *think*.

Let us not, therefore, be discouraged, though, for the present, we should see no great number of churches professedly unitarian. It is sufficiently evident that unitarian principles are gaining ground every day. Every attempt to suppress them by writing, or otherwise, has hitherto been favourable to their spread, and we may be confident it ever will be so. We are now sowing the seeds which the cold of winter may prevent from sprouting, but which a genial spring will make to shoot and grow up; so that the field which to day appears perfectly naked, and barren, may to-mor-
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row be all green, and promise an abundant harvest. The present silent propagation of truth may even be compared to those causes in nature, which lie dormant for a time, but which, in proper circumstances, act with the greatest violence. We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous explosion; in consequence of which that edifice, the erection of which has been the work of ages, may be overturned in a moment, and so effectually as that the same foundation can never be built upon again.

If we be successful in the propagation of truth, we need not give ourselves any concern about the measures of government respecting it. This is equally out of our province, and unnecessary. Causes will always produce their effects; and though the cases be of a different nature, it is as certain an inference as any in Geometry, that an unitarian people cannot long be subject to a trinitarian establishment. Indeed no motive can be imagined why any civil governors (supposing it to be in their power) should not allow the people the open profession of the religion they really chuse, and are willing to support. Things are already in such a train, that though no person can foresee the particular time, and manner of the change

change in favour of unitarianism, we may be as certain of its taking place, as if we saw it actually accomplished. And till things are properly ripe for such a revolution, it would be absurd to expect it, and in vain to attempt it.

When a competent number of the more intelligent persons in all parts of the Roman empire were either declared christians, or so well disposed towards a change, as not to be sorry for it, the conversion of an emperor was sufficient to establish christianity, without any alarming opposition. The conversion of Tiberius, of Vespasian, of Marcus Antoninus, or any other emperor in an earlier period, would not have done it. But when an *internal revolution* had been previously made in favour of christianity, though Constantine should not have been converted, the *external revolution* could not have been delayed much longer. It would certainly have taken place, whether any particular emperor had favoured it or not.

In like manner, when the minds of a proper number of persons were enlightened with respect to the grosser errors of popery, the boldness of Luther and a few others, roused by the impudence of the venders of indulgences; was sufficient to produce what has been called *the reformation*. Ten Luthers, in an earlier period, would only have supplied so many victims for the inquisition; and

and though no Luther should have appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century, things were then in such a state, that, by some other means, a similar revolution in favour of religious liberty would, no doubt, have taken place.

It has been well observed by philosophical historians, that if the loss of a single battle decide the fate of an empire, there must have been a previous reason, in the general state of things, why so much should depend on the event of a single battle; and that, in a different state of things, the loss of many battles would not have overturned the state.

It is our business, therefore, by conversation, by preaching, and by writing, to get access to the minds of those who are disposed to think; and without giving ourselves any trouble about the conduct of government, to employ ourselves simply in the propagation of truth. Here is a great and glorious field fully open to our utmost exertions, and requiring them. And while we are successful in these labours (and the success is visible every day) though we should not live to see any favourable change in the face of public affairs, we may die in as firm a faith of its taking place, as Joseph did of his countrymen inhabiting the promised land, when he ordered that he should not be buried, but that his body should only be

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embalmed,

embalmed, and put into a coffin in Egypt, ready to be carried away when they should leave that country.

The most equitable thing in the governors of any country would, no doubt, be to allow unitarians, or any other description of men, the use of a church, or any other public building in a town, in which they should be so numerous as to occupy one, and when their proportion of the tythes, &c. would be sufficient for the maintenance of a minister of their persuasion; and no sort of inconvenience would arise to the state from such a measure as this. This was done in several places in Germany at the time of the reformation. But in the present state of things it is in vain to expect any such equitable conduct. We may now, however, besides *deserving* it, be doing that which shall ensure such an event at a future time; when it shall be sufficiently understood that unitarians are quite as good subjects as trinitarians, and therefore that there has been no good reason why the latter should so long have enjoyed their present exclusive advantages. How the belief of a mysterious doctrine operates to the prosperity and security of the state, is a problem not very easy to solve.

At Boston, in New-England (a country in which no man was taxed towards the support of
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any religion that he did not approve, and which never flourished the less on that account) there were three episcopal churches; and had the English government continued there, the English Liturgy, in its present state, would, no doubt, have continued to be used in them all. But the principal of them has now adopted an Unitarian form of worship, and the same will probably be done in other provinces of the United States. Was there equal liberty in this country (which may take place, by means as unforeseen by us as the revolution in America) there are few considerable towns in which the people (voting freely, and all the complex influence of the present establishment out of the question) would not have at least one unitarian church. And if one would be wanted now, there will, I am confident, be a demand for two, twenty years hence. This may be said with tolerable certainty, from the consideration of the increase of unitarians in the last fifty years, the greater still in proportion in the last twenty, and the greatest of all in the last ten years. What then may we not reasonably expect from the train in which things now are?

The efforts of man to stop what they may call the mischief, would be like the attempt to stop a rivulet supplied by a constant spring, however small. Nothing could be easier than to make a dam

dam that would be sufficient for the purpose at first. But as the water keeps rising, the dam must be made higher and stronger, and (the effort of the water to burst its way continually encreasing) the highest and strongest must necessarily fail some time or other, and the deluge, which would be the consequence, would be in proportion to the time in which it had been confined. Truth has never yet been conquered by power, numerous as have been the attempts of the latter to bear it down.

It may be said that since there has been an increase of unbelievers, as well as of unitarians, in the last century, it may, on these principles, be predicted that *they* will continue to increase, to the extirpation of christians of all denominations. This reasoning, I own, would have been just, if men had become unbelievers, as well as unitarians, from reading and thinking. But there is in this respect a most essential difference in the two cases. Of the unbelievers of this age (I speak from the fullest persuasion) few indeed are so from that serious inquiry and real conviction, to which alone the spread of unitarianism can be ascribed. The rejection of christianity may be accounted for from many causes besides a serious conviction of its fallacy; but no other cause can reasonably be assigned why a trinitarian should

should become an unitarian; as the obligations of moral virtue are not relaxed by the change, and the allurements of honour and profit are on the side of the established faith.

It is evident to those who converse with unbelievers, that few of them are qualified to discuss the evidences of christianity, a proof that they have not rejected it from any deficiency that they found in its proof; whereas there are great numbers of unitarians who can readily give the reasons of their faith, which shews that they have really considered and weighed the subject.

It is also to be observed, that a great increase of unbelievers has been owing to the corruptions of christianity; and this cause ceasing, in part by the efforts of unitarians, the effects will in due time cease of course. Christianity and its evidences are exhibited in such a light at present, that fewer philosophical persons, giving due attention to the subject (which is the great thing that is wanting, but which many circumstances may excite) will be able to withhold their assent to it.

Others will object to the conclusiveness of this reasoning, to prove the future universality of unitarianism, the rapid spread, and long continuance, of Mahometanism in the world. But the grounds and principles of that religion underwent

no very severe discussion at the time of its promulgation, or early propagation. The professors of it wrote little in its defence, and there never was an age in which the Mahometan and christian literari had so free and equal an intercourse, as to give room for much controversy. Whenever that shall take place, and the common people be in a capacity of reading and judging for themselves, less than a century, I am persuaded, will be sufficient fully to establish the credit of the one system, and to destroy that of the other. Which of the two must yield in the contest, I, who am a christian, cannot have a doubt.

On the contrary, christianity, from the earliest period, was eagerly attacked and defended, the common people gave great attention to the controversy, and it was the manifest superiority of the christian apologists in point of argument that decided between them.

The same observations will apply to the reformation from popery; and had not the civil powers intervened, there can be no doubt, but that an end would soon have been put to the authority of the church of Rome, and the chief corruptions of it. Had the reading of Protestant books only been allowed in Popish countries, the reformation would have kept advancing, notwithstanding all the opposition from the civil powers.

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The controversy between the unitarians and trinitarians has been open many years, much has been written on both sides, the common people are become parties, and civil government does not directly interfere. In these circumstances, it is a fact which no person can deny, that a great number of the common people, with a much greater proportion of men of learning, are become unitarians; and this has been the case so long, that there can be no doubt of its continuance.

The effect of free discussion is to produce a number of persons capable of writing in defence of their principles. Unbelievers really qualified to write upon the subject are very few, compared with learned christians. It is no less evident that learned unitarians increase, while learned trinitarians decrease. These facts are sufficient to enable any person, without making himself master of the respective arguments, to conclude that unitarian christians will continue to increase, to the extermination of unbelievers on the one hand, and trinitarians on the other. The interference of the civil powers, and the influence of splendid establishments, may retard this event, but will not be able to prevent it.

Some may smile at this method of calculating and predicting events. But moral causes are as uniform and certain in their operation as natural

ones, and when the *data* are equally clear, the *principles* will authorize equally sure conclusions.

If a man of common sense only, without any knowledge of philosophy, were to'd that the Newtonian system of the universe, after having been canvassed by philosophers of all nations, had, notwithstanding great opposition, been gradually gaining ground for the space of more than half a century, he would not doubt the universality of its reception in time. Having similar *data*, I think we may venture to predict the universal prevalence of unitarianism in a future period.

If the controversy between the Arians and the Socinians should be kept up ten or twenty years longer, and in all that time the Socinians should continue to increase, as they have done during the last ten years, few persons will be backward to prognosticate that Arianism also will finally and even soon be exterminated, especially as it has not the support of the civil powers.

The *principles* on which I argue will hardly be contested; but persons, according as they are disposed with respect to particular controversies, will see the *facts* relating to them in different lights. What I say of the uniform spread of unitarian principles may possibly be denied by some trinitarians, but it is allowed by unitarians. To them, therefore, it holds out a sure prospect of a final

triumph over all their adversaries, and it is for their encouragement that I make these observations.

To write in this manner may be said to be imprudent, as it is giving an alarm to those who now apprehend no danger, and therefore make no efforts to prevent it. But the friends of free inquiry and truth may rest satisfied, that, as every effort which has hitherto been made to bear down the cause for which they contend, has, in reality, served to promote it, so also will every future effort that can be made for the same purpose. The cause of truth may be compared to an engine constructed so as to be put in motion by the tide, and which is kept in its proper movement, whether the water flow in or flow out. Nothing here is wanting but *motion*, it being impossible for that motion, from whatever quarter it arise, to operate unfavourably.

The best worldly policy, in the enemies of truth, is, no doubt, that of those who endeavour to stifle all inquiry, who read nothing, and who reply to nothing. But even this will do but little, while the friends of truth are zealous and active in its interests; as by this means they have the advantage, in the eye of the world, of being known to invite and provoke discussion; being seen to walk over the field of controversy without an

adversary; though it would certainly be more desirable still to have a respectable opponent.

As to this country, we may be confident that, while error and superstition are falling every where abroad, they can never really gain ground here. We have in a great measure set the example of free inquiry, and have taken the lead in religious liberty to other nations; and though the policy of the times may be averse to any extension of this liberty, circumstances will no doubt arise, that will hereafter be as favourable to it in this country as they are now in others. Having hitherto been foremost in this great cause, it will not be in the power of man to keep us long behind the rest of Europe. Abroad they are *the governing powers*, that promote reformation. But with us, *the people* think and act for themselves, a circumstance infinitely more promising for an effectual and permanent reformation; there being nothing of *worldly policy* in the case, but a pure *love of truth* that is the great spring of action with us.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the indolence and indifference of friends, and the silence, or virulent opposition of enemies, let the advocates of free inquiry steadily pursue their purpose. Let us examine every thing, with the greatest freedom, without any regard to consequences, which, tho' we cannot distinctly see, we may assure ourselves will
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will be such as we shall have abundant cause to rejoice in.

Some persons dislike controversy, as leading to a *diversity of opinions*. But as this is a necessary, so it is only a temporary inconvenience. It is the only way to arrive at a permanent and useful uniformity, which it is sure to bring about at last. Religious truth cannot be so different a thing from truth of every other kind, but that it must at length overcome all opposition; and the knowledge of its having stood the test of the severest examination, by men sufficiently able and interested to oppose it, will at last produce a firm conviction, that all future opposition will be equally vain, and thus terminate in the most unwavering acquiescence.

It will be said that this process is a very slow one. But it is as sure in its operation, as it is necessary in the nature of things. Every great truth, in the firm belief of which mankind now universally acquiesce, has gone through the same process; and it has generally been longer in proportion to its importance, though somewhat shorter in proportion to the activity with which the controversies it has occasioned have been conducted. By promoting discussion, therefore, we really accelerate this progress, and are bringing forward the period of *uniformity*; while those who

are the enemies of free inquiry, and who hate all controversy, are prolonging that state of suspense and diversity of opinion, which they so much dislike, and pushing back that very uniformity of opinion for which they sigh. For this *period of controversy* must have its course, and come to its proper termination, before any valuable and lasting uniformity can take place. The conduct of those who wish to see an end of controversy at present, may be compared to that of those who should endeavour to keep a ship steady in its place at sea; when our aim should be, by using all our sails and oars, to get into harbour, where alone it can be kept steady.

The great articles which are now in a course of discussion will not be determined in our time. But if we exert ourselves, this work may be accomplished in the time of our children, or grand children; and surely if we have any elevation or comprehension of mind, we may look forward to, and actually enjoy, the happiness we procure for *them*. We scruple not to plant trees for the benefit of posterity. Let us likewise sow the seeds of truth for them, and anticipate the acknowledgments they will make us on that account.

I do not write this from a persuasion that every thing that I have myself contended for is indisputably true. On the contrary, I have for the sake
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of discussion, hazarded many things, and shall probably hazard many more; and I have actually changed many opinions, theological as well as philosophical, which I have advanced since I was a writer. But if men make use of their faculties at all, and especially in that period which is most favourable to inquiry (which is about the middle time of life) they may arrive at so much certainty, as will justify them in expressing a considerable degree of confidence, at least with respect to those subjects to which they have given the closest attention.

I do profess to have this confidence in my opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity. I do not think the doctrine of transubstantiation more manifestly absurd, and this is by much the less mischievous of the two. Not that I think there are no wise and good men who are advocates for the doctrine of the trinity. I acknowledge there are. But there are likewise many persons, of whose ability and integrity also I think very highly, who are advocates for the doctrine of transubstantiation; and as there were learned Pagans five centuries after the promulgation of christianity, there may be some respectable believers in the doctrines of the trinity and of transubstantiation, some ages hence.

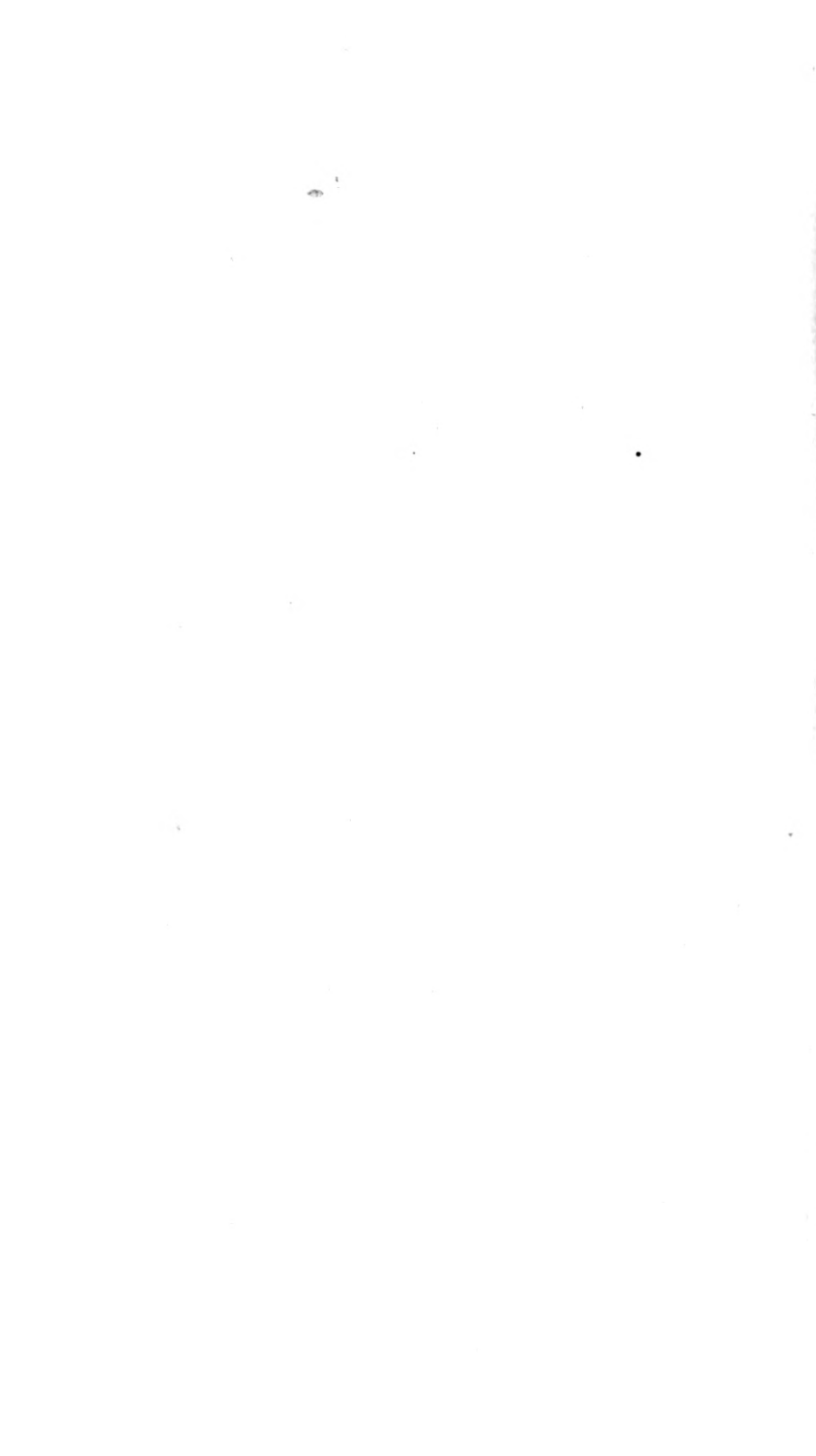
The minds of a few *individuals* may be so locked up as that no keys we can apply will be able to open them. But it is with *the bulk of mankind* that we have to do, because they will always be within the reach of reason. And solitary unbelievers, or solitary bigots, may have their use in the general system; an use similar to that of the few idolatrous inhabitants of the land of Canaan, who were not extirpated; which was that of trying and exercising the Israelites, without having it in their power to drive them out again.

THE DOCTRINE OF
DIVINE INFLUENCE
ON THE
HUMAN MIND,
CONSIDERED, IN A
SERMON,

Preached at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr.
THOMAS and JOHN JERVIS, in 1779.

——— The first Almighty Cause
Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral Laws.

POPE.



T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE doctrine advanced in this discourse is by no means *new*, and the interpretations I have given of those texts, which at first sight seem to be the most unfavourable to it, are, in fact, the same that are given by Grotius, and other divines and commentators of the greatest repute. It ought not, therefore, to give any particular offence. And yet, because the doctrine is here, perhaps, more distinctly laid down, more largely illustrated, and urged with less caution and reserve, than, I believe, it has been hitherto done, it is not impossible but that it may excite more attention; and that to many, who have been long accustomed to a different view of things, it may give more alarm, than it did while the views exhibited of it were but transient and indistinct. I shall, therefore, make a few observations on the nature and consequences of it, that no persons may complain that they were not fully apprized of the whole extent of what is proposed to them.

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This doctrine of the exclusion of all *immediate agency of the Deity on the minds of men*, restraining them from evil, or disposing them to good, and of his doing this by no other means than the natural influence of proper instructions and motives, certainly goes to the root of the grossest and most dangerous delusions that the christian world has, in all ages, been subject to. It precludes the bold pretensions of all empirics in religion, by whatever name they have been distinguished, with the vain hopes of all that are liable to be deluded by them; and it supplies the only basis of that practical religion that is truly rational and safe. It is utterly incompatible with the very principle and ground of the doctrine of *sovereign and irresistible grace*, the possibility of *instantaneous conversion*, and consequently of any true and availing conversion at the latest hour of life. Let all those, therefore, who are attached to such notions be apprized, that the doctrine contended for in this discourse is exceedingly hostile to them. It is, however, a doctrine that, I am confident, the more it is examined, the more consonant it will appear to be to reason (that is, to all actual *appearances* and *facts*) and to the genuine sense of scripture; and on this account, I am satisfied, that their doctrine of a *new and miraculous birth* is altogether unscriptural and deceitful.

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On the other hand, the doctrine that excludes all miraculous interpositions is by no means inconsistent with the belief of a *particular providence*, or of an intended correspondence between all events that are co-incident, or that have any relation to each other. For whether those coincidences, which are ascribed to a particular providence, be brought about just at the time of the respective events, or were originally provided for in the general plan, the *design* is the very same. We equally acknowledge *the hand of God*, though we consider him as acting by the intervention of second causes. It is an uncontroverted maxim of the schools, that *causa causæ est causa causati*. If, therefore, there be an intelligent Author of Nature, who fixed the laws of it, and put the whole complex frame in motion, whatever is the necessary result of this constitution, is to be ascribed to him.

On this account, however, it may be imagined that the doctrine of this discourse is properly *necessarian*, and, taken in its whole extent, true only on that hypothesis. I answer, so very great, important, and comprehensive, as the doctrine of *philosophical necessity*, in my idea of it, is, I believe there cannot be any valuable *moral truth* that does not connect and harmonize with it, if it do not directly imply it. There can be no plan of *moral government*

government that is not built upon it, and every thing that a philosopher understands by the terms *accountableness, praise and blame, reward and punishment, &c.* necessarily supposes it, and nothing that respects the *discipline of the mind* can have any meaning without it.

But though, speculatively considered, the doctrine of necessity must make a part of every general system that is founded on truth, yet, at the same time, the doctrine of this particular discourse is no more necessarian than every thing that we can preach and inculcate for the *moral good of men* is so; and therefore those who are not necessarians will find no greater difficulty in admitting the doctrine of this discourse in consistency with their peculiar principles, than any other tenet in religion or morals. With much more justice might it be said, that the doctrine of *divine prescience* is a necessarian doctrine, which, however, all who pretend to piety, and especially all who believe the scriptures, *must* maintain; and the embarrassment they will be under on that subject cannot but be much greater than any that can arise in this case.

Whatever notion men may entertain of *divine* and *human agency*, there must be something to which they will give the appellation of the *usual, or established course of nature*, and, in some sense

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or other, they must ascribe this to God; for though the *decision of the will* be supposed to be independent of him, the *acting* in consequence of it cannot be so. He must at least *permit, when he might prevent*, if he does not directly *appoint*, whatever comes to pass. Indeed, according to the doctrine of *philosophical liberty*, this course of nature must be a thing more evidently distinct from the direct interposition of the deity than upon the doctrine of necessity, which ultimately ascribes all to God.

It must, therefore, be perfectly consistent with the principles of those who are advocates for what they call *liberty*, to maintain, with me, that the work of conversion and reformation is something that takes place according to the usual course of nature, whatever that be, and that it is not to be ascribed to any thing out of it; and they are at liberty to ascribe the *opening of the heart of Lydia*, and the *hardening the heart of Pharaoh*, to the former, rather than to the latter of these causes, as much as myself; and accordingly many of them have done so. Though, believing, as they do, that there are certain precincts, within which the human mind naturally acts without the controul of the deity, they may be inclined to think that his *actual interference* may be sometimes necessary; and therefore they will be more easily reconciled

reconciled to the notion of pretty frequent occasional, but properly supernatural influences, than the necessarian (who, as such, believes that nothing is without the sphere of a properly divine, though regular and constant influence) will chuse to have recourse to.

All that the advocates for philosophical liberty can really object to me on this occasion is, the sufficiency of the distinction between the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary* operation of the divine Being, which is a thing altogether foreign to the proper subject of this discourse, and therefore does not require to be discussed in this place. I think I have considered it sufficiently elsewhere.

I may also be thought to have had in my eye, and to have *alluded* to, the doctrine of necessity, in some parts of this discourse. This, I own, is very possible, and, unknown to myself, it may be the case with my other writings, even those that are the most foreign to the subject; because it is a doctrine that I wish always to keep in view, and what I would not willingly ever lose sight of. But this cannot be a *material* objection to any thing that I have advanced. The candid will find no difficulty in interpreting such incidental expressions (which the more sharp-sighted may think to look that way) according to their own sentiments, or substitute others in their places. Had
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not this objection been actually made to the discourse, I own I should have been far from thinking it necessary to have said any thing on the subject in this preface.

The doctrine of this discourse, in common with other great truths, and especially that of the doctrine of necessity, will probably never be within the clear comprehension of the *vulgar*, so that it will always be unpopular; and, as in all other such cases, it must also be expected, that the contrary doctrine will be maintained by some who rank with the *speculative* and the *learned*. In particular, bishop Warburton, in his *Treatise on Grace, or the office and operation of the Holy Spirit*, though he combats what he calls *fanatical pretences to divine influence*, yet takes it for granted, that the spirit of God abides with the church for ever, “in his office of Comforter, both in supporting the will, and in his office of enlightening or directing the understanding;” meaning, no doubt, some immediate agency of the deity on the mind. This also seems to be the general opinion of christians, who acquiesce in the most obvious meaning of scripture language, and who do not give much attention to the phenomena, and powers of the human mind. But, at the same time, it is not pretended by those who hold this

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doctrine,

doctrine, that there can be any *positive proof* of this kind of divine agency, since they acknowledge that the affections and resolutions dictated by it are not to be distinguished from the natural operations of the mind. But is not this flying from one unsupported hypothesis to another, equally unsupported? Nay, those fanatics whom the bishop exposes pretend to evident *facts* in support of their opinion; whereas he does not pretend to be able to assign any fact at all in support of his. What must philosophers think of such an hypothesis as this!

No inconvenience will arise to the generality of christians from confounding, as they will do, *primary* and *secondary causes*, the agency of God, and the operations of their own minds, and especially their occasionally overlooking second causes so far as to ascribe every thing that is *good* immediately to God (which seems to have been the case with the pious writers of the scriptures) provided they do not so far leave *themselves* out of the question, as to neglect the only effectual means of establishing themselves in virtue. It cannot be expected but that the generality of mankind will content themselves with the most *obvious appearances in nature*, and the generality of christians with the most *literal interpretation of*
scripture

scripture language. But let them not be offended if others, who give more attention to appearances, see in them what they do not, but what they may see is not unfavourable to piety and virtue. *By their fruits ye shall know men,* is the wise rule of our Saviour. Let us, therefore, be upon our guard against judging from the *supposed tendencies* of things, when the *real* tendencies, and actual *effects*, cannot fail to manifest themselves in due time.

And he spake many things unto them in parables; saying, Behold, a sower went out to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the Sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

MATT. xiii. 3—10.

IN this parable our Lord gives an account of the reception that his Gospel would meet with in the world, according to the different characters of those to whom it would be proposed. It may, therefore, be

considered as a prophecy; and it is a prophecy verified by all history, and indeed by the observation of every day; announcing to us, that the effects of religious truths, and of religious impressions of all kinds, depend upon the disposition of mind with which they are received; so that, though the doctrines of the gospel be the same things in themselves, the consequence of the general promulgation of them will be very various.

Our Lord seems to lay peculiar stress on the doctrine of this parable, by closing it with saying, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*; and if we properly attend to it, we shall find that it abounds with the most important instruction, both to those who preach the gospel, and those who hear it. At present I shall consider it in no more than one single point of view, endeavouring to illustrate and inculcate one important truth, plainly intimated to us in it, viz. that all the benefit we are authorized to expect from the gospel arises from the natural effect that the great truths and motives of it are calculated to produce upon the mind; that
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the interposition of the Divine Being in the dispensation of the gospel consists solely in imparting those truths, and suggesting those motives, and not at all in giving any supernatural efficacy to the truths or motives after they are presented.

Our Lord evidently compares himself, and his apostles, to persons who merely sow good seed (which the earth could not bring forth of itself) and this they are represented as scattering promiscuously, without distinction of places or soils, which were just as nature, or previous circumstances, had made them. Consequently, where the soil was previously well disposed to receive it, the produce was a...ple; but where it was, on any account, indisposed, the produce was insignificant, or none at all.

The preachers of the gospel, here exhibited in the character of husbandmen, are not represented as altering the quality or condition of the soil itself; and therefore we find that the gospel was sometimes a favour of life, and at other times of death. So though it is elsewhere compared to *light*,

which is generally a very welcome thing, yet some are said to *bate this light, because their deeds were evil*. Also, though the evidences of the divine mission of Christ were fairly and equally proposed to all; yet our Saviour says, that they only who *do the will of God*, i. e. those who are upright and previously well disposed, *shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God*. Others would be so prejudiced, that the strongest evidence would not be properly attended to, and therefore could not have its proper effect; in so much that he expressly tells these bigotted Jews, that *they would not come to him that they might have life*; and applying to them a prophecy of Isaiah, he represents them as so far infatuated by vicious prejudices, that it was *not in their power* to receive the Gospel. And unless they had had better dispositions of mind, which he did not pretend to give them, it was really and truly impossible.

In another parable our Lord compares human nature not to the *soil*, as in my text, but to a *fig-tree* growing in it, Luke xiii. 6—9. and in this the nature or quality of the
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the tree itself is represented as unaltered, except by the effect that *digging round it* and *dunging it* might produce.

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground. And he, answering, said unto him, Lord let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

In both these parables, you see (and I doubt not it will be found to be the same in every other, in which the reformation and instruction of men are represented) the *nature of man* is supposed to be a thing that is never operated upon by the divine power *immediately*, but always through the medium of certain means, without the mind, naturally adapted to that end. When man is the *soil*, nothing is done to it besides scattering proper seed upon it, and this seed will take root, or
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not, according to the previous quality and state of the soil; and when man is a *tree*, nothing is done to *that*, but only to the soil in which it grows; so that though the figures are different, the meaning of the two parables, the instruction we are led to derive from them, is the same; and if we attend to it, we shall find it to be very important indeed, such as, when fully apprehended, cannot fail to alarm and to arouse us to the utmost.

We clearly learn from them, that the agency of God upon the minds of men, though real, and constant (*for in him we live, and move, and have our being*) is not *immediate*, or *miraculous* (for if it were immediate, it would be the same thing with what we do term miraculous) but always through the medium of the natural means of instruction and reformation; and consequently that, without proper *opportunity*, and especially without proper *time* for those means to produce their effect, no change is to be expected.

Ministers, therefore, may learn that, under God, who is the author of nature, and
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by whose agency all causes produce their proper effects, every thing depends upon their labours with their people, and that they can do nothing without labour; and the people may be apprized that, without their own earnest endeavours, concurring with the instruction and admonitions of their ministers, and other means of virtue and religion, they cannot receive any real benefit.

But ministers may likewise learn for their comfort, that, since all the laws of nature, and among them those to which the human mind is subject, are uniform, and consequently all causes never fail to produce an adequate effect, according to the circumstances in which they operate; if their admonitions be proper in themselves, and seasonably applied, their labour can never be wholly in vain. They will always have more or less effect, and therefore they may go through with their pious labours with cheerfulness and good hope.

The people, likewise, impressed with the same persuasion, will attend upon the word of exhortation, and diligently apply them-

themselves to all the means of religion ; assuring themselves that, whether the effect of their application be visible or not, it is not lost. Their characters are really improving ; and by a steady perseverance in receiving proper nourishment, they cannot fail (though insensibly, if the state of their minds be compared at short intervals) to *grow in grace*, till they come to the *full measure of the stature of Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Whereas, without this persuasion concerning the uniformity of the laws of nature respecting our minds and their affections, ministers and people will both be subject to great occasional despondence, whenever present appearances happen not to be favourable ; and some, in consequence of not always feeling (and it is impossible they should at all times feel) a lively sense of religious impressions, will abandon themselves to despair.

We shall learn to respect the laws of nature the more, if we consider the extraordinary provision that the author of nature has made to preserve their uniformity, and to super-

superfede the necessity of the frequent violation of them; which he has done by means of occasional and seasonable miraculous interpositions. In fact, the proper use of miracles has been to make more miracles unnecessary. Also, miracles have generally respected the *external world*, and have had their effect on the minds of men in a natural and regular manner; and, therefore, they have produced very different effects according to the previous different states of mens' minds. And indeed, all external miracles, all that appear to have ever been provided in the history of the various dispensations of God to man, have been insignificant, and the whole plan of them was idle and absurd, if it was necessary that *internal miracles* should be wrought also.

If moral impressions were made upon mens' minds by an immediate divine agency, to what end has been the whole apparatus of *revealed religion*. For what rational purpose were all the miracles wrought by Moses, by Christ, and by the apostles (the only ob-
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ject of which was to impress the minds of men with a conviction of the divine mission of certain teachers of religion, and, thereby, of the credit that was due to their instructions, in order, finally, that such instructions might the more easily produce that excellence of moral character which, in the epistle of St. Peter, is called a *divine nature*) if the Divine Being had, after all this, still found it necessary to produce this excellent disposition and character by his own immediate agency.

Has not God, at all times, the most intimate access to the minds of men; and cannot he who made us at first, new-make us, and new-mould us, as he pleases. Is it not in his power, by a word, a volition (that word and energy by which *he spake and it was done*, by which *he commanded*, and *the whole creation stood fast*) to change the hearts of the worst of men in an instant, and make them breathe the spirit of the purest angels; and cannot he preserve them in this state of sinless purity and excellence to all eternity? Certainly this, and every thing else that is possible

possible in itself, is within the compass of his almighty power.

But, notwithstanding this, it is evident from fact (whether we shall be able fully to comprehend the reason of it or not) that he has not thought proper to work in this manner. And though it is his wish that *all men should be saved*, and *he wishes not the death of any sinner*, but *had rather that they should repent and live*, he does not think proper to work miracles on the minds of men for this purpose; but only provides *authoritative instruction*, and proper *motives*; which, being addressed to the mind, operate upon it in an uniform and regular manner.

Thus, when the old world became abandoned to wickedness, he only sent Enoch and Noah to preach to men; but he thought proper to destroy them all, perhaps by a miracle, rather than reform them, as he might have done, by his own immediate agency.

When the Israelites fell into idolatry, and the many horrid vices at that time inseparable from idolatry, he sent prophets from

time to time to admonish them of various impending calamities. But when those admonitions had no good effect, he always thought proper that the threatened calamities, as famine, pestilence, war, or captivity, should actually overtake them, rather than give (as with a volition he might have done) a supernatural effect to the warnings and expostulations of his servants, by his own influence upon their minds.

So also when God had compassion on the whole world lying in wickedness, and irrecoverably sunk in superstition and vice, all that he did to reclaim them was to send the gospel among them. And whatever moral good has been produced in the world by it, has been by natural means, and, to all appearance, by no other means whatever; these being fully adequate to the effect: and wherever the publication of the gospel, and of the great truths and motives of it, has failed to produce good effects, they have not been produced at all, but men continue wicked and abandoned, doomed to certain destruction.

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Our Lord even wept over Jerufalem, defiring, with the greateft affection and earneftnefs, to reclaim the inhabitants of it, and prevent their impending calamities ; but his labours, and thofe of the apoftles, failing of fuccefs (that infatuated people continuing in their obftinate impenitency and unbelief) God did not interpoze any farther ; and though the Jews are ftiled his *peculiar people*, he gave them up to the vengeance of the Romans, and made their calamities the moft dreadful, and of the longeft continuance, of any that are recorded in hiftory.

We may affure ourfelves, therefore, that God, notwithstanding the love that he bears to men, as his offspring, will certainly fuffer them to perifh, and undergo the pains of hell, whatever they are, rather than fave them from that punifhment when they die impenitent ; and alfo, that he will fuffer them to die impenitent, rather than employ any other than the ufual natural means of their repentance and reformation. So facred with him are his eftablifhed laws of nature.

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We read of our Lord's giving sight to the blind, limbs to the maimed, and the use of reason to those who were deprived of it; but never of his giving a *sound mind*, in a moral sense, to those who were destitute of that. For this, though the greatest of all purposes, he made use of nothing but instruction and admonition. He used no other means either to disarm the malice of his enemies, or to correct the imperfections of his best friends. Otherwise Judas would never have betrayed him, nor would Peter have denied him.

It might seem a matter not unworthy of divine interposition, to shorten, or at least to alleviate in some measure, the extreme sufferings of so excellent a person as our Saviour; and the wisdom of the world was so much offended at the thought of a *suffering Messiah*, that in the early ages of christianity, great numbers could not be reconciled to the thought, and therefore maintained that our Lord suffered only in appearance, when in reality, he felt no pain; and some in modern times have supposed that he put an end to his own life, before he could have been
released.

released from his pains in the course of nature. But, according to the plainest evidence of history, his death was as properly the natural effect of pain and torture (in the exhausted state, to which he was previously reduced, especially by his agony in the garden) as that of any criminal who is now impaled, or broken on the wheel. And indeed the notion of our Lord's availing himself of his miraculous power, to alleviate or shorten his own sufferings, could not but have the very worst effect upon the minds of those who should be called to suffer in his cause, and who must know that they were not possessed of any such advantage.

Lastly, God has been pleased to suffer the christian religion to be exceedingly debased by a mixture of heathenish opinions and superstitions, and a power to be assumed in his church so contrary to the genius of it, as to be termed, in the language of prophecy, *anti-christian*, rather than interfere to prevent the operation of natural causes, tending to introduce those corruptions, and to establish that

enormous power. And though the Divine Being has resolved to reform his church, to put a period to those abuses, and to overturn that usurped authority, he does it only by means of natural causes; by providing, in the usual course of things, a better understanding of the scriptures, an increase of knowledge of various other kinds, and a juster sense of mens' natural rights and privileges. These causes have been operating some centuries, and will, no doubt, at length accomplish the great ends for which they were provided. But these means of reforming the christian church, and restoring it to its pristine purity, are, in all respects, *natural*, and by no means do they come under the description of miracles. Yet we do, and ought to bless God for the Reformation.

It will be said that, according to the plainest language of the scriptures, God *does* work upon the minds of men, and that the success of the preaching of the gospel is, in a particular manner, ascribed to it. Does not Paul say (1 Cor. iii. 6.) *I have planted,*

planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase ?

I answer, that this representation is undoubtedly and most strictly true. The success of the gospel is certainly the work of God ; but the question is, whether, in this, he works *with*, or *without*, *natural means* ; and it is not the less his work, because he employs certain means adapted to answer his purposes. His agency is just as complete on one supposition as on the other. All the difference respects the mode or manner of his operation ; and it becomes us to look at all times beyond all second causes, to the ultimate and proper cause of all good, which is God only. For strictly speaking, as our Lord himself observed, *There is none good but one, that is God* ; all other goodness being only the effect of his.

In this case, is not the gospel itself called *the gospel of God*, because he gave it ? Was it not by his appointment that Paul preached it at Corinth, and that Apollos watered it there ; and if, after this, the natural effect of the Corinthians hearing the gospel was

their receiving and profiting by it, is not the whole to be ascribed to the God of nature, and providence? Without that constitution of nature, by which their minds were disposed to receive the truths of the gospel, and without the providential events of Paul planting the gospel, and Apollos watering it, the Corinthians had been mere heathens still.

That this language is only the same in which the pious writers of the scriptures describe all the events of providence, overlooking all second causes, and regarding the primary cause only, is evident from numberless passages. Does not the Psalmist, (Psalm civ. 27.) represent all the beasts of the field as *waiting upon God, that he may give them their meat in due season? That thou givest them, says he, they gather. Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.*

But does God feed wild beasts by miracle, as he fed the Israelites in the wilderness? By no means, though the language, literally interpreted, would denote as much. His feeding them is in the common course of providence,

providence, by giving them natural powers for seizing their prey, and thus enabling them to provide for themselves. And very often, not being able to meet with proper food, or being disabled by accidents from seizing it, they actually starve and perish.

In the same manner, therefore, we ought to interpret what is said of God's giving the increase when Paul planted, and Apollos watered; and also what is said of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14. viz. that *God opened her heart, that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul.* By a train of previous circumstances and impressions, all under the direction of providence, she was disposed to receive the preaching of Paul with due attention, and without prejudice.

We are instructed to pray that God would give us, *day by day, our daily bread*, and it is from God that we *do* receive our daily bread; but it is only in the natural course of things, and by the use of proper means for procuring it for ourselves. We are also authorized to pray that God would *create in us a clean heart, and renew in us a right Spirit*; and if

we have a clean heart, and a right spirit, we ought to ascribe that to God also, and not, as the heathen Stoics did, to themselves, exclusively of God. But God gives us good dispositions of mind as he gives us our daily bread in a natural, and by no means in a supernatural manner. It is by the help of means adapted to impress our minds, and never without them. The language of scripture is uniform, and exactly similar in both these cases, and therefore is certainly to be understood in the same manner.

If we admit any other interpretation of such language as this, we shall ascribe moral evil to the immediate divine agency, as well as moral good. For God is as expressly said to *harden the heart of Pharaoh*, as to *open that of Lydia*; whereas there does not appear to have been any occasion for a miracle to harden the heart of Pharaoh. He acted just as other bad men, blinded by their passions and by their interest, in similar circumstances, still act; and his hardness and obstinacy answering the most important purposes in the plan of Divine providence,

vidence, it was, for that end, no doubt, permitted to take place.

In sickness we always do, and ought to pray for health; but we never expect that God will interpose by miracle to relieve us. When limbs are to be amputated, and other operations in surgery are to be performed, we look up to God, but at the same time we never fail to have recourse to the hand of a skilful surgeon.

Even when the Divine Being has addressed himself to the mind of man in a supernatural manner, as in the gift of prophecy, it does not appear that such communications have ever affected the moral character of those who were the subjects of them, any farther than such communications tended, in a natural way, to produce that effect. Balaam was a bad man, though he was a prophet; and though Saul was for a time among the prophets, his character was not altered, but he continued the same man to the end of his life.

The apostle Paul was converted to christianity by the miraculous appearance of Christ

to him; but it does not appear that his temper of mind was changed by it, otherwise than as a full conviction of the truth of christianity naturally and necessarily made a change in him. He still possessed the same vehemence of temper, the same zeal and ardour of mind, though in a different cause. He became, no doubt, a much better man upon the whole, than he would have been if he had continued a Jew, but it was in consequence of being actuated by better principles, and of being subjected to more favourable influences. It should be considered that, instead of inflaming his hatred of men by the practice of persecuting them, he would have the best opportunity of improving in meekness, patience, and a love of the brethren, in consequence of being himself persecuted along with them. Thus would his superior virtues naturally arise from his being in circumstances peculiarly favourable to the acquisition and growth of them.

The cure of madness, called, in the language of scripture, *the casting out of demons*, (to the malignant influence of which that disorder

disorder was usually ascribed) and also the gift of tongues, were miracles that immediately respected the minds, or the mental faculties of men, but they were not of a moral nature. It no more followed that a man restored to the use of his reason would be a good man, than one that was restored to his health, or the use of his limbs. Paul expressly supposes that a man might have the gift of tongues, and yet not have charity; and not only to those who were the subjects of miracles, but even to some of the workers of them. our Lord himself assures us he will say, *I know you not; depart from me ye workers of iniquity.*

Prayer for good dispositions of mind is proper on the idea of God being the real giver of all the good we receive, though in the usual course of nature, of which he is the author; and also more especially of his realizing to us that character of *parent* and *guardian*, which he has condescended to assume. And if he *has* provided that our reasonable requests shall actually be granted, it is the very same thing to us, whether this
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be brought about by his mediate or his immediate agency. He is still the giver, and the only difference is in the manner of bestowing the gift. It is to God that we ought always to look for the supply of all our wants, corporeal or mental, and to him should our gratitude be expressed; for the gospel and all its effects, as well as for food and raiment. And we actually receive blessings of both these kinds, viz. spiritual and temporal, in the same manner. It is always through the channel of some natural means, and never, at least, in this age of the world, by miracle.

Let us, therefore, look up to God for every thing, but always in the use of proper means; and let us beware of deceiving ourselves, as too many do, by expecting any end whatever, especially a proper temper of mind, necessary to qualify us for future happiness, without the diligent use of such means as he has prescribed for that purpose. If God had thought proper to work, and gain this end, by miracles, there would have been no occasion whatever for preaching,

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ing, for the gospel itself, or even for the practice of virtue, which is the end of the gospel, and of the preaching of it. For, as I have, indeed, observed already, could not the Divine Being change the hearts of the most profligate of men the moment they were to enter another world, and fit them as completely for the enjoyment of heaven, as if he had made them go through all the difficulties, trials, and discipline, of a virtuous life? But as we are well assured that God *will not* do this, though he is certainly able to do it, we may be equally assured, that the hearts of none will be thus miraculously changed in an instant, as many suppose, at any period of life. A real change of character, from vice to virtue, is only to be effected in a natural, and consequently in a gradual manner.

If this doctrine be true (and the whole tenor of scripture and reason confirm it) the doctrine of *instantaneous conversion* is altogether a most dangerous delusion. Buoyed up by this vain hope, men continue in sin, fancying they can be converted at the very hour of death; and though they are even brought

brought to the gallows by their crimes, even from thence they pretend to be sure of going to heaven.

But if there be any such thing as an *established course of nature*, if our minds be subject to any regular laws and influences, and if changes of mind are made in no other manner than by the natural influence of the objects presented to them, and by the circumstances in which men are placed (which certainly corresponds to fact) *time* must be requisite to form any character. A *character* is a thing of slow growth, but of a firm constitution. The rudiments of it are formed early, while the mind is sensible to impressions of all kinds; but when once it is formed, it is with great difficulty indeed that it receives any material and lasting change.

Ministers therefore should bestow their labour chiefly on the *young*, instructing them in the principles of religion, inculcating good maxims, forming them to good habits, and making every thing in religious discipline familiar to them. This is bending the oak while it is pliable, and while the task is not difficult.

difficult. But, with respect to persons advanced in life, all that we can hope to do is to palliate excesses, and prevent enormities. The character, the general temper, and turn of mind, are fixed, and can no more be made to bend to our efforts, than an oak of some growth and standing.

I shall conclude with observing, that there are two things that we should principally attend to with respect to God, and both are of the greatest importance. The first is, the consideration of his universal presence, and his constant uncontrolled agency; and the second is, his acting by natural means, or in a regular manner. We must, in the first place, endeavour to see God in every thing, and to see every thing in God, that is, in its relation to him. We must habitually look beyond all second causes, considering them in no other light than as instruments in the hands of God, the only proper cause of all, and employed by him to accomplish, in the best manner, his excellent purposes.

But, in the second place, it is almost of as much importance, that we consider God

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not as a Being incapable of foresight, and acting as particular occasions and emergencies require, but as foreseeing every thing that can ever come to pass, and adapting means to ends from all eternity: as acting by general laws, and established rules, without ever deviating from them, except for great and extraordinary purposes; and then in such a manner as that his interposition shall be publicly known and acknowledged, so as to have the effect of proper miracles. Now, that God has sufficiently provided for the instruction and reformation of mankind by the gospel, we are to consider the age of miracles as over. And if we are not to expect miraculous interpositions in the external world, similar to those that were exhibited in the times of Moses and the prophets, or those that attended and promoted the first promulgation of the gospel, much less can we expect any miraculous influences on the minds of men; which, in a moral sense, do not appear to have ever been the subject of miracles in former times. Indeed, in this sense they would have been
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a very improper subject of miracles, on many obvious accounts.

Not to respect the general presence and agency of God is *practical atheism*. It is *living without God in the world*; and to expect his miraculous interpositions, and not to consider him as acting by general laws, is to encourage an *enthusiasm*, and a *delusion*, that is, in some cases, almost as dangerous; leading men to neglect the natural and only efficacious means of improving their characters, and to depend on certain supernatural impulses and feelings, of vague and uncertain description, and that cannot have any relation to moral virtue; which consists in a supreme reverence and love of God, an entire devotedness to his will, in doing and suffering, a disinterested love of his creatures, and our brethren, and a just self-government, equally favourable to both.

On the whole, the doctrine of *divine agency* and *divine influence*, respecting things spiritual, as well as temporal, is true, and in the highest degree important. Our characters

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approach

approach to perfection in proportion as we keep it in view, and they are debased and bad, in proportion as we lose sight of it. But the doctrine of a proper *supernatural influence* on the mind is false; and though, like most other false principles, it *may* be very innocent, not in fact superseding the use of the natural means of religion, it is always delusive, and in some cases highly dangerous.

Let this doctrine, therefore, teach us, as *individuals*, to cultivate above all things a spirit of *habitual devotion*, founded on the belief of the divine presence with us, and of his constant agency upon us, and upon all things. This is that *faith* which is the only sure *anchor of the soul* in a tempestuous world, or rather it is the wings on which we rise above the world, and approach to a state of union with God.

But let us carefully avoid indulging the vain and delusive imagination of an immediate and supernatural communion with God, which is always the foundation of *spiritual pride*,

pride, and the bane of humble devotion and virtue. For there is no true devotion without the deepest humility, and what is sometimes not improperly called *self-annihilation*.

As *ministers and people*, let us bear in mind, on the one hand, that a congregation is a flock, that must be tended and fed; that food for the mind must be provided, received, and digested, like food for the body, and that we receive nourishment and strength from both in the same natural and gradual manner. We must therefore *labour for the bread that endureth to everlasting life*, as well as for *the bread that perisheth*. And though we are to expect no success but in the diligent use of proper means, we must, at the same time, ascribe to God, and acknowledge that we receive from him (who has wisely and graciously adapted all means to their proper ends) both the bread that we daily eat, and the benefit we receive from the administration of the word, and ordinances of the gospel, both our growth in

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strength

strength and stature, and what is called our *growth in grace*.

Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him, therefore, AND TO HIM ONLY, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Rom. xi. 36.

T W O

D I S C O U R S E S ;

I. On *Habitual Devotion*.

II. On the Duty of *not living to Ourselves* ;

Both preached to Assemblies of Protestant Dissenting
Ministers, and published at their Request.

T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE former of these discourses I have been induced to publish by the request of the body of Dissenting Ministers who assemble annually at Dudley, in Staffordshire, before whom the greater part of it was delivered on Tuesday the 21st of May last. The latter was preached before the assembly of ministers of the counties of Lancaster and Chester, met at Manchester, May 16th, 1764, to carry into execution a scheme for the relief of their widows and children. But though it was printed at their request, it was not generally published; as only a small edition was printed, and sold in that neighbourhood. Several of my friends having expressed their wishes to see it made more public, I have thought proper to print them together, especially as the subjects of them have a considerable relation to each other; the one recommending a proper disposition of mind with respect to God, and the other that which respects men. In both of them, also, I

have availed myself of Dr. Hartley's theory of the human affections, the excellence of which is, that it not only explains, with wonderful simplicity, many phenomena of the mind, which are altogether inexplicable on other principles, but also leads to a variety of practical applications, and those of the most valuable kind. Of this I have given several specimens in my *Observations on Education*, and others of my publications.

My apology for introducing any thing of this nature into these discourses is, that neither of them was composed for a common audience. Besides, the more abstruse parts of them are of such a nature, as to be pretty easily intelligible to persons of reflection, though they should have no knowledge of that particular theory. For the general doctrine of the *association of ideas* is known to all persons of a liberal education. Whenever I have delivered these discourses before a common audience, I have omitted whatever I thought would not be readily understood by them, and such passages (which however are not very many) may now be passed over, without much difficulty or inconvenience, by those persons for whose use they are not calculated.

To the former of these discourses the public are already under considerable obligations, though they have been ignorant of it; as it was the
occasion

occasion of that excellent poem of Mrs. Barbauld, intituled *An Address to the Deity*, which was composed immediately after the first delivery of it, before an assembly of ministers at Wakefield, in Yorkshire, in the year 1767. Were I to inform my readers how soon that poem appeared after the delivery of the discourse, it would add much to their idea of the powers of the writer. I could also make the same observation with respect to several other pieces, and some of them the most admired in that collection.

If my theological publications have been more of a *speculative* than of a *practical* nature, it is merely because circumstances have led me to it, and by no means because the former are more pleasing to me. I hope I shall always consider speculation as subservient to practice. The most exact knowledge of truth, and the greatest zeal for it, will avail nothing without the practice of those virtues which the most uninstructed of mankind perfectly understand. Nay the more knowledge we have of the christian religion, of the general plan and object of it, the more inexcusable shall we be, if we do not, in the first place, take care to impress our hearts with that *love of God*, and that unreserved devotedness to his will, which our Saviour calls *the first and greatest of all the commandments*, and also with that disinterested

good will to our fellow creatures, which he calls the *second great commandment, and like unto it.*

He was himself equally exemplary with respect to them both. And it is in vain for us to pretend to be *christians*, if we do not study to resemble him (whom alone we are to acknowledge in the character of Lord and master) in the disposition of our minds, and in the conduct of our lives. May we all be so attentive to discharge our proper duty, and to improve the talents with which we are severally intrusted, that when, according to his promise, *he shall return, and take an account of his servants, we may be found without spot and blameless.*

The world in which we live, with all the influences to which we are subject, may be equally our friend or our enemy, according to the use we make of it. It is wonderfully adapted, by the exercise it gives to our faculties, and to our passions and affections, to *establish, strengthen, and settle us* in the habit and practice of all virtue, and to raise us to a pitch of excellence to which Adam in paradise could never have attained. But then it is equally possible that, by sloth and indulgence, we may debase our natures to a degree equally wonderful. The knowledge and belief of christianity itself, as well as every other advantage of which we are possessed, is also capable either of

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promoting

promoting the moral perfection of our natures, and our fitness for immortal happiness, or of making us the proper objects of a greater condemnation than that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment.

It behoves us then to consider our situation and all our privileges, very attentively, that we may make the best use of them. It is not in our option to be in any other circumstances than those in which our maker has placed us. It will also avail us nothing to *hide any talent in a napkin*. As we have received it, we must give an account of the use we make of it.

We are likewise ignorant of the time when this account will be called for; and great and serious as the business of life is, the time allowed for the dispatch of it is both short, and uncertain. But, though short, it is sufficient for the purpose of it, if it be rightly improved; and then the uncertainty of its duration is a circumstance that does not need to give us any concern. *At such an hour as we think not the judge may come, but then, happy is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.*

I shall take the liberty to close this preface with an extract of what is more peculiarly practical, and therefore more immediately suiting my present
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sent purpose, from Mrs. Barbauld's poem above-mentioned.

If the soft hand of winning pleasure leads,
 By living waters, and thro' flow'ry meads;
 When all is smiling, tranquil, and serene,
 And vernal beauty paints the flatt'ring scene;
 Oh teach me to elude each latent snare,
 And whisper to my sliding heart, BEWARE.
 With caution let me hear the syren's voice,
 And doubtful, with a trembling heart, rejoice.

If friendless, in a vale of tears, I stray,
 Where briars wound, and thorns perplex my way
 Still let my steady soul thy goodness see,
 And with strong confidence lay hold on thee,
 With equal joy my various lot receive,
 Resign'd to die, or resolute to live;
 Prepar'd to kiss the scepter, or the rod,
 While God is seen in all, and all in God.

With thee in shady solitudes I walk,
 With thee in busy crowded cities talk;
 In every creature own thy forming pow'r.
 In each event thy providence adore.
 Thy hopes shall animate my drooping soul,
 Thy precepts guide me, and thy fear controul,
 Thus shall I rest, unmov'd by all alarms,
 Secure within the temple of thy arms;
 From anxious cares, from gloomy terrors free,
 And feel myself omnipotent in thee.

Then

Then when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,
And earth recedes before my swimming eye;
Teach me to quit this transitory scene,
With decent triumph, and a look serene.
Teach me to fix my ardent hopes on high,
And, having liv'd to thee, in thee to die.



A Discourse on Habitual Devotion.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts.

PSALM X. 4.

GOD, my christian brethren, is a being with whom we all of us have to do, and the relation we stand in to him is the most important of all our relations. Our connexions with other beings, and other things, are slight, and transient, in comparison with this. God is our *maker*, our constant *preserver* and *benefactor*, our moral *governor*, and our final *judge*. He is present with us wherever we are; the secrets of all hearts are constantly known to him, and *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. Here, then, is a situation, in which we find ourselves, that demands our closest attention. The consideration is, in the highest degree, inte-

interesting and alarming ; knowing how absolutely dependent we are upon God, that *in him we live and move and have our being* ; and knowing also, that by vice and folly we have rendered ourselves justly obnoxious to his displeasure.

Now, to think, and to act, in a manner corresponding to this our necessary intercourse with God, certainly requires that we keep up an habitual regard to it : and a total, or very great degree of inattention to it, must be highly criminal and dangerous. Accordingly, we find in the scriptures, that it is characteristic of a good man, that *he sets the Lord always before him*, and that *he acknowledges God in all his ways*. Whereas it is said of the wicked, in my text, that *God is not in all their thoughts* ; and elsewhere, that *the fear of God is not before their eyes* ; that *they put the thoughts of God far from them, and will not the knowledge of the Most High*.

This circumstance seems to furnish a pretty good test of the state of a man's mind with respect to virtue and vice. The most aban-

abandoned and profligate of mankind are those who live *without God in the world*, entirely thoughtless of his Being, perfections, and providence; having their hearts wholly engrossed with this world and the things of it; by which means those passions which terminate in the enjoyment of them, are inflamed to such a degree, that no other principle can restrain their indulgence. These persons may be called *practical atheists*; and the temper of mind they have acquired, often leads them to deny both natural and revealed religion. They secretly wish, indeed, they cannot but wish, there may be no truth in those principles, the apprehension of which is apt to give them disturbance; and hence they give little attention to the evidence that is produced for them, and magnify all the objections they hear made to them. And it is well known, that, in a mind so strongly biased, the most cogent reasons often amount to nothing, while the most trifling cavils pass for demonstration. It is the same with respect to any

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other speculation, when the mind has got a *bias* in favour of any particular conclusion.

On the other hand, a truly and perfectly good man loves, and therefore cherishes, the thought of God, his father and his friend ; till every production of divine power and skill, every instance of divine bounty, and every event of divine providence, never fails to suggest to his mind the idea of the great Author of all things, *the giver of every good and every perfect gift*, and the sovereign disposer of all affairs and of all events. Thus he lives, as it were, constantly *seeing him, who is invisible*. He sees God in every thing, and he sees every thing in God. He *dwells in love*, and thereby *dwells in God, and God in him*. And so long as he considers himself as living in the world which God has made, and partaking of the bounty with which his providence supplies him ; so long as he is intent upon discharging his duty, in the situation in which, he believes the Divine Being has placed him, and meets with no greater trials and difficulties than,
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he is persuaded, his God and father has appointed for his good, it is almost impossible that the thought of God should ever be long absent from his mind. Every thing he sees or feels will make it recur again and again perpetually. His whole life will be, as it were, one act of devotion; and this state of mind, being highly pleasurable, and his satisfaction having infinite sources, will be daily encreasing, so as to grow more equable, and more intense to all eternity; when it will be *joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*

These are the two extremes of the sentiments and conduct of men with respect to God, and all the varieties of human characters will be found somewhere between them; so that we may be deemed virtuous or vicious, in proportion as we approach to the one or the other.

The more imperfect of the middle classes of mankind will have their minds too much engrossed by this world and the things of it, so as to exclude, in a very great degree, the apprehension of God, and of their relation to him. Provided, however, that they have

had a religious education, these thoughts cannot be prevented from recurring from time to time, and producing stronger or weaker resolutions of repentance and amendment; but not having their full influence, and therefore, serving rather to disquiet the mind, conscious of a want of perfect integrity, they will be apt to be overborne by the superior power of things seen and temporal; and the minds of such persons being in this fluctuating condition, whatever success they may have in the world, their lives will contain a great mixture of anxiety and remorse.

But those whom we may stile the more perfect of the middle classes of men, though like the former, their minds may be, now and then, carried away by the magic influences of this world; and though they may give too far, and too eagerly, into the pursuit of its pleasures, riches, and honours, they will never wholly, or for a long time, lose sight of God, and of their duty; and pious sentiments, recurring with superior force, at intervals, will produce a kind of
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religious fervour, which, rousing the mind to a greater exertion of its powers, will produce good resolutions with considerable strength and vigour; and thereby break their growing attachment to the world. These fervours, however, will of course remit, and other objects will necessarily resume some part, at least, of their influence: but if a sense of God and of religion have once taken firm hold of the mind, in the early part of life, there will be reason to hope, that an express regard to them will return with greater force, and after shorter intervals, perpetually. By this means such strength will be given to the principle of conscience, that in the farthest excursions they make from the strict path of religion, even while they maintain no express regard to God in their actions, the bare apprehension of a thing being *right*, and their *duty*, will, in all considerable instances, immediately and mechanically determine their minds; so that they will never deliberately do any thing which they are convinced is unlawful, and offensive to God. At most, if ever a

stronger temptation than usual should induce them to transgress their known duty, in any of the greater instances of it, the state of their minds will be such, as that these transgressions will be followed by the keenest compunction and contrition, which will make them less liable to commit the same offence a second time.

Thus we see that those persons, in whose minds there is this prevailing disposition to virtue, will be improved both by the uniform practice of their duty, which necessarily strengthens the *habit* of it, and even by occasional transgressions, which gives a stronger *stimulus* to the power of conscience. But there is great danger, lest these violations of known duty be either so great as to produce despair, which naturally hardens the mind, or so frequent as to beget a habit. Both these weaken the power of conscience. The man then goes backward in religion, and may at last, even from this more advanced state of virtue, be brought to *commit all iniquity with greediness*. Let him, then, *who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall* ;

and let all of us, conscious of the frailty of our natures, be intent upon *working out our salvation with fear and trembling.*

An *habitual regard to God* being the most effectual means of advancing us from the more imperfect to the more perfect state I have been describing, I shall endeavour to recommend this leading duty to you, by a fuller and more distinct enumeration of its happy effects; and I shall then shew what I apprehend to be the most effectual methods of promoting it, and of removing the various obstructions to it.

1. An habitual regard to God in our actions tends greatly to keep us firm in our adherence to our duty. It has pleased divine providence to place man in a state of trial and probation. This world is strictly such. We are surrounded with a great variety of objects, adapted to gratify a variety of senses, with which we are furnished. The pleasures they give us are all innocent in moderation, and they engage us in a variety of agreeable and proper pursuits. But our natures are such, as that the frequent indul-

gence of any of our appetites tends to make its demands inordinate, and to beget an habitual propensity to indulge it; and this proneness to the excessive indulgence of any of our passions enslaves our minds, and is highly dangerous, and criminal. By this means we too often come to forget God our maker, to injure our fellow creatures of mankind, and to do a still greater, and more irreparable injury to ourselves, both in mind and body.

It has pleased Almighty God, therefore, from the concern he had for our good, to forbid these immoderate indulgences of the love of pleasure, riches, and honour, by express *laws*, guarded with the most awful sanctions. Now we are certainly less liable to forget these laws, and our obligation to observe them, when we keep up an habitual regard to our great law-giver and judge; when we consider him as always *present with us*; when we consider that *his eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good*; that he *sees in secret*, and will one day *reward openly*. In this manner

manner we shall acquire an habitual reverence for God and his laws, which will end in an habitual obedience to them, even without any express regard to their authority. Thus we should certainly be less likely to neglect the request of a friend, or the injunction of a master, if we could always keep in mind the remembrance of our friend, or master; and a constant attention to them would certainly give us a habit of pleasing them in all things.

2. An habitual regard to God promotes an uniform cheerfulness of mind; it tends to dissipate anxiety, or melancholy, and may even, in some cases, prevent madness. Without a regard to God, as the maker and governor of all things, this world affords but a gloomy and uncomfortable prospect. Without this, we see no great *end* for which we have to live, we have no great or animating *object* to pursue; and whatever schemes we may be carrying on, our views are bounded by a very short and narrow space. To an atheist, therefore, every thing must appear little, dark, and confused. And

let it be considered, that, in proportion as we forget God, and lose our regard to him, we adopt the sentiments and views of atheists, and shut our eyes to the bright and glorious prospects which religion exhibits to us.

Religion, my brethren, the doctrine of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, opens an immense, a glorious, and most transporting prospect; and every man, who is humbly conscious that he conforms to the will of his maker, may enjoy, and rejoice in this prospect. Considering ourselves as the subjects of the moral government of God, we see a most important sphere of action in which we have to exert ourselves, we have the greatest of all objects set before us, *glory, honour, and immortality; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, as the reward of our faithful *perseverance in well doing*; and we have a boundless existence, an eternity, in which to pursue and enjoy this reward.

These great views and objects, the contemplation of which must be habitual to the mind which keeps up an habitual regard to
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God, cannot fail to diminish the lustre of *the things of time and sense*, which engage our attention here below; and while they lessen our solicitude and anxiety about them, they must cure that fretfulness, and distress of mind, which is occasioned by the disappointments we meet with in them.

For the same reason, this habitual regard to God, this life of devotion, which I would recommend, must tend in some measure to prevent that most deplorable of all the calamities mankind are subject to, I mean *madness*. It is well known, that the circumstance which generally first occasions, or at least greatly contributes to, this disorder, is too close, and too anxious an attention to some *single thing*, in which a person is greatly interested; so that, for a long time, he can hardly think of any thing else, and particularly, is often prevented from *sleeping*, by means of it. Thus we frequently see, that when persons are of a sanguine temper of mind, a severe disappointment of any kind will end in madness. Also a sudden transport of *joy*, from unexpected

pected success, will sometimes have the same effect. But, from the nature of the thing, this violence of either kind, could hardly take place in a truly devout and pious mind, in the mind of a man who considers all the events, in which he can be concerned, as appointed by a God infinitely wise and good; who, he is persuaded, hath, in the most afflictive providences, the most gracious intention to him, and to all mankind; and who, by the most prosperous events, means to try his virtue, and to put him upon the most difficult of all exercises, that of behaving properly in such circumstances. To a mind rightly disposed, and duly seasoned with a sense of religion, nothing here below will appear to be of sufficient moment to produce these dreadful effects. *We shall rejoice, as though we rejoiced not; and weep, as though we wept not, knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Deep melancholy is often occasioned, in persons of a lower tone of spirits, by the same kind of disappointments which produce raging madness in others. It is the
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effect of *despair*, and could never take place, but when a person apprehended, that that which we may call his *all*, that in which he put his chief trust and confidence, had failed him, and he had no other resource to fly to. But a truly religious man can never despair; because, let what will befall him here below, he knows his chief happiness is safe, being lodged where *neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through nor steal. In patience, therefore, he will be able at all times to possess his own soul, exercising a steady trust and confidence in God, the rock of ages, the sure resting place of all generations.*

Melancholy, or despondence in a lower degree, what we commonly call *lowness of spirits*, generally arises from a want of some object of pursuit, sufficient to engage the attention, and rouse a man to the proper exertion of his powers. In this situation, he has nothing to do but to think of himself, and his own feelings, which never fails to involve him in endless anxiety and distress. But a principle of religion will ever
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put a man upon a variety of active and vigorous pursuits. No truly pious and good man can be an idle man. He will fully employ all his power of doing good; he will not keep his *talent hid in a napkin*; and, far from complaining that time hangs heavy on his hands, he will rather complain, that he has not time enough for the execution of half his benevolent purposes.

3. An habitual regard to God fits a man for the business of this life, giving a peculiar presence and intrepidity of mind; and is, therefore, the best support in difficult enterprises of any kind. A man who keeps up an habitual regard to God, who *acknowledges him in all his ways*, and lives a life of devotion to him, has a kind of *union with God*; feeling, in some measure, the same sentiments, and having the same views. Hence, being, in the language of the apostle, *a worker together with God*, and therefore being confident that God is with him and for him, *he will not fear what man can do unto him*. Moreover, fearing God, and having confidence in him, he is a stranger to every
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every other fear. Being satisfied that God will work all his pleasure in him, by him, and for him, he is free from alarm and perturbation, and is not easily disconcerted, so as to lose the possession of his own mind. And having this presence of mind, being conscious of the integrity of his own heart, confiding in the favour of his maker, and therefore sensible that there is nothing of much real value that he can lose, he will have leisure to consider every situation in which he finds himself, and be able to act with calmness and prudence, as circumstances may require.

Is there, then, any active and difficult service, to which we are summoned by the voice of our country, of mankind, and of God, these are the men, I mean men of religion and devotion, in whom we can most confide. Other men may be roused by their passions to any pitch of patriotic enthusiasm. They may oppose the insidious attempts of corrupt ministers or tyrants, to enslave their country, or may bravely face a foreign enemy
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in the field, though they risk their fortunes, and their lives in the contest. But mere worldly minded men, staking their *all* in such enterprizes as these, and having little more than a sense of *honour* to support them, may, in some critical moment, be sensible of the value of what they risk, and, on that principle prove cowards.

Whereas the man of religion feels the same indignation against all iniquitous attempts to enslave himself and his country, and if he have the same native ardour of mind, he will be roused to act with the same vigour against a tyrant, or an invader; but running no risk of what is of most consequence to him, he will not be so liable to be intimidated: he will be more master of himself, have greater presence of mind, and act with greater prudence in time of danger. If he die in the glorious struggle, he dies, not with the gloomy ferocity of the mere man of this world, but with the triumph of a christian, in a consciousness of having finished his career of virtue in the most
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glorious manner in which he could possibly finish it, in the service of his country, and of mankind.

Having thus considered the important *effects* of an habitual regard to God in all our ways, I come to treat of the most proper and effectual methods of promoting this temper of mind.

1. If you be really desirous to cultivate this habitual devotion, endeavour, in the first place, to divest your minds of too great a multiplicity of the cares of this world. The man who lives to God, in the manner in which I have been endeavouring to describe, lives to him principally, and loves and confides in him above all. To be solicitous about this world, therefore, as if our chief happiness consisted in it, must be incompatible with this devotion. *We cannot serve God and Mammon.* If we be *christians*, we should consider, that the great, and professed object of our religion, is the revelation of a future life, of unspeakably more importance to us than this transitory world, and the perishable things

of it. As christians, we should consider ourselves as *citizens of heaven*, and only *strangers and pilgrims here below*. We must, therefore, see, that, as christians, there is certainly required of us a considerable degree of indifference about this world, which was only intended to serve us as a passage to a better.

The Divine Being himself has made wise provision for lessening the cares of this world, by the appointment of one day in seven, for the purpose of rest and avocation from labour. Let us then, at least, take the advantage which this day gives us, of *calling off our eyes from beholding vanity*, and of *quickenning us in the ways of God*.

This advice I would particularly recommend to those persons who are engaged in *arts, manufactures, and commerce*. For, highly beneficial as these things are, in a political view, and subservient to the elegant enjoyment of life, they seem not to be so favourable to religion and devotion, as the business of *agriculture*; and for this reason, therefore, probably, among others, the Di-
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vine Being forbid commerce to the people of the Jews, and gave them such laws as are chiefly adapted to a life of husbandry. The husbandman is in a situation peculiarly favourable to the contemplation of the works of God, and to a sense of his dependance upon him. The rain from heaven, and various circumstances relating to the weather, &c. on which the goodness of his crops depends, he receives as from the hand of God, and is hardly sensible of any secondary, or more immediate cause. If he understand any thing of the principles of vegetation, and can account for a few obvious appearances upon what we call *the laws of nature*; these laws he knows to be the express appointment of God; and he cannot help perceiving the wisdom and goodness of God in the appointment; so that the objects about which he is daily conversant, are, in their nature, a lesson of gratitude and praise.

Besides, the employment of the husbandman being, chiefly, to *bring food out of the earth*, his attention is more confined to the

real wants, or at least, the principal conveniences of life; and his mind is not, like that of the curious artist and manufacturer, so liable to be fascinated by a taste for superfluities, and the fictitious wants of men.

Nor, lastly, does the business of husbandry so wholly engross a man's thoughts and attention, while he is employed about it, as many of the arts and manufactures, and as commerce necessarily does. And it should be a general rule with us, that the more *attention of mind* our employment in life requires, the more careful should we be to draw our thoughts from it, on the *day of rest*, and at other intervals of time set apart for devotional purposes. Otherwise, a worldly-minded temper, not being checked or controuled by any thing of a contrary tendency, will necessarily get possession of our hearts.

2. This brings me to the second advice, which is by no means to omit stated times of worshipping God by prayer, public and private. Every passion and affection in our
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frame is strengthened by the proper and natural expression of it. Thus frequent intercourse and conversation with those we love promotes friendship, and so also, the intercourse we keep up with God by prayer, in which we express our reverence and love of him, and our confidence in him, promotes a spirit of devotion, and makes it easier for the ideas of the Divine Being, and his providence to occur to the mind on other occasions, when we are not formally praying to him. Besides, if persons whose thoughts are much employed in the business of this life, had no time set apart for the exercises of devotion, they would be in danger of neglecting it entirely; at least, to a degree that would be attended with a great diminution of their virtue and happiness.

But, in order that the exercises of devotion may be the most efficacious to promote the true spirit, and general habit of it, it is adviseable, that *prayers* properly so called, that is, direct addresses to the Divine Being, be short. The strong feelings of re-

verence, love, and confidence, which ought to animate our devotions, cannot be kept up in such minds as ours through a prayer of considerable length; and a tedious languor in prayer is of great disservice to the life of religion, as it accustoms the mind to think of God with indifference; whereas, it is of the utmost consequence, that the Divine Being always appear to us as an object of the greatest importance, and engage the whole attention of our souls. Except, therefore, in public, where prayers of a greater length are, in a manner, necessary, and where the presence and concurrence of our fellow worshippers assist to keep up the fervour of our common devotion, it seems more adviseable, that devotional exercises have intervals of meditation, calculated to impress our minds more deeply with the sentiments we express; and that they be used without any strict regard to particular times, places, or posture of body.

This method of conducting devotional exercises, which makes them consist chiefly of meditation upon God and his providence,

has in many cases several advantages over a direct address to God, which should peculiarly recommend it to those who are desirous to cultivate the genuine spirit of devotion. Among other advantages, and that not the least, in meditation, the mind is not so apt to acquiesce in the mere *work done* (what the schoolmen call the *opus operatum*) as it is in formal prayer, especially when it is made of considerable length. So prone, alas! is the mind of man to superstition, that hardly any thing can be prescribed to us, as a *means* of virtue, but we immediately acquiesce in it as an *end*; and not only so, but the consequence of a punctilious observance of prayer, and other means of religion, is too often made the foundation of a spiritual pride, and self-sufficiency, which is of a most alarming nature; being directly opposite to that deep humility and self-abasement, which is ever the predominant disposition of a mind truly devout. The sentiment corresponding to the language *stand by thyself, I am holier than thou*, is not, I am afraid, peculiar to the Pharisaical Jew,

or the Romish devotee. It infects many protestant religionists, being generated by similar causes. Rather than be liable to this, it is certainly better, far better, even to be less regular in our exercises of devotion. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.*

3. In the course of your usual employment, omit no proper opportunity of turning your thoughts towards God. Habitually regard him as the *ultimate cause*, and *proper author* of every thing you see, and the disposer of all events that respect yourselves or others. This will not fail to make the idea of God occur familiarly to your mind, and influence your whole conduct.

It is to be regretted, that the taste and custom of this country is such, that a person of a devotional turn of mind cannot indulge himself in the natural expression of it, even upon the most proper and just occasions, without exposing himself to the particular notice, if not the ridicule, of the generality of those who may be present; whereas could

we decently, and seriously express our gratitude to God, upon every agreeable occurrence, and our resignation and submission to his will upon every calamitous event of life, it would tend greatly to strengthen the habit of *acknowledging God in all our ways*, and promote the spirit of devotion.

In no other country, I believe, whatever, neither among the Roman catholics, nor Mahometans, have people, even the most fashionable and polite, any idea of being ashamed of their religion. On the contrary, they are rather ostentatious of it, and therefore they seem to have more than they are really possessed of: and this is the case with some, both of the established church, and among the Dissenters in England. But, unfortunately, this outward shew of religion was carried to such a length, about a century ago, in this country, and was sometimes made to subserve such infamous purposes, that, I believe, the greater part of the most sincerely pious, and humble christians, now make a point of exposing to the world, as little of the religion they have as possible;

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so that they are really possessed of much more than they seem to have. This I trust is the case with great numbers, who are little suspected of being particularly religious, because they are seldom, or never heard to talk about it. And, upon the whole, while things are so unfortunately circumstanced, I think this extreme preferable to the other ; as, of all things, the reproach of hypocrisy ought to be avoided with the utmost care.

4. In a more especial manner, never fail to have recourse to God upon every occasion of strong emotion of mind, whether it be of a pleasurable, or of a painful nature. When your mind is labouring under distressing doubts, and great anxiety, or when you are any way embarrassed in the conduct of your affairs, fly to God, as your friend and father, your counsellor and your guide. In a sincere and earnest endeavour to discharge your duty, and to act the upright and honourable part, *commit your way unto him*, repose yourselves upon his providence, confiding in his care to overrule every thing for the best, and you will find a great, and
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almost instantaneous relief. Your perturbation of mind will subside, as by a charm, and the storm will become a settled calm. Tumultuous and excessive joy will also be moderated by this means; and thus all your emotions will be rendered more equable, more pleasurable, and more lasting. And this is produced not by any supernatural agency of God on the mind, but is the natural effect of placing entire confidence in a being of perfect wisdom and goodness.

But the capital advantage you will derive from this practice will be, that the idea of God, being, by this means, associated with all the strongest emotions of your mind, your whole stock of devotional sentiments and feelings will be increased. All those strong emotions, now separately indistinguishable, will coalesce with the idea of God, and make part of the complex train of images suggested by the term, so that you will afterwards think of God oftener, and with more fervour than before; and the thought of him will have greater influence with you than ever.

5. In order to cultivate the spirit of habitual devotion, labour to free your minds from all consciousness of guilt, and self reproach, by means of a constant attention to the upright and steady discharge of the whole of your duty. In consequence of neglecting our duty, we become backwards, as we may say, to make our appearance before God. We cannot look up to him with full confidence of his favour and blessing ; and are, therefore, too apt to omit devotion entirely. Besides, we always feel an aversion to the exercise of *self-abasement* and *contrition*, which are all the sentiments that we can with propriety indulge in those circumstances ; especially as we have a secret suspicion, that we shall, for some time at least, go on to live as we have done ; so that rather than confess our sins, and continue to live in them, we chuse not to make confession at all.

But this, my brethren, is egregious trifling, and highly dangerous. Thus, at best, all improvement is at a stand with us, if we be not going fatally backwards in our moral
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state. If this be our character (as I believe it is, more or less, that of a very great number even of those I have called the better sort of the middle classes of men) let us in time, and in good earnest, cast off all our sins, negligences, and follies by true repentance. Let us draw near, and *acquaint ourselves with God*, that we may be at peace. You can have no true peace, assurance, or satisfaction of mind in this life without it: for, if you be of the class I am now referring to, it is too late for you to have a perfect enjoyment of a life of sin and dissipation. And between that kind of peace, or rather *stupor*, which those who are abandoned to wickedness, those who are wholly addicted to this world, and make it their sole end (or those who are grossly ignorant of religion) enjoy, and that *inward peace and satisfaction* which accompanies the faithful and earnest discharge of every known duty, there is no sufficient medium. You may go about seeking rest, in this wide space, while your hearts are divided between God and
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the world, but you will find none; whereas the *fruit of righteousness*, of a sincere and impartial, though imperfect obedience to the law of God, *is peace and assurance for ever.*

6thly, and lastly. To facilitate the exercise of devotion, cultivate in your minds just ideas of God with whom you have to do upon those occasions, and divest your minds, as far as possible, of all superstitious and dishonourable notions of him. Consider him as the good father of the prodigal son, in that excellent parable of our Saviour. Let it sink deep into your minds, as one of the most important of all principles, that the God with whom we have to do, is essentially, of himself, and without regard to any foreign consideration whatever, *abundant in mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that he had rather that all should come to repentance*; and then, notwithstanding you consider yourselves as frail, imperfect, and sinful creatures; and though you cannot help accusing yourselves of much negligence, folly, and vice, you may still approach
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him with perfect confidence, in his readiness to receive, love, and cherish you, upon your sincere return to him.

In this light our Lord Jesus Christ always represented *his father and our father, his God and our God*. This is the most solid ground of consolation to minds burdened with a sense of guilt; and what is of great advantage, it is the most natural, the most easy, and intelligible of all others. If once you quit this firm hold, you involve yourselves in a system, and a labyrinth, in which you either absolutely find no rest, and wander in uncertainty and horror; or, if you do attain to any thing of assurance, it is of such a kind, and in such a manner, as can hardly fail to feed that *spiritual pride*, which will lead you to despise others; nay, unless counteracted by other causes, too often ends in a spirit of censoriousness, hatred, and persecution.

Religious melancholy, the most deplorable of all the cases of melancholy, will never be effectually relieved by any consideration, but that of the mercy and clemency of the
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Divine Being. This unhappy state of mind arises from superstition. It consists in an excessive and unreasonable fear of God, and is peculiarly incident to persons of the greatest tenderness of conscience. And if we consider nothing but the holiness of the divine nature, and our proneness to vice and folly, there will be no end of this distressing scrupulosity in the best disposed minds. But, in our situation, we must learn to acquiesce in the sense of our manifold imperfections, and the unavoidable consequences of them; and to take refuge in the goodness and compassion of God, who *considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.* This is the part of humility.

So long as we are seeking to justify ourselves in the sight of God (unless our minds be absolutely blinded) we shall not fail to condemn ourselves; for *there is not a man upon earth, not even the most just and righteous man, who doeth good and sinneth not.* Yea, *in many things we offend all: so that if we should say we have no sin, we should deceive ourselves, and the truth would not be in us:*

but it is a never failing source of consolation, that *if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Moreover, let it be considered, by persons labouring under this deplorable calamity, that this fear of displeasing God, and anxiety about our future state, is one of the best evidences we can have that *our hearts are, upon the whole, right towards God; that we are seeking first, and before all things else, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that we are not so much concerned about the bread that perishes, as about that which endures to everlasting life.* Our Saviour said, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;* so that this excess of religious fear, producing despondence and melancholy, is a state of greater safety, though it be less pleasing, than that of religious joy.

This fear of God, when it has once exceeded its due bounds, and degenerated into superstition; and when it is not cured by a

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confidence in the divine mercy and clemency, by that *love which casteth out fear*, is of a most alarming nature, and has often been productive of the most fatal effects. What is it that superstitious mortals have scrupled either to do, or suffer, in order to recommend themselves to God! Voluntary pains, and penalties, of the most frightful kinds, have not been spared for this purpose; and men, like ourselves, yea, *the excellent of the earth*, men of whom the world was not worthy have been persecuted, and massacred, under the idea of *doing God service*.

I shall, also, here give an admonition concerning another inconvenience we are apt to be betrayed into, by imperfect and unworthy conceptions of God. It is that kind of enthusiasm, which arises from an excess of religious joy, as the superstition I have just described arises from an excess of religious fear. It is well known, that in the beginning of a religious life, persons of a warm temper of mind, are apt to be carried away with extreme fervour. They are swelled with a tumultuous and rapturous joy,

joy, attended with great zeal in the discharge of their duty. But all this is of short continuance, and generally ends in a most unaccountable *langour*, and even a total indifference about religion, which astonishes them, and which they are apt to consider as the consequence of the presence of God deserting them; that peculiar presence which they supposed to be the cause of the preceding fervour. Also, in this deadness to devotional fervour, and indifference about religion, they are apt to imagine their former experience to have been an illusion. All religion, in that state of their minds, appears like a dream; and they afterwards often fancy themselves to have been tempted by the devil, to disbelieve and renounce it all, natural and revealed.

But the peculiar warmth of those emotions is owing to the novelty of them, together with a kind of *familiarity* in our conceptions of God, which leads to such a passionate joy, as we naturally indulge with respect to beings like ourselves. But more awful, and on account of the preceding excessive fami-

liarity, too awful ideas of God will follow and check that fond transport. The emotion itself having been above the usual tenor of the sensations, will of course subside, and the idea of God, being as yet single, as we may say, and not associated with a sufficient variety of other objects, cannot long be retained in the mind, any more than any other single idea, unconnected with others. Consequently, other objects, and trains of thought which we have been before accustomed to, will force themselves upon the mind; and these not having had any previous connexions with the ideas of God and religion, will exclude them, so that the former religious state of mind will as absolutely disappear, for a time, as if it had never existed.

All this, however, is perfectly natural, and will give no alarm to those who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature. In this case, a person who would favour his progress in religion, should calmly acquiesce in the imperfection of his devotion. He should give himself, in the intervals of it, to
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the steady prosecution of his lawful business, considering *that* as his proper *duty*, as *serviug mankind*, and *serviug God*, and therefore by no means foreign to religion; depending upon it, that, if he only be careful to *keep his conscience void of offence*, his devotional feelings will return in due time. Let him then endeavour to purify and exalt his conceptions of God as much as possible; for this will tend, both to give him humiliating views of himself, and to make his pious emotions more composed, and more permanent. And, by degrees, by frequently endeavouring to raise his views above the world, while he is employed in it, religion will come to be no longer the business of an hour, or of a limited time with him, but he will *walk with God all the day long*, and proceed in the path of his duty with a calm, and equal, a steady, and a persevering progress.

I shall conclude this discourse with observing, that if a person should never experience any thing of this fervour of devotion, I have been endeavouring to describe and

explain, I should by no means pronounce him the less safe on that account. This fervour of devotion is in a manner incompatible with the constitution of some persons minds; and an uniform care *to glorify God in all our actions, and to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men,* without any thing of that warmth of zeal and devotion, which often delights, but also often misleads others; this, I say, will certainly be sufficient, according to the gracious constitution of the gospel, to entitle a person to that *glorious recompence of reward, to that eternal life,* which awaits all those who, by nothing but *patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.* Our Saviour himself has assured us, that if a man *do the will of God* (he makes no other condition, he describes no particular *feeling*) he shall be to him as *a brother, a sister, or a mother.*

We well know, my christian brethren, *what it is that the Lord our God requires of us,* in order to live and to die in his favour. namely, *to do justice, to love mercy, and to*
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walk humbly with our God. To this plain path of duty, then, let us adhere, without being anxious about any thing farther. Whether we have those fervours of devotion, which some feel, and are apt to be proud of, or not, we shall experience that *great peace of mind, which all those have who keep God's law*; and having lived the life of the righteous, our *latter end will also be like his*; the foundation of our joy being *the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.*

It is true, we are imperfect, sinful creatures: but, notwithstanding this, we have all possible encouragement given us, to trust in the abundant mercy of our gracious God and father, in that mercy which is essential to his nature, as a Being who is infinitely good, and who is *love itself*; and which, if we could entertain the least doubt concerning it, he has fully declared to all the world, by Moses and the Prophets, by Jesus Christ and his Apostles; whom he sent into the world to preach the grateful doctrine of re-

penitance and remission of sins, thereby to redeem (i. e. to deliver) us from all iniquity, and to reconcile us to God. Animated, therefore, by the glorious promises of the gospel, let us, my christian brethren, be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of our Lord, knowing that our labour shall not finally be in vain in the Lord.

The Duty of not living to Ourselves.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

ROMANS xiv. 7.

IT is the excellence of our rational nature that by it we are capable of living to some known end, and of governing our lives and conduct by some rule; whereas brute creatures necessarily live and act at random, just as the present appetite influences them. Let us then, my brethren, make the most of this our prerogative, by proposing to ourselves the noblest end of human life, and engaging in such a course of actions as will reflect the greatest honour upon our nature, and be productive of the most solid and lasting happiness, both in the performance and the review of them.

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Agreeably to this, let the principal use we make of our understanding be to discover what the great end of life is; and then let us use the resolution and fortitude that is either natural to us, or acquired by us, in steadily conforming ourselves to it.

But as the regular investigation of the rule of life, from the light of nature only, may be tedious and perhaps at last unsatisfactory, let us, without waiting for the result of such an enquiry upon the principles of reason, take a more clear and sure guide, the holy scriptures, in so important a subject, and see, afterwards, whether reason and experience will not give their sanction to that decision.

The great end of human life is negatively expressed by the apostle Paul in my text. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*; and, if we attend to the connection of these words, we shall find what, in the apostle's idea, is the true end to which men ought to live.

The apostle is here treating of a controversy which had arisen in the christian church, about the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed

sacrificed to idols, and keeping holy certain days, together with some other ceremonious observances, and exhorting both parties to do nothing that might give offence, or be a snare to the other; lest, by their means, any one should perish for whom Christ died.

As the best foundation for mutual tenderness and charity, he reminds them that both parties acted, with regard to all ritual observances, as they imagined was the will of Christ. *He that observeth a day, observeth it to the Lord; and he that observeth not a day, to the Lord he observeth it not.* And after giving his sanction in the fullest manner to this maxim, and deciding, with respect to this particular case, that all christians ought to act according to the will of Christ, and consult the good and the peace of their fellow christians, he declares in general, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord;* that is, in all our actions, our views should not be directed to ourselves, but to the interest of our holy religion. And as
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the christian religion has for its object the happiness of mankind (since, *Christ came to bless us in turning us away from our iniquities*) it is the same thing as if he had said, the great scope of all our conduct should be the real welfare of all to whom our influence can extend.

We should, therefore, my brethren, according to this apostolical maxim, by no means confine our regards to ourselves; and have our own pleasure, profit, or advantage in view in every thing we undertake; but look out of, and beyond ourselves, and take a generous concern in the happiness of all our brethren of mankind; make their sorrows our sorrows, their joys our joys, and their happiness our pursuit: and it is in this disinterested conduct, and in this only, that we shall find our own true happiness.

That this is the true rule of human life, will appear, whether we consider the course of nature without us, the situation of mankind in this world, or take a nearer view of the principles of human nature. And we shall likewise find, that several considerations

drawn from the holy scriptures will farther confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

1. This disinterested conduct of man is most agreeable to the course of nature without us. There is no part of the creation but, if it be viewed attentively, will expose the selfishness and narrow mindedness of men. For among all that infinite variety of things and creatures which present themselves to our view, not one of them appears to have been made merely for itself, but every thing bears a relation to something else. They can hardly be said to afford any matter for contemplation singly, and are most of all the objects of our admiration when considered as connected with other things. The primary uses of things are few, but the secondary uses of every thing are almost infinite. Indeed the secondary uses of things are so many, that we are lost in the multiplicity of them; whereas we can give no answer, if we be asked what is the primary use of any thing, but this general one, which will equally suit every thing,

thing, that every creature which is capable of happiness was made to enjoy that share of it which is suited to its nature.

Now what do we mean when we say that the several parts of nature are *adapted* to one another, but that they are *made for the use* of one another. I shall mention only a few of these mutual relations and uses; beginning with those parts of nature which are the most remote from one another, and whose mutual relations and uses are the least obvious, and so proceed to those in which they are more obvious. The sun, the moon, the planets, and comets, are strictly connected, and combined into one system. Each body, though so exceedingly remote from the rest, is admirably adapted, by its situation, magnitude, and velocity in its orbit, to the state of the whole, in those respects and many others. This connexion, probably, also extends to the remotest bodies in the universe: so that it is impossible to say, that the withdrawing of any one would not, in some respect or other, affect all the rest.

The clouds and the rain are designed to moisten the earth, and the sun to warm it ; and the texture and juices of the earth are formed so as to receive the genial influences of both, in order to ripen and bring to perfection that infinite variety of plants and fruits, the seeds of which are deposited in it. Again, is not each plant peculiarly adapted to its proper soil and climate, so that every country is furnished with those productions which are peculiarly suited to it? Are not all plants likewise suited to the various kinds of animals which feed upon them? so that, though they enjoy a kind of life peculiar to themselves, and all the influences they are exposed to be adapted to promote that life, they themselves are as much adapted to maintain that higher kind of life which is enjoyed by creatures of the animal nature.

The various kinds of animals are, again, in a thousand ways adapted to, and formed for, the use of one another. Beasts of a fiercer nature prey upon the tamer cattle : fishes of a larger size live almost wholly upon

upon those of a less: and there are some birds which prey upon land animals, others upon fishes, and others upon creatures of their own species.

That brute animals are excellently adapted to the use of man, and were, therefore, made to be subservient to the use of man, man will not deny. The strength of some, and the sagacity of others, are as much at our command, and are as effectually employed for our use, as if they belonged to ourselves. We can even turn to our advantage every passion of their nature; so that we can safely repose the greatest confidence in many of them. They are the guardians of our possessions and of our lives. They even enter into our resentments, and, at our instigation, take part in our revenge.

Having now advanced to man, the chief of this lower creation, and shewn that all creatures of the vegetable, and merely animal nature, live and die for his use; pride might bid us here break off the chain of mutual relations and uses, which we have been pursuing thus far, and leave man in
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the enjoyment of his superiority ; but, beside that it is contrary to the analogy of nature, in which we see nothing but what has innumerable secondary relations and uses, that *man* only should be made for himself ;

2. The situation of man in this world, or the external circumstances of human nature still oblige us to assert, with Paul, that *no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.* Man himself is but a link, though the highest link, of this great chain, all the parts of which are closely connected by the hand of our divine author. Nay, the more various and extensive are our powers, either for action or enjoyment, on that very account, the more multiplied and extensive are our wants : so that, at the same time that they are marks of our superiority to, they are bonds of our connexion with, and signs of our dependance upon, the various parts of the world around us, and of our subservience to one another.

In fact, every time that we gratify any of our senses, though it be in consequence of the exertion of our own powers, we are re-

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mind (if we will be so just to ourselves as to take the hint) of our dependance upon something without us. For the means of our gratification are, in all cases, evidently without ourselves.

If we be served by the vegetables and the animals which this earth affords, we are obliged, in our turn, to favour their propagation, to promote their cultivation, and to preserve them in a healthy and vigorous state: and employment of this kind doth, in fact, take up a great part of our attention and labour. We must make the creature in some measure happy, if we would be effectually served by it. And the attention which domestic animals give to us, and their anxiety for us is not to be compared to the attention we bestow on them, and the anxiety we undergo on their account.

But my subject leads me to attend to the connexion which man has with man, rather than with the inferior part of the creation; though it seemed not improper to point out that. In general, nothing can be more obvious than the mutual dependance of

men on one another. We see it in the most barbarous countries, where the connexions of mankind are the fewest and the slightest. This dependance is more sensible, indeed, in a state of infancy, when the least remission of the care of others would be fatal to us; but it is as real and necessary, and even vastly more extensive, though less striking, when we are more advanced in life, especially in civilized countries. And the more perfect is the state of civil society, the more various and extended are the connexions which man has with man, and the less able is he to subsist comfortably without the help of others.

The business of human life, where it is enjoyed in perfection, is subdivided into so many parts (each of which is executed by different hands) that a person who would reap the benefit of all the arts of life in perfection must employ, and consequently be dependant upon, thousands: he must even be under obligations to numbers of whom he has not the least knowledge.

These connexions of man with man are every day growing more extensive. The most distant parts of the earth are now connected: every part is every day growing still more necessary to every other part. And the nearer advances we make to general happiness, and the more commodious our circumstances in this world are made for us, the more intimately and extensively we become connected with, and the more closely we are dependant upon, one another.

By thus tracing the progress of man to that state of happiness which he now enjoys, we may be led to think, that, in pursuing it still farther, to a more happy state of being, adapted to our social natures, we shall find ourselves still more variously and intimately connected with, and more closely dependant upon, one another; which affords a far nobler and more pleasing prospect to a person of an enlarged mind, and of a social and benevolent disposition, than he could have from supposing, that after death, all our mutual connexions will be broken, and that every
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good man will be made transcendently happy within himself, having no intercourse, or at least necessary intercourse with any being beside his maker.

By these arguments, which are drawn from facts that are obvious to every person who attends to the external circumstances of mankind, it is plain that no man *can* live of himself; and even that the rich are, in fact, more dependant upon others than the poor; for, having more wants, they have occasion for more, and more frequent supplies. Now it will easily be allowed, that every reason why we cannot live *of* ourselves, is an argument why we ought not to live *to* ourselves: for certainly no person receives an obligation, but he ought to confer one. Every connexion must, in some measure, be mutual. And, indeed, the circulation of good offices would in a great measure cease, if the passage were not as open, and as free from obstruction, in one part of the common channel as another. The rich, if they would receive the greatest advantages from society, must contribute to

the happiness of it. If they act upon different maxims, and think to avail themselves of the pleasures of society without promoting the good of it, they will never know the true pleasures of society. And, in the end, they will be found to have enjoyed the least themselves, who have least contributed to the enjoyment of others.

Thus it appears from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, that man was not made to live to himself. The same truth may be inferred,

3. From a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, and the springs of human actions.

If any man look into himself, and consider the springs and motives of his own actions, he will find that there are principles in his nature which would be of no use, were the intercourse he has with his fellow-creatures cut off: for that both the efficient and final causes of their operations are without himself. They are views of mankind, and their situations, which call those principles into action. And if we
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trace the operation of them, we shall clearly see that, though they be strictly connected with private happiness, their ultimate and proper object is the happiness of society.

What other account can we give of that impulse, which we all, more or less, feel for society? And whence is that restless and painful dissatisfaction which a man feels when he is long excluded from it, but that, in such a solitary condition, his faculties have not their proper exercise, and he is, as it were, out of his proper element?

Whence is that quick sensibility which we are conscious of, with respect to both the joys and the sorrows of our fellow creatures, if their happiness or misery were a matter of indifference to us? Can we feel what is sometimes called the contagion of the passions, when we find that our minds contract a kind of gloom and heaviness in the company of the melancholy, and that this melancholy vanishes in company which is innocently cheerful, and question the influence of social connexions? Much less can the reality or the power of the social

principle be doubted when a fellow creature in distress calls forth the most exquisite feelings of compassion, attended with instant and strong efforts towards his relief.

So essential a part of our nature are these social passions, that it is impossible for any man wholly to escape the influence of them; but if we would be witnesses of their strongest effects, and see them branched out into that beautiful subordination which corresponds to all the varieties of our mutual relations, we must look into domestic life. There we shall clearly see that the most frequent and almost the only cause of a man's joys and sorrows are the joys and sorrows of others, and that the immediate aim of all his actions is the well being and happiness of others.

Doth not the sense of honour in the human breast derive all its force from the influence which social connexions have over us? Of what use could it be but to beings formed for society? What do we infer from our dread of infamy, and from our being so strongly actuated by a passion for
fame,

fame, and also from the universality and extent of this principle, but that our nature obliges us to keep up a regard to others in our whole conduct, and that the author of nature intended we should? And is it not a farther evidence of the ultimate design of this principle, that, in general, the means of being distinguished, at least of gaining a solid and lasting reputation, among men, is to be useful to mankind; public utility being the most direct road to true fame.

Every noble and exalted faculty of our nature is either directly of a social nature, or tends to strengthen the social principle. Nothing can be more evident than that the dictates of conscience strongly enforce the practice of benevolence: and the pleasures of benevolence certainly constitute the greatest part of those pleasures which we refer to the moral sense. They must necessarily do so, while the foundation of all virtue and right conduct is the happiness of society: for then every reflexion that we have done our duty, must be the same thing as a reflexion that we have contributed what

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was in our power to the good of our fellow creatures.

Lastly, of what doth devotion itself consist, but the exercise of the social affections? What are the dispositions of our minds which are called forth into action in private or public prayer, but reverence for true greatness, humility, gratitude, love, and confidence in God, as the greatest and best of Beings; qualities of the most admirable use and effect in social life.

I may add that not only are the highest and the worthiest principles of human conduct either truly social, or a reinforcement of the social principle, but even the lowest appetites and passions of our nature are far from being indifferent to social connexions, considerations, and influences. That the pleasures we receive from the fine arts, as those of music, poetry, and painting, and the like, are enjoyed but very imperfectly except in company, is very evident to all persons who have the least taste for those pleasures. I may even venture to say, that there is hardly a voluptuary, the most devoted

voted to the pleasures of the table, but indulges himself with more satisfaction in company than alone.

Having given this general view of the social turn of our whole natures; whereby we are continually led out of ourselves in our pursuit of happiness; I shall now consider farther, how all our appetites and passions, which are the springs of all our actions, do, in their own nature, tend to lead us out of ourselves, and how much our happiness depends upon our keeping their proper objects in view, and upon our minds being thereby constantly engaged upon something foreign to themselves; after which I shall shew what are the fittest objects thus to engage our attention.

In order to preserve mutual connexion, dependance, and harmony among all his works, it has pleased our divine author to appoint, that all our appetites and desires, to whatever sense, external or internal, they be referred, should point to something beyond ourselves for their gratification; so
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that the idea of *self* is not in the least necessary to a state of the highest enjoyment.

When may men be said to be happy, but when their faculties are properly exercised in the pursuit of those things which give them pleasure. I say the pursuit rather than the enjoyment, not because enjoyment makes no part of our happiness; but because the vigorous and agreeable sensations with which our minds are impressed during the pursuit of a favourite object are generally, at least in this life, of vastly more consideration. The pleasure we receive the instant we arrive at the height of our wishes may be more exquisite, but the others are of much longer continuance; and, immediately upon the gratification of any of our desires, the mind is instantly reaching after some new object.

Supposing now the mind of any person to be fully and constantly engaged in the pursuit of a proper object, to the possession of which he is sensible he every day makes near approaches, and his desires be not so
eager

eager as to make him uneasy during the pursuit, what more is requisite to make him as happy as his nature can bear? He will not be the less happy because the object he is in pursuit of is foreign to himself; nor would it make him any happier to have the idea of its contributing to his happiness. Nay it may be shewn, that it were better for us, in general, with respect to real enjoyment, never to have the idea of the relation which the objects of our pursuit bear to ourselves: and this is most of all evident with respect to the higher pleasures of our nature, from which we derive our greatest happiness.

Our benevolence, for instance, leads us immediately to relieve and oblige others. Pleasure, indeed, always attends generous actions, and is consequent upon them; but the satisfaction we receive in our minds from having done kind offices to others is far less pure, and less perfectly enjoyed, if at all, when we had this, or any other private gratification in view before the action.

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In like manner, he who courts applause, and does worthy actions solely with a view to obtain it, can have no knowledge of the genuine pleasure arising either from the good action itself; or the applause that is given to it; because he is sensible, in his own mind, that if those persons who praise his conduct were acquainted with the real motive of it, and knew that he meant nothing more, by his pretended acts of piety and benevolence, than to gain their applause, they would be so far from admiring and commending, that they would despise him for it.

It is evident, for the same reason, that no person can enjoy the applause of his own mind, on the account of any action which he did with a view to gain it. The pleasures of a good conscience, or, as they are sometimes called, those of the moral sense, cannot be enjoyed but by a person who steadily obeys the dictates of his conscience, and uniformly acts the part which he thinks to be right, without any view to the pleasure

sure and self-satisfaction which may arise from it.

The idea of *self*, as it is not adapted to gratify any of our appetites, and can contribute nothing towards their gratification, can only occasion anxiety, fear, and distrust about our happiness, when it is frequently the subject of our thoughts. The apprehension and dread of misery (which is certainly the occasion of most of the real trouble and misery of men in this life) is beyond measure increased from this source : and the effects of it are most sensibly felt both in the lesser and greater scenes of our lives.

It is chiefly an anxious solicitude about ourselves, and the appearance we shall make in the eyes of others, which is the cause of that affectation and constraint in behaviour which is so troublesome to a person's self, and so ridiculous in the eyes of others. This trifling remark, being so frequently verified, may serve to shew that these sentiments are by no means merely speculative ; but that they enter into the daily scenes of active life. Indeed they are in the highest sense
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practical, and upon them depend those maxims of conduct, which contain the great secret of human happiness, and which are confirmed by every day's experience.

That the idea of *self* frequently occurring to our minds in our pursuit of happiness is often a real and great obstruction to it, will be more obvious from a short series of plain facts and examples, which I shall therefore mention.

Why are brute creatures, in general, so contented and happy in their low sphere of life, and much more so than the mind of man could be in their situation? Is it not because their views are perpetually fixed upon some object within their reach, adapted to their desires; and that the abstract idea of *self*, together with the notion of their being in the pursuit of happiness, and liable to be disappointed in that pursuit, never comes in their way, to interrupt the uniform and pleasureable exertion of their faculties in the pursuit of their proper objects.

The days of our infancy are happy for the same reason, notwithstanding the imperfection
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fection of our faculties, and the greater proportion of pains and disorders we are then liable to. Those years of our lives slide away in unmixed enjoyment; except when they are interrupted by the actual sensations of pain: for we are then incapable of suffering any thing from the *fear* of evil. It is not till after a considerable time that we get the abstract idea of *self*; an idea, which the brutes, probably, never arrive at, and which is of excellent use to us, as will be shewn in its proper place, in our pursuit of happiness; but is often abused to the great increase of our misery, as will appear by the facts we are now considering.

Why are persons whose situation in life obliges them to constant labour, either of body or mind, generally more happy than those whose circumstances do not lay them under a necessity to labour, and whose own inclination does not lead them to it; but because the former have their thoughts constantly employed in the pursuit of some end, which keeps their faculties awake, and fully exerted? And this is always attended

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with a state of vigorous, and consequently pleasurable sensations. Persons thus employed have not much leisure to attend to the idea of self, and that anxiety which always attends the frequent recurring of it; whereas a person who has no object foreign to himself, which constantly and necessarily engages his attention, cannot have his faculties fully exerted; and therefore his mind cannot possibly be in that state of vigorous sensation in which happiness consists.

The mind of such a person, having nothing without him sufficient to engage its attention, turns upon itself. He feels he is not happy, but he sees not the reason of it. This again excites his wonder, vexation, and perplexity. He tries new expedients: but as these are only temporary, and generally whimsical choices; none of them have sufficient power to fix and confine his attention. He is still perpetually thinking about himself, and wondering and uneasy that he is not happy. This anxious perplexed state of mind, affecting the nervous system, necessarily occasions a more irritable state of the
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nerves, and of the brain, which makes the unhappy person subject to more frequent alarms, to greater anxiety and distress than before; till, these mental and bodily disorders mutually increasing one another, his condition is at length the most wretched and distressing that can be conceived. No bodily pain, no rack, no torture, can equal the misery and distress of a human being whose mind is thus a prey to itself. No wonder that, in this situation, many persons wish the utter extinction of their being, and often put a period to their lives.

This is certainly the most deplorable situation to which a human being can be reduced in this world, and is doubly the object of our compassion, when the disorder has its seat originally in the body, in such a manner, as that no endeavours to engage a man's thoughts upon other objects can force his attention from himself.

It is no wonder that we see more of this kind of unhappiness in the higher ranks of life, and among persons who are in what is called *easy circumstances* than in any other.

Indeed, the case is hardly possible in any other than in easy circumstances. For did a man's circumstances really find constant employment for his thoughts, were his business so urgent as to leave him no leisure for suspense and uncertainty what to do, it is plain, from the preceding principles, that such anxiety and distress could not take place. It is well known that the mind suffers more in a state of uncertainty and suspense, for want of some motive to determine a man's choice, than he can suffer in the vigorous prosecution of the most arduous undertaking. I appeal to men of leisure, and particularly to persons who are naturally of an active and enterprising disposition, for the truth of this fact.

These principles likewise, as is evident without entering into a detail of particulars, furnish us with a good reason why we generally see fathers and mothers of large families infinitely more easy, chearful, and happy, than those persons who have no family-connexions. The greater affluence, ease, and variety of pleasures which these
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can command (subject to the inconveniences I have mentioned, and which are commonly visible enough in the case I refer to) are a poor equivalent for the necessary, constant, and vigorous exertion of their faculties, and consequently the strong sensations, and lively enjoyments, which a variety of family cares, conjugal and parental tendernefs, supply for the others.

This would be the case universally, where large families could subsist, if the parents had sufficient employment, and if an early acquired taste for superfluities, had not taken too deep root in their minds.

Happy is it for the world, and a great mark of the wisdom and goodness of divine providence, that men's minds are so constituted, that though they be in easy circumstances, they are never completely satisfied. The passions of most men are still engaging them in a variety of pursuits, in which they are as eager, and which they prosecute with as much alacrity and earnestness, as if necessity compelled them to it. Otherwise, every

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person

person who could live easy would be inevitably miserable.

Infinitely happier would it be for themselves, and for the world, if all their pursuits were such as would give them satisfaction upon the reflection as well as in the pursuit, and be of real advantage to the rest of mankind; which two circumstances never fail to coincide. However, with regard to a person's self in this life, any end is unspeakably better than no end at all; and such is the wise appointment of providence, that bad ends tend in a variety of ways, to check and defeat themselves, and to throw the minds of men into better, nobler, and more satisfactory pursuits. A consideration, which cannot fail to suggest, to a benevolent and pious mind, a prospect of a future happy and glorious state of things.

It may be said, that if happiness consist in, or depend upon the exertion of our faculties upon some object foreign to ourselves, it is a matter of indifference what the object be, I answer, that during the pursuit

suit it is nearly so, and universal experience, I imagine, will justify the observation. This is the reason why we see men equally eager, and equally happy in the pursuit of a variety of things which appear trifling to one another. Thus the florist, the medalist, the critic, the antiquary, and every adept in the minuter branches of science, all enjoy equal happiness in the pursuit of their several objects; and as much as the historian, the astronomer, the moralist, or the divine, who refers his nobler studies to no higher end, and to whom they only serve as an exercise of his faculties.

But though an eager pursuit tends to keep the mind in a state of vigorous and lively sensation, that pursuit only can give us the *maximum*, the highest possible degree, of happiness, which has the following characters. It must be attended with the probability of success, consequently it must be generally successful; and it must also terminate in such gratifications as are least inconsistent with themselves, or with the other gratifications of which our nature makes us

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capable.

capable. And it may be demonstrated (though I shall not undertake to do it particularly in this place) that no pursuits answer to this description but those in which the love of mankind, the love of God, or the dictates of conscience, engage us.

For in all other pursuits, such as those of sensual pleasure, the pleasures of imagination, and ambition, we are liable to frequent disappointments; the gratifications in which they terminate are inconsistent with themselves, and with each other; and they almost entirely deaden and disqualify the mind for the nobler pleasures of our nature. It is the love of God, the love of mankind, and a sense of duty which engage the minds of men in the noblest of all pursuits. By these we are carried on with increasing alacrity and satisfaction. Even the pains and distresses in which we involve ourselves by these courses are preferable to the pleasures attending the gratification of our lower appetites.

Besides, these noble pursuits, generally at least, allow us even more of the lower gratifications

fications of our nature than can be obtained by a direct pursuit of them. For a little experience will inform us, that we receive the most pleasure from these lower appetites of our nature, as well as from the highest sources of pleasure we are capable of, when we have their gratification least of all in view. There can be no doubt, for instance, but that the labourer who eats and drinks merely to satisfy the calls of hunger and thirst, has vastly more pleasure in eating and drinking than the epicure who studies the pleasing of his palate.

They are the pleasures of benevolence and piety which most effectually carry us out of ourselves; whereas every other inferior pursuit suggests to us, in a thousand respects, the idea of *self*, the unseasonable intervention of which may be called the *worm* which lies *at the root* of all human bliss. And never can we be completely happy, till we *love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves.*

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This is the christian *self-annihilation*, and a state of the most complete happiness to which our natures can attain ; when, without having the least idea of being in the pursuit of our own happiness, our faculties are wholly absorbed in those noble and exalted pursuits, in which we are sure not to be finally disappointed, and in the course of which we enjoy all the consistent pleasures of our whole nature. When, *rejoicing with all that rejoice, weeping with all that weep*, and intimately associating the idea of God, the maker of all things, our father and our friend, with all the works of his hands, and all the dispensations of his providence, we constantly triumph in the comfortable sense of the divine presence and approbation, and in the transporting prospect of advancing every day nearer to the accomplishment of his glorious purposes for the happiness of his creatures.

If this be the proper and supreme happiness of man, it may be asked of what use is the principle of self-interest. I answer, that though an attention to it be inconsistent with pure unmixed happiness, yet a moderate

rate attention to it is of excellent use in our progress towards it. It serves as a scaffold to a noble and glorious edifice, though it be unworthy of standing as any part of it. It is of more particular use to check and restrain the indulgence of our lower appetites and passions, before other objects and motives have acquired a sufficient power over us. But though we ought, therefore, to exhort those persons who are immersed in sensuality and gross vices, to abandon those indulgencies out of a regard to their true interest, it is advisable to withdraw this motive by degrees. However, as we shall never arrive at absolute perfection, we necessarily must, and indeed ought to be influenced by it more or less through the whole course of our existence, only less and less perpetually.

The principle of self interest may be regarded as a medium between the lower and the higher principles of our nature, and therefore of principal use in our transition, as we may call it, from an imperfect to a more perfect state.

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Perhaps the following view of this subject may be the easiest to us. A regard to our greatest happiness must necessarily govern our conduct with respect to all those virtues which are termed *private virtues*, as temperance, chastity, and every branch of self-government: but it always does harm as a motive to the *social virtues*. When, therefore, self government, which is our first step towards happiness, is established; we ought to endeavour to excite men to action by higher and nobler motives. For, with regard to all those virtues, the ultimate object of which is not private happiness, an attention to self-interest is of manifest prejudice to us; and this through the whole course of our lives, imperfect as we are, and as much occasion as we have for every effectual motive to virtue.

We are now come, in the last place, to see what considerations drawn from the holy scriptures, will farther confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

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That the scriptures join the voice of all nature around us, informing man that he is not made for himself; that they inculcate the same lesson which we learn both from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, and also from a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, will be evident whether we consider the object of the religion they exhibit (that is, the temper to which we are intended to be formed by it) or the motives by which it is enforced and recommended to us in them.

That the end and design of our holy religion, christians, was to form us to the most disinterested benevolence cannot be doubted by any person who consults the holy scriptures, and especially the books of the New Testament.

There we plainly see the principle of benevolence represented, when it is in its due strength and degree, as equal in point of intenseness to that of self-love. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* The plain consequence of this is, that if all our brethren of mankind with whom we are connected,

nected, have an equal claim upon us (since our connexions are daily growing more extensive, and we ourselves are consequently growing daily of less relative importance in our own eyes) the principle of benevolence must in the end absolutely swallow up that of self-love.

The most exalted devotion, as even superior both to self-love and benevolence, is always every where recommended to us : and the sentiments of devotion have been shewn greatly to aid, and, in fact, to be the same with those of benevolence : and they must be so, unless it can be shewn that we have some senses, powers, or faculties which respect the Deity only.

In order to determine men to engage in a course of disinterested and generous actions, every motive which is calculated to work upon human nature is employed. And as mankind in general are deeply immersed in vice and folly, their hopes, but more especially their fears, are acted upon in the strongest manner by the prospect of rewards and punishments. Even temporal rewards
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and punishments were proposed to mankind in the earlier and ruder ages of the world. But as our notions of happiness grow more enlarged, infinitely greater, but indefinite objects of hope and fear are set before us. Something unknown, but something unspeakably dreadful in a future world is perpetually held up to us, as a guard against the allurements to vice and excess which the world abounds with. And still farther to counteract their baleful influences, the heavenly world (the habitation of good men after death) is represented to us as a place in which we shall be completely happy, enjoying something which is described as more than eye hath seen, ear heard, or than the heart of man can conceive.

These motives are certainly addressed to the principle of self-interest, urging us out of a regard to ourselves, and our general happiness, *to cease to do evil, and learn to do well.* And, indeed, no motives of a more generous nature, and drawn from more distant considerations can be supposed sufficient to influence the bulk of mankind, and *bring them*

them from the power of sin, and Satan, unto God.

But when, by the influence of these motives, it may be supposed that mankind are in some measure recovered from the grosser pollutions of the world, and the principle of self-interest has been played, as it were, against itself, and been a means of engaging us in a course and habit of actions which are necessarily connected with, and productive of more generous and noble principles, then these nobler principles are those which the sacred writers chiefly inculcate.

Nothing is more frequent with the sacred writers than to exhort men to the practice of their duty as the command of God, from a principle of love to God, of love to Christ, and of love to mankind, more especially of our fellow christians ; and from a regard to the interest of our holy religion : motives which do not at all turn the attention of our minds upon themselves. This is not borrowing the aid of self-love to strengthen the principles of benevolence and piety, but it is properly deriving additional strength to these

these noble dispositions, as it were, from within themselves, independent of foreign considerations.

We may safely say that no degree or kind of self-love is made use of in the scriptures but what is necessary to raise us above that principle. And some of the more refined kinds of self-love, how familiar soever they may be in some systems of morals, never come in sight there. We are never exhorted in the scriptures to do benevolent actions for the sake of the reflex pleasures of benevolence, or pious actions with a view to the pleasures of devotion. This refined kind of self-love is no where to be found in the scriptures.

Even the pleasures of a good conscience, though they be of a more general nature, and there be less refinement in them than in some other pleasures which are connected with the idea of *self*, and though they be represented in the scriptures as the consequence of good actions, and a source of joy, as a testimony of a person's being in the favour of God, and in the way to happiness,

are perhaps never directly proposed to us as the reward of virtue. This motive to virtue makes a greater figure in the system of the later stoics (those heathen philosophers who in consequence of entertaining the most extravagant idea of their own merit, really idolized their own natures, to a degree absolutely blasphemous) than in the scriptures. And if we consider the nature of this principle we shall soon be sensible that if it be inculcated as a motive to virtue, and particularly the virtues of a sublimer kind, it should be with great caution, and in such a manner as shall have the least tendency to encourage self applause. For does not self applause border very nearly upon pride and self conceit, and that species of it which is called spiritual pride, and which is certainly a most malignant disposition.

If this same principle have power to excite such ridiculous vanity, intolerable arrogance, inveterate rancour, and supercilious contempt of others, when it has nothing but the trifling advantage of skill in criticism, a talent for poetry, a taste for belles lettres,

lettres, or some other of the minuter parts of science to avail itself of; what have we not to dread from it, when it can boast of what is universally acknowledged to be a far superior kind of excellence?

To guard against this dangerous rock, so fatal to every genuine principle of virtue, the utmost humility, self diffidence, and trust in God are ever recommended to us in the holy scriptures. Good men are taught to regard him as the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They are represented as disclaiming all the merit of their own good works, and expecting all favour and happiness, private or public, from the free goodness and undeserved mercy of God. *When we have done all that is commanded us we must say we are unprofitable servants, we have done only that which it was our duty to do.*

In the representation which our Saviour has given us of the proceedings of the last great day of judgment, it is in this respect that the temper of the righteous is contrasted with that of the wicked, though that

was not the principal design of the representation. The righteous seem surprized at the favourable opinion which their judge expresses of them, and absolutely disclaim all the good works which he ascribes to them.

When saw we thee, say they, an hungred, and fed thee ; or thirsty, and gave thee drink ; when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in, or naked and cloathed thee ; when saw we thee sick and in prison and came unto thee.

Whereas the wicked are represented as equally surprized at the censure our Lord passes upon them, and insist upon their innocence ; saying, *When saw we thee an hungred, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee.*

This, too, is the excellent moral conveyed to us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican ; and the import of one of the blessings which our Lord pronounced in a solemn manner at the beginning of his ministry on earth, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ;* and also the

the spirit of many of our Lord's invectives against the pride and hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees.

No other vice seems capable of disturbing the equal and generous temper of our Lord. Other vices rather excite his compassion, but pride together with its usual attendant hypocrisy, never fails to rouse his most vehement indignation: infomuch that before we attend to the heinous nature, and dreadful consequence, of those vices, we are apt rather to blame our Lord for intemperate wrath upon these occasions, and to wonder why a person, who otherwise appears to be so meek, should, in this case only, be so highly provoked.

How severely doth he check the least tendency towards pride and ambition in his own disciples, whenever he discovers in any of them a disposition to aspire to distinction and superiority; closing his admonition, on one remarkable occasion, with these words, which are characteristic of the temper of his religion. Matt. xxiii. 11, 12. *He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

What temper can be supposed more proper to qualify us for joining the glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, and perhaps innumerable orders of beings far superior to us both in understanding and goodness, when all the splendour of the invisible world shall be thrown open to us, but a spirit of the deepest humility, and the purest benevolence? This alone can dispose us truly to rejoice in the view of every kind and degree of excellence wherever found, without the least uneasiness arising from pride, envy, jealousy, or dislike; all which vicious qualities of the mind are nearly connected together. And how can a spirit of true humility and pure benevolence, which cannot exist without humility, be attained, if our regards be perpetually, or frequently, directed to ourselves. Where *self* is considered, pride, vanity, or self conceit, with all their hateful consequences, seem, in some degree, to be unavoidable.

Whoever,

Whoever, therefore, lays the foundation of human virtue, on the principle of self-interest, or, what is nearly the same thing, self-applause, is erecting a fabric which can never rest on such supports; and he will be found in fact to have been pulling down with one hand what he was endeavouring to build up with the other.

To draw to a conclusion. This doctrine abounds with the noblest practical uses, and points out directly the great rule of life, and source of happiness; which is to give ourselves wholly up to some employment, which may, if possible, engage all our faculties, and which tends to the good of society. This is a field which is open to the exertion of all human powers, and in which all mankind may be equally, mutually, and boundlessly happy.

This will render all expedients to *kill time* unnecessary. With our affections and our faculties thus engrossed by a worthy object, we scarce need fear being ever dull, pensive, or melancholy, or know what it is to have our time hang heavy upon our

hands. And I think I may so far presume upon the known connexion of mind and body, as to say that this is the best preservative against hypochondriacal disorders, to which persons whose situation in the world doth not lead them into the active scenes of life are peculiarly subject. Every day passed in the steady and earnest discharge of a man's known duty, will pass with uniform cheerfulness and alacrity. And in the glorious animating prospect of a future happy state of mankind, on which, in a humble trust and confidence in the assistance and grace of God, he has spent all his cares, and exerted all his powers, that joy will spring up in his heart here, which will hereafter be *unspeakable and full of glory*.

If troubles and persecutions arise on account of our adhering to our duty; if we be opposed in the prosecution of laudable undertakings, or suffer in consequence of undertaking them; the true piety of a person who habitually lives to God, and not to himself, is capable of converting them all into pure unmixed joy and transport. Then the
human

human mind, roused to the most intense exertion of all its faculties, burdened with no consciousness of guilt, referring itself absolutely to the disposal of its God and father, distrusting its own powers, and confiding in the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, acquires a fervour of spirit, a courage, fortitude, and magnanimity, tempered with the most perfect serenity, and the greatest presence of mind, that is sufficient, and more than sufficient, to bear a man through every difficulty, and even to convert all pain into pleasure. His highly agitated state of mind, in those trying circumstances, is almost pure rapture and extasy.

In those circumstances, which appear so distressing, numbers, I doubt not, have been able, according to our blessed Saviour's direction, to *rejoice and be exceeding glad, knowing that their reward was great in heaven*; and have experienced more real comfort, peace of mind, and inward joy, in the greatest adversity, than they had ever felt in the days of their prosperity. Yea, what is related by historians of some christian and protestant martyrs,

martyrs, appears to me not incredible; namely, that in the midst of flames they have felt no pain. Their minds were so intensely agitated, and so wholly occupied with opposite sensations, of the most exalted nature, as to exclude all external sensation whatever, vastly more than we can form any idea of from the trances and reveries which any person was ever subject to.

What the extraordinary exercises of devotion are able to do upon extraordinary occasions, the habitual moderate exercise of piety will be able to do in the ordinary course, and the common troubles of our lives; so that it may not only be compared to a strong cordial, to be applied when the mind is ready to faint under adversity, but to that food which is the daily support of our lives.

To have God always in our thoughts, is not possible in this world. Present objects, to the influence of which we are continually exposed, must necessarily engage a great part of our attention; and worldly objects, by continually engrossing our thoughts, are apt to become of too great importance to us.

We

We grow anxious about them, and our minds are harrassed and fatigued with a constant and close attention to them. Now, it is when the mind is in this state, or rather tending towards it, that the benign influences of devotion are, in the ordinary course of our lives, the most sensibly felt; when the mind, looking off, and above all worldly objects, and deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, unburdens itself of every anxiety, and casts all its cares upon its heavenly father; and when the preceding tumult and disorder in the passions only serves to augment that unspeakable joy, satisfaction, and confidence, with which a deep sense of the presence and providence of God inspires the soul.

The relief a benevolent mind feels from communicating its troubles and cares to an intimate friend, in whose wisdom and integrity he can confide, though of the same nature, is but a faint image of what the truly pious soul feels in the delightful seasons of the devout intercourse which he maintains with his God.

This

This is a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction to a truly devout mind, which the wicked, those persons who live to themselves, and not to mankind, or to God, intermeddle not with. Not even an idea of that sweet tranquillity, exalted joy, and calm fortitude which true devotion inspires can be communicated to another who hath had no experience of it himself. This is truly of those things which St. Paul says *the natural man cannot comprehend, and that they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.*

I would be no advocate for enthusiasm. The fervour of devotion cannot always be kept up. That is inconsistent with the condition of our nature, and far from being necessary in our present state: but that chearful serenity and composure in which moderate acts of devotion leave the mind is an excellent temper for entering upon, and persevering with spirit and alacrity, in any useful and honourable undertaking.

The sum of this practical doctrine, suggested by revelation, and confirmed by reason and observation is, that NO MAN CAN BE

HAPPY

HAPPY WHO LIVES TO HIMSELF; BUT THAT TRUE HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN HAVING OUR FACULTIES WHOLLY ENGROSSED BY SOME WORTHY OBJECT, IN THE PURSUIT OF WHICH THE STRONGEST AND BEST OF OUR AFFECTIONS HAVE THEIR FULL PLAY, AND IN WHICH WE ENJOY ALL THE CONSISTENT PLEASURES OF OUR WHOLE NATURE; that though a regard to our greatest happiness be of excellent use, particularly about the beginning of our progress towards perfection and happiness, in bringing our inferior appetites and passions into due subjection to the superior powers of our nature, yet that self-love, and a regard to ourselves is very apt to grow too intense, and is in fact the cause of a great deal of the useless anxiety, perplexity, and misery there is in the world; and that therefore it ought to be our care, that our minds be engrossed as much as possible by other objects; and that even motives to virtue which turn our attention frequently upon ourselves should be used with caution; for fear of feeding that vanity and self-conceit

which we ought to study every method of repressing, as the greatest banè of true religion, being most opposite to the genuine temper of christianity, and the most destructive of human happiness.

I cannot make a better application of this general maxim of conduct, namely, to propose to ourselves, and, in the language of Solomon *to pursue with all our might* some worthy object, some honourable and useful employment, especially in the present circumstances of things among us, than in encouraging you, my brethren in the ministry, to prosecute with vigour that excellent scheme in which you have already shewn so much laudable zeal, and have made so successful a progress. I need not add, that I mean the scheme of a provision for the more comfortable support of ministers' widows and orphans.

This particular subject has the easiest and happiest connexion imaginable with the general
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neral one I have been discussing; as it is both a worthy and benevolent undertaking itself, and is designed for the relief of those persons who have shewn themselves to be actuated by the same excellent sentiments; of persons who have not lived to themselves, but to society; who have entered into the social connexions of life, and who have exposed themselves and families to peculiar hardships in consequence of those honourable connexions.

If any set of duties shine with peculiar lustre and make a greater figure than the rest in our holy religion, they are those of humanity and compassion. Through all the books both of the Old and New Testament, they are the most frequently, and the most earnestly inculcated of any particular duties: doubtless, because they are of the strongest obligation in themselves, the finest exercise for our faculties (having the greatest tendency to advance the perfection of our nature) and the best adapted to promote the ease and happiness of mankind in general.

The

The Divine Being himself is always represented as taking particular notice of the treatment which the poor and distressed meet with. He hath stiled himself the *father of the fatherless, and the widow's God*: and therefore when we undertake those humane and kind offices, we may with more propriety than in any other sphere, consider ourselves as acting the glorious part of God's deputies, and as stewards of the divine grace and goodness here below.

If we be obliged to contribute of our substance to the relief of the distressed, much more is it incumbent upon us not to withhold our labour and our interest, in the prosecution of proper schemes for their relief. And the method in which it is proposed to relieve the distressed persons we have now under consideration is one that is quite free from all the difficulties which lie in the way of common charities (though the objections to common charities have no weight in this particular case) and a method which is, in all cases, the most eligible, when it can be pursued

purſued with effect; namely, to put thoſe perſons whoſe circumſtances are diſtreſſing, or liable to be ſo, in the way of relieving themſelves. It is to exert our humanity in the way of encouraging, if not induſtry, at leaſt frugality.

This, conſequently, is a method which will relieve the minds of the diſtreſſed of a burthen which is often leſs tolerable than moſt kinds of calamity, namely, the ſenſe of dependance and obligation. It may be a falſe kind of delicacy which makes ſome perſons ſo extremely ſenſible upon theſe occaſions; but it is a ſenſibility which only the moſt amiable and deſerving perſons are ſubject to; and there is certainly a peculiar propriety in attending to this circumſtance in the caſe before us.

Who are, generally, the unhappy widows whoſe caſe we are now conſidering, but perſons who have been brought up in eaſy and genteel circumſtances, and whoſe ſmall fortunes, joined to the income of their huſbands, and managed with great frugality, have been juſt ſufficient to bring up a family in that

decent and reputable manner, in which a regard to their station in life, and to the congregations in whose service their husbands were engaged, are universally acknowledged to require. These unhappy persons, therefore, are reduced at once, upon the death of their husbands, and the great reduction, if not total ceasing of their incomes (which is the immediate consequence of that event) to one of the most distressing situations that can occur in human life.

Here is to be seen the deepest affliction for the loss of that companion and friend for whose sake they had sacrificed perhaps better prospects, and in situations in which it would have been more in their power to support themselves and families in the like circumstances; the greatest indigence, to which they have never been accustomed, with which they are therefore wholly unprepared to encounter, and which, in their time of life, they are utterly incapable of remedying; and all this joined with that generosity of sentiment, inspired by their education, and cherished by the company and acquaintance they

they have always kept up, to which relief itself is distressing, unless conferred with the greatest prudence and delicacy.

To augment the distress of these disconsolate widows, they see nothing before them but a number of children educated in the same decent and frugal manner in which their parents were obliged to live, with expectations (if they be of an age capable of having any) almost unavoidably above their rank and fortune, wholly unprovided for, and destitute, in a great measure, of their father's interest and friendships, on which were founded all their expectations of being introduced with tolerable prospects into the world.

Here then, my brethren, are the worthiest objects of charity, and here is the most unexceptionable and desirable method of bestowing it; so that no circumstance seems wanting to engage every benevolent and public spirited person to join heartily in a scheme which is calculated for so excellent a purpose.

Consider, my brethren, how many worthy persons are anxious about the prudence and

the vigour of your present resolutions ; with what tender and heart-piercing concern the worthy and pious parent regards the wife of his bosom, and the children of his love, when he feels the symptoms of his own declining nature, and dreads to communicate the alarming intelligence ; and how earnestly he wishes it may be in his power to do something, while living, which, when he is dead, may be the means of providing a small substitute for the fruit of his present labours ; when alas, no substitute can be provided for himself, for his advice, his instructions, his consolations, the charms of his conversation, and all his personal kind offices. Of what a load of anxiety and distress, which tends to hasten the dreaded event, would this scheme ease the worthiest and most considerate of human minds.

Consider also, how many persons, the best qualified to bear their parts with propriety and honour in social life, and to exhibit the finest example of the several relative and domestic duties to others, and who are thereby capable of having their own usefulness greatly extended, are restrained from
engaging

engaging in social connexions by that peculiar tenderness and humanity, which a liberal education, and a life devoted to the service of a benevolent religion inspires; and also by that very prudence, which would eminently contribute to their fulfilling the most important duties of it in the most exemplary manner.

So excellent an undertaking, will doubtless be its own sufficient reward; and if *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, what good may you not reasonably expect that the devout blessings and fervent prayers of the many excellent persons interested in your present resolutions will procure you, from that God *who is able to make all grace abound towards you, and to supply all your wants, out of his abundant fulness in Christ Jesus.*

Let us then, my brethren, *be stedfast and unmoveable in this, as well as always abounding in every good work; for as much as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Of the Danger of Bad Habits.

Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone.

HOSEA iv. 17.

EPHRAIM is here put for the whole kingdom of Israel, of which it was a part; and this awful sentence pronounced upon it was delivered during its declension, and not long before its final dissolution by the kings of Assyria.

Many prophets had God sent to this unhappy nation, and by repeated messages had he expostulated with them, from time to time, for their crying wickedness and provocations. They had had *line upon line*, and *precept upon precept*; but all had been to no purpose. They shewed no sign of repentance, but *held fast their iniquity, and would not let it go*, till the divine patience and forbearance were wearied out. Mercy could plead for them no longer, their fate was deter-

determined; and the execution of the just judgments of God upon them was only delayed, but was sure to take place in the end.

This is the case of a whole nation abandoned of God in this fearful manner. But whatever has been the case of one nation, may not only be the case of another nation, but also that of any *individual*; and it is the possibility of this being the case of our own nation, or of ourselves, that makes it to demand our attention. To the Almighty, with respect to moral government, a nation is as one man, and one man as a whole nation. He punishes vice, and he rewards virtue in both; and whatever is agreeable to wisdom and equity in the case of a nation, is likewise agreeable to wisdom and equity with respect to individuals. Supposing, therefore, that the cases are exactly similar, I shall, in discoursing from these words,

1. State the case with as much exactness as I can;
2. Shew the probability and danger of it with respect to human nature; and

3dly, Consider the equity and propriety of it with respect to God, applying the whole doctrine to the cases of individuals.

In the first place, I am to state this case with as much exactness as I can.

In general, when any person is in the condition of Ephraim in my text, so that God shall, as it were, say of him, *he is joined to idols* (he is joined to his lusts, and vices) *Let him alone*, his day of trial and probation may be said to be, to all important purposes, expired. He is no longer a *subject of moral government*, because he is utterly incapable of *amendment*, which is the end of all moral discipline; and though, through the goodness of God, which is over all his works, he may live many years longer, yet his final doom is in reality fixed; his sentence is irrevocable, and the execution of it only deferred.

Not that the reformation of any sinner is ever *naturally impossible*, or that, if he truly repent, he shall not find favour at the hand of God. For *nothing is impossible with God*, and a *truly humble, penitent, and contrite*
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heart

heart he will never despise, whenever, and wheresoever he finds it. But the change may be *morally impossible*, or not to be expected according to the usual course of things; and this is sufficient to authorize us to make use of the language.

Supposing a man to have lived so long in the habits of vice, as to have lost all relish for every thing that is good, that he has no pleasure in the company of the sober, the virtuous, and the pious, but only in that of those who are as abandoned as himself, and that the greatest satisfaction he has is in corrupting others (and farther than this, depravity cannot go) supposing that, in the course of his life, this man, besides every advantage for *instruction*, had experienced a great variety of prosperity and adversity; and yet that prosperity, instead of making him more thankful and obedient to God, made him forget him the more; and that afflictions, instead of softening and bettering his heart, only served to harden it, and make it worse. Do I say that this abandoned wretch *cannot* be reformed, that God cannot,

cannot, by any methods whatever, work upon his heart, and bring him to serious thought and reflexion? By no means.— That would be to limit the power of God, to whom all things are possible. He can work *miracles*, if he should think proper so to do. But then I say this would be a proper miracle, such as, at this day, we are not authorized to expect. And judging by what we see actually to take place, and what we must conclude to be just and right, God *may*, and probably *will*, leave such a one to himself. He may determine to try him no longer by any of those methods of his providence which are usually employed for the purpose of reclaiming sinners.

For instance, afflictions, and especially bodily sicknesses, are a great means of softening and bettering the minds of men; but God may resolve that he shall be visited with no remarkable sickness, till he be overtaken with his last; or he may cut him off by a sudden and unexpected death, in the midst of his crimes. The death of our friends, or any calamities befalling them, have often
been

been the means, in the hands of divine providence, of bringing to serious thought and reflexion those who have survived those strokes; but God may resolve never to touch him in so tender a part, but rather make use of his death as a warning and example to others.

Now when a man is thus *left of God*, and no providential methods are used to reclaim him, we may conclude that he is irrecoverably lost. It is, in fact, and according to the course of nature (and we know of no deviations from it since the age of the apostles) absolutely impossible that he should repent, or be reformed. And though he should continue to live ever so long after God has thus forsaken him, he is only, in the awful language of scripture, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; and there remains nothing for him but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of that fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries of God.*

Having thus stated the nature of this awful case, and shown in what sense, and on what account, it may be said that it
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is quite desperate and hopeless, viz. because it may be morally impossible that he should ever truly repent and be reformed, by reason of God's withdrawing those providential methods by which he uses to work upon men's hearts, and to bring them to serious thought and reflection, I come

2dly, to consider the *probability* and *danger* of the case with respect to human nature; how far men are liable to fall into this fearful condition, and by what means they fall into it.

A man's case may be pronounced to be thus desperate, when his mind is brought into such a state, as that the necessary means of reformation shall have lost their effect upon him; and this is the natural consequence of confirmed habits of vice, and a long continued neglect of the means of religion and virtue, which is so far from being an impossible or improbable case, that it is a very general one.

In order to be the more sensible of this, you are to consider that vice is a *habit*, and there-

therefore of a subtle and insinuating nature. By easy, pleasing, and seemingly harmless actions, men are often betrayed into a *progress*, which grows every day more alarming. Our virtuous resolutions may break with difficulty. It may be with pain and reluctance that we commit the *first acts* of sin, but the *next* are easier to us; and use, custom, and habit, will at last reconcile us to any thing, even things the very idea of which might at first be shocking to us.

Vice is a thing not to be trifled with. You may, by the force of vigorous resolution, break off in the early stages of it; but *habits*, when they have been confirmed, and long continued, are obstinate things to contend with, and are hardly ever entirely subdued. When bad habits *seem* to be overcome, and we think we have got rid of our chains, they may perhaps only have become, as it were, *invisible*; so that when we thought we had recovered our freedom, and strength, so as to be able to repel any temptation, we may lose all power of resistance on the first approach of it.

A man

A man who has contracted a habit of vice, and been abandoned to sinful courses for some time, is never out of danger. He is exactly in the case of a man who has long laboured under a chronical disease, and is perpetually subject to a relapse. The first shock of any disorder a man's constitution may bear, and, if he be not naturally subject to it, he may perfectly recover, and be out of danger. But when the general habit is such, as that a *relapse* is apprehended, a man's friends and physicians are alarmed for him.

The reason is, that a relapse does not find a person in the condition in which he was when the first fit of illness seized him. That gave his constitution a shock, and left him enfeebled, so as to be less able to sustain another shock; and especially if it be more violent than the former, as is generally the case in those disorders.

In the very same dangerous situation is the man who has ever been addicted to vicious courses. He can never be said to be *perfectly recovered*, whatever appearances may
promise,

promise, but is always in danger of a fatal relapse. He ought, therefore, to take the greatest care of himself. He is not in the condition of a person who has *never known the ways of wickedness*. He ought, therefore, to have the greatest distrust of himself, and set a double watch over his thoughts, words, and actions, for fear of a surprize. For if once, through the force of any particular temptation, he should fall back into his former vicious courses, and his former disposition should return, his case will probably be desperate. He will plunge himself still deeper in wickedness ; and his having abstained for a time will only, as it were, have whetted his appetite, and make him swallow down the poison of sin by larger and more eager draughts than ever.

Such persons may be so entirely in the power of vicious habits, that they shall be in no sense *their own masters*. They may even see the danger they are in, wish to free themselves from the habits they have contracted, and yet find they have no force, or resolution, to relieve themselves. They are
not

not to be rescued from *the snare of the destroyer*, and brought to their *right mind*, but by some uncommon and alarming providence, which is in the hands of God, and which he may justly withhold, when his patience and long-suffering have been much abused. Justly may he say to such an habitual sinner, as he did to Ephraim in my text. *He is joined to idols, he is joined to his lusts, let him alone.* He is determined to have the *pleasure of sin*, let him receive the *wages of sin* also.

This brings me to the third head of my discourse, in which I propose to consider the equity of the preceding with respect to God.

It may be said that it is not agreeable to equity for God to favour some with the means of improvement, and suffer others to abandon themselves to destruction without a possibility of escaping. But I answer, that the persons whose case I have been describing have had, and have outlived, their *day of grace*. God has long exercised forbearance towards them, but they have wearied

tried it out; and it could not be expected to last for ever. They have had gracious invitations to repentance, but they have slighted them all: they *stopped their ears, and refused to return.* They have been tried with a great variety both of merciful and of afflictive providences, but they made no good use of them. *Why then, as the prophet says, should they be stricken any more, when they will only revolt more and more?*

A day of trial and probation, or what is frequently called a *day of grace*, must necessarily have some period. Else when would the time of retribution, when would the time of rewards and punishments, take place? A state of trial necessarily respects some future state, in which men must receive according to their deeds. But this state of trial it has pleased God to make of uncertain duration, no doubt, to keep us always watchful, having our accounts always in readiness, because *in such an hour as we think not, our Lord may come*, and require them. The state of trial, therefore, is with some of much longer duration than it is

with others ; and God is the fovereign arbiter of every thing relating to it. He makes our lives longer or shorter, as seems good in his sight, and at death a state of trial ends of course. We may, therefore, as well pretend to question the justice and equity of God's cutting us off by death when and in what manner he pleases, as arraign his justice in sealing up our doom, though while we live, whenever he pleases.

No doubt God gives to every person a sufficient trial ; for *he is not willing that any should perish, but had rather that all should come to repentance.* We may therefore assure ourselves, that he will not cease to endeavour to promote the reformation of a sinner by all proper means, till he shall become absolutely incorrigible, and the methods taken to reclaim him would be abused and lost. And if we consider that every means of improvement neglected adds to a man's guilt, and aggravates his condemnation, it may even appear to be mercy in the Divine Being to grant a person no farther means of improvement, after it has been found,

found, by actual trial, that they would only have been abused, and therefore have proved highly injurious to him. Not but that it might have been sufficient to silence every cavil of this kind, to say, as Paul does, on a similar occasion, *Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God; or with Abraham, Shall not the judge of all the earth do that which is right?* But it is proper to shew that *in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy.*

There is a very pathetic description of the case of a sinner who, after a relapse into vicious courses, is justly abandoned of God to seek his own destruction, in a parable of our Saviour's, formed upon the popular opinion of the Jews of his age concerning demons, or evil spirits, Matt. xii. 43, &c. "When
" the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,
" he walketh through dry places, seeking
" rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I
" will return to my house from whence I
" came out; and when he is come, he find-
" eth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then
" goeth he, and taketh with himself seven
" other spirits, more wicked than himself,

“ and they enter in, and dwell there, and
“ the last state of that man is worse than
“ the first.” The application of this parable either to the case of the Jews (for whom it seems to have been originally intended) or to particular persons, who, after a seeming reformation, have relapsed into vicious courses, is too obvious to be particularly dwelt upon.

To come, therefore, to a general application of this doctrine ; Let all persons who are sensible of the folly and evil of sinful courses, and of the danger of persisting in them, make a speedy and effectual retreat. Let us do nothing by halves. To be lukewarm in religion, is in effect to have no religion at all. We must *give God our hearts* ; we must give him an undivided affection ; for *we cannot truly love God and mammon*, or the world, at the same time. In this unsettled and fluctuating disposition, temptations will have a great advantage over us. We shall ever be in danger of throwing off all restraint, and of running into every kind of riot and excess, till nothing on the part
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of divine providence shall occur to reclaim us.

In reality, my brethren, and to every valuable end and purpose, the term of our trial and probation does generally expire long before the term of our natural lives. For how few are there whose *characters*, whose *dispositions*, or *habits of mind*, undergo any considerable change after they are grown to man's estate. Our *tempers*, and general characters are usually fixed as soon as we have fixed ourselves in a regular employment and mode of life. For, after this, we see almost every person continue the very same to the end of his life. Some remarkable providential occurrence, some fit of sickness, or some unforeseen misfortune of any kind, may alarm those who have been addicted to vicious courses, and for a time bring them to serious thought and reflexion; but if they be turned thirty or forty years of age, how soon do the serious purposes, which they then form, go off, and their former modes of thinking and living return? Not only with respect to *temper*, and *disposition of mind*,

as it relates to virtue or vice, but with respect to those habits which are indifferent to morals, we see that, excepting one case perhaps in a thousand, they are not subject to change after the period that I have mentioned. Any habits that we contract early in life, any particular bias or inclination; any particular cast of thought, or mode of conversation, even any particular gesture of body, as in walking, sitting, &c. we are universally known by among our acquaintance, from the time that we properly *enter life* to the time that we have done with it; as much as we are by the tone of our voice, or our hand-writing, which likewise are of the nature of *habits*, or *customs*.

These observations may be applied in a great measure even to matters of *opinion*, (though, naturally, nothing seems to be more variable) as well as to mental and corporeal *habits*. A man who has studied, or who fancies he has studied, any particular subject, sooner or later *makes up his mind*, as we say, with respect to it; and after this, all arguments, intended to convince him of
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his mistake, only serve to confirm him in his chosen way of thinking. An argument, or evidence of any kind, that is entirely *new* to a man, may make a proper impression upon him; but if it has been often proposed to him, and he has had time to view and consider it, so as to have hit upon any method of evading the force of it, he is afterwards quite callous to it, and can very seldom be prevailed upon to give it any proper attention. This consideration accounts, in some measure, both for the great influence of christianity on its first publication, when the doctrines were *new* and *striking*, and also for the absolute indifference with which the same great truths are now heard in all christian countries.

It accounts also for the more striking effect of the preaching of the Methodists than ours. They find people utterly ignorant, to whom the truths, the promises, and the threatenings, of the gospel are really *new*; whereas we have to do with persons who have heard them from their infancy, and have, alas, acquired a habit of disregarding

them. But then our people, having, in general, been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes of character and conduct are less necessary in their case. It is to be regretted, however, that they too seldom exceed that mediocrity of character which they acquire in early life. I speak of the generality among us. For others are remarkable exceptions, persons of *disinterested and heroic virtue*, in full proportion to the superior advantages which they enjoy.

The resistance which the mind makes to the admission of truth, when it has been strongly prejudiced against it, is evident both with respect to the belief of christianity in general, and of particular opinions relating to it. There are many persons, by no means defective with respect to *judgment* in other things, of whose conversion to christianity we can have no more reasonable expectation, than of the sun rising in the west, even though they should consent to hear, or read, every thing that we could propose to them for that purpose. There are also many conscientious and intelligent
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Roman catholics, absurd as we justly think their principles to be, who would deliberately read the best defences of Protestantism, without any other effect than that of being more confirmed in their prejudices against it. The same may be said of persons professing other modes of faith; so that their persuasions are not to be changed, except by such a method as that which was applied for the conversion of the apostle Paul. The same observation may also be applied to many opinions, and especially to a *general bias*, or *turn of thinking*, in matters of a political nature, and even in subjects of philosophy, or criticism.

Facts of this kind, of which we are all witnesses, and which come within the observation of every day in our lives, shew in a very striking light, what care we ought to take in forming our *first judgments* of things, and in contracting our *first habits*; and therefore deserve the more especial attention of *young persons*. For we see that when these *principles* and *habits* are once properly formed, they are generally fixed for life. What-
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ever is fact with respect to *mankind in general*, we ought to conclude to be the case with respect to *ourselves*; that the cause is in the constitution of our *common nature*, and dependent upon the fundamental laws of it, and no doubt a wise and useful part of it; and we must not expect that *miracles* will be wrought in our favour.

To shew that there is the greatest advantage, as well as some inconvenience, resulting from this *disposition to fixity*, as we call it, in our own nature, let it be observed, that if there was nothing *fixed*, or *permanent*, in the *human character*, we should find the same inconvenience, as if any other law of nature was unsettled. We should be perpetually at a loss how to conduct ourselves, how to behave to mankind in general, and even to our own particular friends and acquaintance, especially after having been for any space of time absent from them. We do not expect to find persons the very same in all changes of condition or circumstances, as in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, &c. but then we generally
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know what *kind of change* to expect in them in those circumstances, and we regulate our conduct towards them by our experience of the usual effect of similar changes.

These observations, when applied to *opinions*, may serve to amuse us, but when they are applied to *practice* they ought seriously to alarm us. Let all those, therefore, who being at all advanced in life, see reason to be dissatisfied with themselves, with their disposition of mind, and their general conduct, be alarmed; for there is certainly the greatest reason for it, probably much more than they are themselves aware of. Persons in this state of mind always flatter themselves with a time when they shall have more leisure for repentance and reformation; but, judging from observation on others, which is the surest guide that they can follow (infinitely better than their own imaginations) they may conclude, that it is almost a certainty that such a time will never come.

If they should have the *leisure* for repentance and reformation which they promised themselves, it is not probable that
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sufficient *strength of resolution* will come along with it. Indeed, all resolutions to repent at a future time are necessarily insincere, and must be a mere deception; because they imply a preference of a man's present habits and conduct, that he is really *unwilling* to change them, and that nothing but necessity would lead him to make any attempt of the kind. In fact, he can only mean that he will discontinue *particular actions*, his *habits*, or *temper of mind*, remaining the same.

Besides, a real, effectual repentance, or reformation, is such a total change in a man, as cannot, in the nature of things, take place in a short space of time. A man's habits are formed by the scenes he has gone through, and the impressions which they have made upon him; and when death approaches, a man has not another life, like this, to live over again. He may, even on a death bed, most sincerely *wish* that he had a pious and benevolent disposition, with the love of virtue in all its branches: but that *wish*, though it be ever so sincere, and earnest,
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can no more produce a proper change in his mind, than it can restore him to health, or make him taller, or stronger, than he is.

The precise time when this confirmed state of mind takes place, or, in the language of scripture, the time when any person is thus *left of God*, or *left to himself*, cannot be determined. It is necessarily various and uncertain. But in general, we may say, that when any person has been long abandoned to vicious courses, when vice is grown into a habit with him, and especially, when his vices are more properly of *a mental nature*, such as a disposition to *envy*, *malice*, or *selfishness* (which are the most inveterate, the most difficult to be eradicated, of all vices) when neither health nor sickness, prosperity nor adversity; when neither a man's own reflections, the remonstrances of his friends, nor admonitions from the pulpit, have any visible effect upon him; when, after this, we see no great change in his worldly affairs, or connexions, but he goes on from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, without any sensible

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alteration,

alteration, there is reason to fear that he is fallen into this *fatal security*, that he is as it were *fallen asleep*, and that this sleep, will be *the sleep of death*.

However, a shadow of hope is not to be despised. One chance in a thousand is still a chance; and there are persons whose vigour of mind is such, that, when sufficiently roused, they are equal to almost any thing. Let those, therefore, who see their danger at any time of life, be *up and doing*; *working out their salvation with fear and trembling*; that, if possible, they may *flee from the wrath to come*.

THE DUTY OF NOT BEING ASHAMED
OF THE GOSPEL.

*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ:
for it is the Power of God to Salvation to
every one that believeth.* ROM. i. 16.

THIS was written by the apostle Paul at Corinth, when he had formed a design of visiting Rome, the metropolis of the empire, the seat of power, and of course the resort of the ambitious, and also of the learned, and in general of all persons who had any hopes of distinguishing themselves on the great theatre of the world. There this apostle wished to have an opportunity of preaching the gospel, after having propagated it with success in the principal cities of Asia minor and Greece; in his travels for which purpose, though he had suffered much, he had met with nothing that had made him repent of his undertaking, or had led him to be ashamed of his commission.

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He now discovered as little apprehension on the idea of going to Rome, and was as little ashamed to preach the gospel even there.

There was something peculiarly great and magnanimous in these sentiments and this conduct of the apostle, of which we shall be sensible if we consider the circumstances in which he wrote. Christianity was then a *new* religion, professed comparatively by very few; and of those few, not many were rich, powerful, or learned. By such persons as these it was generally viewed in an unfavourable light, interfering with their favourite gratifications and pursuits, so that both among Jews and Gentiles it was a *sect that was every where spoken against*, and the preachers of it were hated, as those who came to *turn the world upside down*. Paul had been at Athens, the great seat of learning, and of education, in the ancient world; but the language of the philosophers there, was *What does this talker, or this dealer in new and unscuth words, say*. After a hearing before the Areopagus, the most respectable court of judicature in Athens, or in all Greece; though, with much address, he avoided

avoided giving any particular offence, he made very few converts; and though he continued there some months, we do not hear of any Christian church at Athens in his time:

This indeed was the first time that the gospel had been preached at Athens; whereas at Rome, to which there was a constant resort of persons of all professions, from every part of the empire, there were already Christians, and in numbers sufficient to constitute *a church*; at the time of Paul's writing this epistle, and to that church it is addressed. But still the number of Christians in Rome must have borne a very small proportion to the inhabitants of the place. In these circumstances, the apostle could have had no very flattering prospect before him, when he thought of visiting the metropolis. He had many and great difficulties in view, and hardly any thing, with respect to this life, to enable him to bear them. The attachment of a very few persons, and those very much divided amongst themselves, was all that he had with which to balance the contempt of the

learned, and the great, the rude insolence of the mob, and perhaps hardships and persecutions of a more serious kind. Notwithstanding this, the apostle declares that he should not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, or afraid to preach it in the most public manner. For that must likewise have been his resolution.

Our circumstances are, no doubt, considerably different from those of the apostle. Christianity is now the religion of the country, in which we live, and the open profession of it lies under no odium. It cannot, therefore, be a just ground of boasting in any man to say that, he is not ashamed of it. Even those who by their writings wish to undermine and discredit Christianity, do it under the pretence of being friends to it. In many respects, however, the serious profession of pure Christianity, free from those corruptions and abuses which have been unhappily introduced into it, and have become incorporated with it, in all the public establishments of it, and in some cases even the profession of Christianity itself (and still
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more a life and conversation governed by the strict rules of it) is disliked, and therefore *disreputable*; so that it may require no small degree of fortitude in a man uniformly to avow his serious belief of it, and his strict adherence to it.

In this Christian country, the Christianity of the greater number is only a secondary consideration with them. The great objects with the bulk of mankind are pleasure, profit, or honour. Religion, by which I mean a regard to God and a future life, is so little thought of, or attended to, by them, that it is no sensible check to their pursuits, and enforces no moderation in their gratifications. Consequently, a man who thinks, who feels, and who acts, as really becomes a Christian, who *sets God always before him*, whose views are primarily directed to a future life, and who habitually considers himself as *a pilgrim and stranger here below*, is a character of which they have no conception. Such views, and a conduct governed by them, they cannot enter into. To them, therefore, it must appear either

felly, or *hypocrisy*; and of course will be treated by them with contempt, or hatred. Their being nominally Christians themselves will not make them look with more respect upon those who are truly and practically so.

If we look back a century or two, we shall see that the hatred and contempt with which the reformers from popery abroad, and the puritans in this country, were treated by those who called themselves Christians, was not exceeded by that which the Jews, and the Gentiles in general, entertained for Christianity at the first promulgation of it.

By great numbers also, and especially in the most distinguished ranks of society, the rich, the great, and the speculative, Christianity itself is disbelieved, and even despised; so that any person who makes a serious profession of it will by them be treated with contempt. In such company, therefore, it must require some courage for a man to declare himself to be a Christian, and especially a serious one, with views in
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his conduct quite different from those with whom he associates.

On these accounts it may not be improper, or unseasonable, to exhort Christians themselves, and in this Christian country, not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; by informing them of the reasons why, in these circumstances, or in any circumstances, they ought, on the contrary, to value themselves upon it, and to consider the profession of it as their greatest happiness and honour. Now, my Christian brethren, we shall be sensible that we have no reason to be ashamed of the gospel, but the greatest reason to glory in it, when we consider what it is *in itself*, not what it has by too many been *imagined* to be, and what is the great object and use of it.

Men of reason will be governed by reason, or just views of things, and will not be influenced by the opinions of those who have taken no pains in forming them, but have taken them up lightly, and on insufficient grounds, which you will find to be the case with all those who despise, or affect

to despise, Christianity. This apostle, who had been strongly prejudiced against it, who had even persecuted it, but whom the most convincing evidence (and in his case nothing less than the most convincing would have been sufficient) had made a convert to it, who had in the midst of much opposition, and with great labour and hazard, preached it many years, says that *it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth*. In other words, it is a scheme which divine wisdom has adopted, as the most effectual, to deliver men from superstition and vice, and to prepare them for future glory. And *this* is certainly nothing of which any man, any truly sensible and wise man, need to be ashamed, in whatever light it may appear to the unthinking world, or in what manner soever, from ignorance, or malice, they may treat the professors of it.

That mankind are subject to *error*, and also to *vice*, we who are men ourselves cannot but know, and experience. This liability to error and vice is, indeed, necessary

cessary in a state of *trial*, in which great characters, characters fitted for great and excellent future purposes, are to be formed. Many, alas *the many*, the great bulk of mankind, are fatally entangled in error and vice. They are struck with the appearances of things, which present themselves to their view, and which prompt them to immediate gratification; and, looking no farther, they abandon themselves to the pursuit of them. By this means their characters are debased, and having no respect to God, or a future life, their conduct, corresponding to their low and grovelling views, will be such as, though viewed with too much indulgence by men like themselves, is a disgrace to their rational nature; neither making them truly happy here, nor qualifying them for happiness hereafter.

Now the precepts and maxims of the gospel, and especially the future prospects which it opens to us, are calculated to conduct us with safety through the snares of the world, and to give us a happy exit out of it. They give us just views of things,

of our condition and duty here, and of our expectations hereafter ; by which means they guard us against destructive errors, they lead to the practice of universal virtue, and form us for a happy immortality.

Christianity gives us just views of the relation in which all the human race stands to God, our common parent, of his gracious designs in training us up, as in a school of moral discipline, for future glory and happiness. It consequently teaches us to consider all mankind as *brethren*. It holds out to us all the same great prospects, a state of happiness open to all, and sufficient to content all ; and thereby cuts up, as by the roots, all that envy and jealousy, which, being the parents of our worst vices, are the bane of our comfort in this life, as well as disqualify us for the enjoyment of another. This excites a generous emulation to be virtuous ourselves, and at the same time to promote the virtue of others. It teaches us to consider one another as *fellow soldiers* in the same cause and warfare, and thereby prompts us to be ready to yield each other
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every assistance in our power, to attain the great end of our common faith, to guard against our common dangers, and to secure our common reward. There are no principles comparable to the christian ones for inspiring a noble disinterested benevolence, and leading to a truly heroic conduct.

Christianity exalts the dignity of man, and inspires great and generous sentiments, by teaching us to have a constant respect to God; exhibiting him to us as the greatest and best of beings, the author of nature, and the father of mankind; who never deserts his offspring, but with the most gracious intention plans all the events of our lives; without whose will nothing can ever befall us, and who designs every thing for the best.

Let things therefore appear ever so discouraging, they give no alarm, or distrust, to the true christian. He respects the providence of his God and father in the most afflictive, as well as in the most prosperous events of his life; and is confident that, if his own conduct be proper to his circumstances,

stances, it will hereafter appear that there was equal wisdom, and equal kindness, in the appointment of them. The true christian can therefore *rejoice even in tribulation*, knowing with the apostle, that *tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, even that hope which maketh not ashamed*, that hope and joy which are sufficient to bear him up under, and carry him through, any difficulties, even the pains of death, with all its terrors.

In death the true christian *rejoices in hope of the glory of God*. For though *the earthly house of his tabernacle be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. It is the great prerogative of the gospel that it *brings life and immortality to light*; thereby giving us a prospect of something infinitely more valuable than any thing that this world can furnish; *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; not indeed the object of *fight*, but of the firmest *faith*, being *surely reserved in heaven for us*.

Christianity

Christianity, therefore, prepares the mind for all circumstances, and all events, and is calculated to make us equally happy in all places, and at all times ; giving us an equanimity, and consequently a dignity of mind, and of character, which does the greatest honour to human nature, and makes it appear to the greatest advantage of which it is capable. Does any person then need to be ashamed of such a profession as this ?

These great sentiments, which have such remarkable and happy effects, are not confined to a few persons, distinguished by superior genius ; but are such as all human minds, even the weakest, are fully capable of. The doctrines of a *God*, of a *providence*, and of a *future life*, as far as they can have much influence on our tempers and conduct, are of equal comprehension to all men ; and since the lowest of mankind are as capable of firm *faith* as the highest, they are capable of being as powerfully influenced by them. Accordingly, we find in the history of christianity, as much dignity of *sentiment* (if that be estimated by dignity of *conduct*,

by benevolence to others, by patience in suffering, and by fortitude in danger and in death) in the lowest orders of mankind, as in the highest; and as much in the female, or weaker sex, as it is called, as in men.

Whereas, the influence of the heathen philosophy, whatever it was, was confined to the superior classes of men, who had leisure to study and attend to it. And yet in real life and use, it fell infinitely short of christianity; so that the maxims of philosophy may be compared to a poor mineral, for which, however, men must dig deep; whereas the truths of christianity are a rich treasure found on the very surface.

Shall we then be ashamed of the gospel, which is so unspeakably more valuable than all the boasted *wisdom of the world*; which is calculated to make us happy in our present sentiments, feelings, and prospects, and infinitely more so in a future and a better state? Surely no man will think christianity of less value because the lowest of his fellow-creatures have equal access to the blessings of it with himself. He must be
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of a low and sordid mind indeed, who can be capable of such a sentiment. A great and generous mind will rejoice in the idea of that superior dignity, and elevation of character, which christianity is capable of imparting to *all*. The sense of it will rather make him proud of the superiority of those common principles, which are capable of producing such great and happy effects, without requiring any thing extraordinary in the qualifications, or furniture of mind, before the reception of them. Surely we ought not to be ashamed, but on the contrary to make the greatest boast, of that religion, which can make, and which has made, the lowest peasants, and thousands of the lowest peasants and mechanics, act with more generosity in prosperity, and with more fortitude in adversity and persecution, than any philosopher in the heathen world; making them superior to the pains and pleasures of life, from the prospect of a future state, on which their views were steadily fixed.

In this world too much account is made of the distinction between the *rich* and the *poor*. The former are courted, and the latter despised. But God, the common parent of all, makes no difference in his benevolent regards towards them. When the nature of the two states is considered, it will appear that there is no peculiar kindness in the divine intentions with respect to either of them. They are only theatres for the exercise of different virtues. And, in reality, the trials of the rich are harder than those of the poor; as is evident from this circumstance, that more persons fall by the snares of prosperity than by those of adversity. And God, in particularly appointing that *the gospel should be preached to the poor* (that they whose condition appears harder in this life may have an opportunity of making a better provision for themselves in another) gives the strongest proof of his paternal affection for them.

Whatever, then, be our situation in life, whether we be rich or poor, whether we
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rank among the more enlightened, or the more unlearned part of mankind ; whether, on any of these accounts, we be of those whom others are disposed to look up to with respect, or to look down upon with contempt, let us equally value that gospel, the blessings of which regard us all alike, as the offspring of God, and brethren to each other ; as training up together in a school of discipline here, and as joint heirs of immortality hereafter.

I shall conclude this discourse with two observations. First, if the world, or any part of it with which we may have intercourse, should hate or despise us because we are christians, and act up to the strictest maxims of it, let us consider that men of the same description hated and despised our blessed master. By the same great principles which actuated him, let us likewise *overcome the world*, and shew our superiority to our adversaries by the superiority of our sentiments and conduct ; and especially by returning good for evil, requiting hatred with love, and by our behaviour, at least, endeavouring

endeavouring to inspire them with a respect for those principles which enable us to feel; and to act; in a manner superior to what they are at present capable of.

Secondly. As our greatest privilege and happiness, and consequently our greatest cause of rejoicing and boasting, is that we are christians (that while other nations are still buried in gross darkness, in error and superstition, without the true knowledge of God, of his providence, and the certain belief of immortality, we have all been taught, and have from our earliest years been brought up in, the firm belief of these things) let christianity have something to boast of in us. The glory of any religion is the good conduct of those who profess it: Now the proper object of christianity is to make good men and good citizens, proper subjects of God's moral government here, and fit heirs of immortality hereafter. And better were it, unspeakably better, for us never to have known christianity, than to know it, and not live according to it; not to *let our light so shine before men, as that others may*
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see our good works, and thereby glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Every christian should be a preacher of the gospel. They who cannot recommend it by any other means, have it in their power to do it by a good example; and without this any other method of recommending it will avail but little. Since, therefore, you retain the outward profession of christianity, be christians, my brethren, not in *name and profession only*, but also *in deed and in truth*. Be unto our great Lord and master that *peculiar people zealous of good works*, which he came to *purify to himself*; that when *he shall return, and take an account of his servants*, you, my hearers, and myself, *may be found of him without spot, and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming*.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

GAL. vi. 14, 15.

SUCH is the truly magnanimous declaration of the apostle Paul, on his speaking of some who urged the practice of circumcision, and a conformity to the law of Moses, on the gentile converts, in order to gain favour with the unbelieving Jews, and by that means to avoid persecution. At the same time, he probably alluded to the common objection against christianity, as the doctrine of a crucified malefactor.

With this circumstance attending their religion, christians, in the early ages, were
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continually reproached ; and in order to lessen the force of the objection, some of them had recourse to very improper expedients. In the age of the apostles arose the Gnostics, who said that Christ (or the Being who was properly entitled to that denomination) was *not* crucified, and indeed was not capable of it, or of dying in any mode ; as he was a super-angelic spirit, which either quitted the man Jesus, to whom he had been attached, or had only assumed the appearance of a human body. They therefore said, that they were the disciples, not of a crucified man, or of any man, but of a superior Being, sent by God to rectify the disorders into which the world had fallen.

After the age of the apostles, the philosophizing christians had recourse to a different scheme in order to remove the ignominy of the cross. They supposed that the principle which rendered Jesus superior to other men, and by which he wrought his miracles, was the wisdom of the supreme Being, detached in some unknown manner from his essence, and becoming a proper *person* ;

the second person in the trinity, which was afterwards formed. This they said was that *logos*, or *word of God*, by which, as an instrument, he had made the world, had intercourse with the patriarchs, and which was afterwards employed to redeem the world, by becoming united to the man Jesus.

Of this scheme the apostles could have no knowledge; but of the former, which was sufficiently similar to it, they always spake with the greatest indignation. So far were they from being ashamed of a crucified master, that they gloried in it. The apostle Paul, in my text says, that it was his *only*, or his greatest boast: *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*; adding, as a reason for his boasting, *by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature*; that is, by whose gospel I am released from my attachment unto sin; by which the world is so completely reformed, as, in a manner, to be created anew.

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That we, my brethren, may enter fully into the sentiment of the apostle in this noble declaration, and adopt it ourselves, I shall endeavour to shew what was the design, and operation, of the death, and especially of so public and ignominious a death, of the founder of our religion.

Many of the heathens would, no doubt, have been much better reconciled to christianity, if the author of it had appeared in such a character as that of Socrates, or of Plato, especially the latter, who lived in affluence, and with dignity, highly respected by the highest ranks of his countrymen, and by foreign princes, and whose death had nothing in it besides what is common to mortality; nothing that could attach an idea of *meanness* to the person who was subject to it. The Jews also would have thought better of christianity, if the founder of this new religion, though he should not have been all that they expected from their *messiah*, had resembled one of their ancient prophets, in whose death there was nothing *degrading*; and still more, if,

like Enoch or Elijah, he had been taken up to heaven without dying. But in the meanness of our Saviour's appearance, and in the circumstances of his death, so humiliating to himself and his followers, the wisdom of God was particularly manifested, as will appear if we attentively consider them.

As that which distinguished Christ from all the other prophets was his resurrection from the dead, which was a thing of so extraordinary a nature, that it required to be authenticated in the most unexceptionable manner, it was evidently necessary that, previous to his resurrection, his *death* should be unquestionable ; and *this* it could not have been, if it had been private, or in the presence of his friends only. For, in this case, his enemies would not have failed to say, that he had never been dead ; and no testimony of his disciples only, how unexceptionable soever in other respects, would have satisfied them of the fact. Consequently, the belief of it would have remained with a very few, and would have been incapable of spreading far.

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To cut off all cavil of this kind, it was necessary that the death of Christ should be as public as possible, so that his enemies should never have it in their power to call it in question. And this they could have no pretence for doing, when he had been put into their own hands for the purpose. We may assure ourselves that the *death* of the person who had given them so much disturbance having been their great object, and having had their utmost wishes gratified in his *sentence*, they would take effectual care of the *execution* of it, and would never have delivered the body to his friends, till they had been well satisfied that he was really dead.

Accordingly, we do not find that it was ever supposed, by any of the ancient unbelievers, that Jesus was not certainly dead before he was put into the sepulchre. A suspicion of the contrary must have occurred at the time, if there had been any colour for it; so that it is too late to make the objection now. There were as inveterate, and as vigilant enemies of Christ at the time of his death, as there can be at this day; and they

were in circumstances infinitely more favourable for discovering a fallacy of this kind. Since, therefore, they could not but acknowledge that Jesus was really dead, unbelievers of the present age must abide by their verdict, and content themselves with objecting to the credibility of the *resurrection*; which, for wise reasons, was not so public, though sufficiently authenticated.

With respect to this, I shall only observe, in this place, that as the enemies of Christ would never have been satisfied without being quite sure of his death, so it is utterly incredible that his disciples would have suffered and died in the cause of christianity, if they had not been as well persuaded that he rose from the dead. It is not, indeed, possible to imagine any case in which men should be more deeply interested to inform themselves of the truth of any fact; and it cannot be denied but that the immediate disciples of Christ must themselves have been the best witnesses of it.

The certainty of the death of Christ being of use only with a view to the certainty of his
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his resurrection, it is the latter only that is the proper foundation of the christian's hope and joy. Accordingly, the apostles never fail to lay a proportionable stress upon it. Thus the apostle Peter says (1 Pet. i. 3.) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, (not by the death, but) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heaven for you. And though great stress is justly laid on the death of Christ, as essential to the scheme of christianity, and various methods are taken by the apostles to reconcile the minds of the Jews to the idea of it; yet more stress is always laid on the resurrection, whenever they are mentioned together.—Who is he that condemneth, says the apostle Paul, Rom. viii. 34. It is Christ (or rather is it Christ) that died, yea rather that is risen from the dead, who is even at the right hand of God. And again, chap. v. 10. If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by*
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the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Let us, therefore, ever keep in view the subserviency of the death of Christ to his resurrection, and not imagine that it had any other proper object.

It was to his resurrection that our Lord himself chiefly directed the views of his disciples, and very seldom to his *death*, considered in itself. When the Pharisees demanded of him a sign from heaven, he told them that, as Jonah lay three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, so the son of man should be three days and three nights (that is, so long and no longer) in the heart of the earth; evidently referring to his resurrection. Again, he said, *destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again.*

Jesus appears to have had a distinct knowledge of the extensive propagation of his religion in the world, and of the necessity of his death to that end; but it was evidently with a view to a subsequent resurrection, without which his death could not have answered any such purpose. Teaching in
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in the temple, a little before his death, he thus expresses himself, John xii. 2. *The hour is come that the son of man must be glorified*, in which, he must have had a view to his resurrection and ascension, preceded by his death. *Verily verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit; that is, by its reproduction, and multiplication.* Again, v. 31, *Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth (that is, if I die) I will draw all men unto me; not by his death, but by his resurrection, and ascension.*

In all this we see that our Lord considered his death in no other light than as necessary to his exaltation and future glory, and especially to the successful propagation of his religion in the world. To this, therefore, let us direct our views; and when we glory in the *cross* of Christ, let us consider it as in reality a glorying in the *resurrection* of Christ, in which we could have no well grounded

grounded faith, if there had not been, in the first place, a certainty of his death. And on the importance of the resurrection of Christ I need not insist. *If Christ be not raised*, as the apostle Paul says, *then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.* The whole of Christianity is an idle tale, unworthy of your attention.

Well, therefore, might the apostle glory in the cross of Christ, when, considered in all its connexions, and consequences, it was the only foundation of his hope in a future life, the revelation of which was the distinguishing glory of the gospel, that gospel by which the world is reformed, and men are made fit heirs of a happy immortality. For such, no doubt, was his meaning when he added, *by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*, that is, by whose gospel I am, as it were, become dead to this world, and alive to another and a better. While others looked with contempt on a crucified Jesus, and despised the gospel on that account, the apostle saw the greatest wisdom in that very circumstance, as it contributed infinitely

infinitely more to the great end of religion than all the speculations and discourses of those philosophers who despised it.

Their instructions were only calculated for the use of a few persons of leisure, and of a speculative turn; and to *them* they could hold out nothing that was capable of controuling the passions of men. They had no great and interesting truths to teach them, nothing of importance concerning God, or concerning many important branches of their duty here, and much less concerning their expectations hereafter. With respect to these things, so infinitely interesting to all men, the philosophers themselves were involved in great darkness. If they had any idea of the absurdity of the vulgar Polytheism, they saw nothing to induce them to *protest* against it, or to *risk* any thing for the overthrow of it. So far were they from this, that they universally conformed to it themselves, and recommended conformity in others; though the rites of their religion were always accompanied with the most detestable vices.

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Whatever knowledge the philosophers might have of a first cause, they had no belief in a *providence*, and were altogether destitute of a principle of practical and habitual *devotion*. Also, whatever speculations they might occasionally indulge concerning a state of existence after death, it was built upon the notion of their having existed before they were born, of which they could not have any proof; and it does not appear that they had so firm a faith in it, as to be the foundation of any real *expectations*, such as in the least influenced their conduct in life.

On the other hand, the religion of a crucified Jesus, crucified in order to a well-attested resurrection, gave the most unlearned of mankind the firmest belief in a future life, and brought them acquainted with such principles of the unity and providence of God, of his respect to virtue here, and the rewards that he would bestow upon it hereafter, as effectually controuled their strongest passions and affections, gave them new and sublime objects of contemplation, new enjoyments

joyments and new pursuits. Teaching them to consider themselves as *children of God*, and heirs of immortal happiness, it raised them above the consideration of the pleasures or pains of this life ; so that neither the hope of any emolument, nor the fear of any suffering here, was capable of diverting them from what they conceived to be their duty.

Thus were some of the lowest of mankind, who had no advantage besides the knowledge of Christianity, formed to characters infinitely superior to any that the heathen world could boast. Having *a treasure in heaven*, treasures on earth were overlooked, and despised by them ; and having a better life in prospect, they made little account of the present ; but readily abandoned it, whenever their attachment to it, or to any thing in it, would have been a snare to them, and would have led them to any compliances which they thought to be forbidden by the great giver of life. Thus did the doctrine of a crucified Jesus, *crucify them to the world, and the world to them*. They were in reality, as the apostle expresses it, *new*

4 *creatures,*

creatures, created anew in Christ Jesus, or by the gospel, unto good works.

Considering that it was the *death* of Christ at which the world in general, both Jews and Gentiles, were so much offended, and which they continually objected to Christians; and that, in the idea of the apostles, this circumstance was of such absolute necessity in the scheme of the gospel, it is no wonder that, in answer to these objections, they should dwell so much as they do on their representations of the death of Christ; sometimes, for example, exhibiting it in the same light as the *sacrifices* under the law, sometimes as the killing of the *pascal lamb*, and sometimes as a *ransom* given by God for our redemption. All these views are different from, and inconsistent with, each other (which abundantly proves that none of them could be more than figurative representations) but, like our Saviour's comparison of it to a putting of *a grain of wheat* into the ground, they are all calculated to take off the odium which, from this circumstance, was reflected upon Christianity. It is even no wonder that,
considering

considering the death of Christ in all its connexions, and especially with his resurrection, and his appointment to great power and dignity, they should boast of it as if the whole of Christianity centered in it.

It is on a similar account that *faith in Christ* is often mentioned as the only condition of salvation, though faith alone, or the mere belief of the truth of Christianity, is so far from ensuring salvation, that it will aggravate the guilt, and enhance the condemnation, of any person who believes the gospel without obeying it. But in *faith*, as a condition of salvation, we are always to include the proper *consequences* of faith, namely, obeying the gospel, as well as believing the truth of it. However, as advantage has been taken of this concise manner of speaking, and *faith*, or mere *belief*, has been made by many to be the sole and proper condition of salvation, exclusive of *good works*; so we cannot wonder that the same persons should have represented the *death* of Christ, exclusive of every thing connected with it, especially his *resurrection* and future
E e glory,

glory, as the sole procuring cause of men's redemption from sin and death.

Thus, my brethren, have the scriptures been wrested, and perverted. But an attention to the general tenor of the whole, will easily bring us to a right interpretation of any particular parts. And the same good sense, and just discernment, which teach us that *faith without works is dead*, and of no avail, will likewise inform us, that the death of Christ, considered without any regard to his resurrection, and what followed upon it, is of no consequence at all to the Christian scheme; but, on the contrary, would have been fatal to it. But taking both these together, with their natural connexions and dependencies, that is, connecting *works* with *faith*, and the consideration of the *resurrection* of Christ, with that of his *death*, we justly make our boast of faith in Christ, and also of the doctrine of the cross; that is, we make our boast of *the gospel*, which by means of the death and resurrection of Christ, brings life and immortality to light.

By

By this gospel we are, as it were, *created* and *born again*, to a new and better life; not an uncertain mortal life like this, but to a permanent and immortal one; not a life, like the present, in which our very substance is scanty and precarious, but to a great and ample *inheritance, an inheritance incorruptable, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; not indeed the object of *sight*, or of *sense*, but of *faith*; being *surely reserved in heaven for us*. By this *new creation*, and *new birth*, we become *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus*, who is stiled our *elder brother*, and called *the first begotten from the dead*; being the first who after death was raised to that state of immortality which is destined for all his faithful followers.

I shall conclude this discourse with a practical observation. If, with the apostle, we glory in the cross of Christ, or in that religion which could not have been confirmed without his death, let us not only be careful to govern our lives by the precepts of it in general, but more particularly be prepared to suffer whatever the strictest

profession of it may call us to. Let us remember that our Saviour hath said, if any man will be his disciple he must *take up his cross and follow him*, that is, he must be ready to do it, rather than abandon the profession of his gospel, or whatever the strictest purity of it may require. A true Christian is no more *of this world* than his lord and master was of it. With him every thing here below is but of secondary consideration. He must not only patiently, and joyfully, *bear the spoiling of his goods*; he must not only think it an honour to him to suffer *reproach* for the sake of Christ; but he must even not *account his life* itself *dear unto him*, if it would prevent his *finishing his course with joy*. But this we must remember for our consolation, that, if, in time of persecution, *he that keepeth his life shall lose it, he that loseth his life for the profession of the gospel shall keep it to life eternal. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him, and be glorified together.*

TAKING

TAKING THE CROSS AND
FOLLOWING CHRIST.

Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

LUKE xiv. 27.

WE shall not understand the full force of this language, or have a just idea of the manner in which it would be received by those to whom it was addressed, if we do not consider with what views most, if not all, of our Lord's disciples, the apostles themselves not excepted, crowded after him. They expected that he would soon assume the character of their promised *Messiah*, who, they imagined, was to be a great temporal prince, destined to rescue the Jews from their subjection to the Romans, and to give them the empire of the whole world. So far, therefore, were any of them from

expecting to be *losers* by their adhering to Christ, that they had no doubt of their being great and immediate *gainers*, of having the first places of honour, profit, and power, in his kingdom, and not to *suffer*, but to *reign* with him.

What then must have been their astonishment, to hear our Lord, in his first discourse of any length, promise *the kingdom of heaven*, which they were looking for, to the *meek*, and the *persecuted for righteousness sake*, to hear him speaking on another occasion of the danger of their being ashamed of him, and now saying that no person could be his disciple who did not take up his cross and follow him. Such, however, was the uniform language of our Lord through the whole of his ministry; and, backward as the apostles were to enter into these views whilst he was with them, they very readily did it after he was gone; when they found that *his kingdom was not of this world*, and yet were well assured that a kingdom was reserved for him, and for all his faithful followers in another. Then they themselves
adopted

adopted a language similar to this of their master, and among others, Paul said, *they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.*

This, you may say, was requisite in the circumstances in which the apostle wrote, Christianity being then in a state of persecution, which no person, retaining the profession of it, could avoid. But now that the church is at rest from persecution, those sufferings are no longer necessary; and we may be, at this day, as good Christians without any hardships, as in those days they who were exposed to them could be.

I am far from saying that this is not possible. But many persons, I fear, deceive themselves by this view of things, and imagine that much less is now necessary to make a Christian than really is so. Whereas, the terms on which we become Christians (and, of course, become entitled to the rewards Christianity in a future world) are the very same that they ever were, and, upon the whole, perhaps not less difficult. As it greatly behoves us to form just ideas on this

subject, I shall endeavour to give you some assistance with respect to it; and for this purpose I beg you will attend to the following observations.

In the first place, though the actual suffering of the loss of goods, of liberty, of life, or of reputation (which is often more valuable than life) be not always required of Christians, the temper of mind which would enable them to bear the loss of all these, if the sacrifice should be demanded, is always required of us. All Christians are required now, as much as in the times of the apostles, to cultivate a superiority of mind to this world, and all the enjoyments and pursuits of it. They are required to have their affections so set on heaven and heavenly things; they are so to have their treasure, and their citizenship, in heaven, as that no earthly consideration shall be able to make them swerve from their duty. If any thing as dear to them as a right hand, or a right eye, would lead them to wrong conduct, they must *cut it off, and cast it from them.* They must not even *hold their lives dear unto them.*

them, if it would prevent their *finishing their course*, or discharging the duty of a christian, and that with *joy*, in every situation in which it shall please divine providence to place them. Our particular duties change with our circumstances, but the *principle* which leads to all duty must ever be the same. This never changes; and where it really exists, it will not fail to make our duty, in all cases, eligible and joyful. A good man, and a good christian, fears nothing but God, and hates nothing but sin.

Have we then, my christian brethren, this *principle of duty* within us? Have we that steady attachment to christianity, and that firm faith in a future life, and the rewards which Christ has promised to his disciples there, that would enable us to bear persecution, and even death, rather than swerve from it? If we have, we are christians, and shall undoubtedly receive the proper rewards of christianity, whether we be actually called to suffer persecution and death, or not. As that soldier who keeps his ranks,
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and holds himself ready to engage when called upon, is justly entitled to share the rewards of victory, with those of his fellow soldiers who happened to be called to the hottest action. Because he would have engaged, and with as much alacrity, if it had been his place.

But, my brethren (and it behoves us seriously to question ourselves on the subject) if we be not ready, and determined, when called upon, to bear persecution, even unto death, in the cause of Christ, we are no true christians. If we be not prepared to *suffer* with Christ here, neither shall we *reign*, and be *glorified* with him hereafter. If, in such a case, we would, in fact, *deny him*, he also will *deny us*. And though it does not now appear to the world, or may not even be known to ourselves, what our behaviour in time of persecution for conscience sake would be, it is always known to God. He sees, and judges by, the heart, and whatever our final destination may be, we shall then be satisfied of the equity of his decision.

2. That

2. That I may not lead persons to think too unfavourably of their state of mind, and general character, when, on putting the question to themselves, whether they should be able to *forsake all and follow Christ*, they might be apprehensive that they should not be able, but that they should shrink from torture and death; I would observe, that there is something in great emergencies which rouses the mind to uncommon exertion; so that in the hour of actual trial, many have been able to bear what in their cooler moments they would have dreaded the thought of.

This receives abundant confirmation from the history of persecutions. Then many of the reputed *first* were the *last*, and the *last first*. Many whom their fellow christians looked up to, as those who would be the foremost to brave danger and death, have betrayed the greatest timidity, and have been the first to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience; while others, who, in the eyes of their brethren, and in their own eyes, appeared as nothing, have stood foremost,

most, and have borne the greatest and the most lingering tortures without a groan, calmly praying for their friends, and their persecutors.

Let no person, therefore, conclude that because he shudders at the idea of pain, when he is thinking calmly on the subject in his closet, he should certainly deny Christ, and abandon christianity, if there should be no alternative but doing this, or dying, even in torture. We are all of us, in a great measure, strangers even to ourselves, and cannot tell with certainty how we should act in new situations.

Besides, when a persecution is seriously begun (as you may perceive, in the histories of such events) a sense of honour, and dread of shame, come in aid of a principle of pure piety and conscience, and will not suffer persons to disgrace their profession, or be behind their fellow christians in the glorious contest.

But what is more than all, and more to the purpose, is that a state of persecution leads persons to think much of their prin-

ciples, and their future expectations, which makes them strongly feel their importance. And the principles and prospects of christianity are in themselves so great, and so far overbalance all the things of the present life, that they only require to be sufficiently *attended to*, to make any person do, or bear, any thing for their sake.

What hardships will not men undergo, and what risk even of life will they not run, in order to obtain a great estate, and much more a crown, in this world? In such a case as this, the mere pain of dying would not be regarded by them, if they were sure that they should not actually die, but that, after this suffering, they should certainly gain their purpose. This we see in history, and in common life, continually. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that if the same persons had the same firm faith in the future glorious rewards of christianity, that they have with respect to the things of this life, it would enable them to do, and to suffer, as much in order to obtain them.

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It is only a deficiency of faith that makes persons shrink from persecution and death in the cause of christianity. Because, in reality, all the pains of this transitory life are nothing in comparison of that *eternal weight of glory* which awaits those who have *faith and patience unto death* with respect to another. This efficacious faith, which makes men superior to pain and death, is increased by that attention to the great principles of christianity, which a state of persecution almost enforces. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that if the christian faith should be again tried as it was at the first promulgation of it, and as it was at the time of the reformation, there would be as many martyrs as ever. But who they would be, it is not for us to say. The probability is, that they who suspect themselves the most, would be foremost on the glorious list.

I take this opportunity of recommending, especially to young persons, the reading of histories of persecutions. They are of excellent use to form, and to fortify, the mind ;
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giving us the clearest idea of the real power of religious principles, infusing the same into ourselves, and thereby enabling us to act as becomes christians in all circumstances. Let us not, however, expect to find perfection in men, not even in martyrs, any more than in the most exemplary characters in scripture history. There are no human examples that are patterns to us in all respects. In the strictest sense of the term, God only is good, and holy.

3. A state of prosperity is, in reality, more dangerous than a state of adversity; so that if any person can act as becomes a christian in the former, he may well presume that he would do so in the latter. If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its ten thousands. The reason of this is obvious. A state of persecution brings our religious principles into view, and interests the mind in them; whereas a state of rest makes us forget them. Other influences then insensibly steal upon us. The pleasures, or the business of the world, engage our affections. They become our chief
objects,

objects ; and religion, which ought to be of primary, becomes of secondary consideration with us ; and this is the same as if it was not attended to at all. For our Saviour has said, *He that loveth father, mother, or any thing else, more than me, is not worthy of me.* He only is justly entitled to the honourable appellation of a *christian* who postpones every thing else to it, and who sets no value upon any thing else when set in competition with it.

Whether this be our case will appear by the share that christianity has in our *thoughts*. Whatever it be that a man chiefly values he ofteneft thinks of ; and if his attention be called off to other things, it will be detained no longer than is necessary. His favourite object, whatever it be, will perpetually recur to his mind, and it will not be in the power of any thing to exclude it long.

We may judge of this by the attention which men of the world give to riches in general, or to any particular estate they may wish to purchase, or by the attention which a person of a scientific turn of mind gives to
his

his favourite objects, whether it be collecting what he thinks curious, or investigating what he thinks important. It will chiefly occupy his thoughts. Now a christian may attend to these things, and many others (for the occasions and business of life are various, and no one object, though the greatest, can possess the mind always) but with him every thing of this kind, and the world itself, which contains them all, will be of no more than secondary consideration. They occupy and amuse him for a time; but he abandons them without regret when his more favourite business and pleasure call him. So much was the mind of pious David occupied with a sense of God, his providence, and religion in general, that he says the law of God was *his meditation day and night*; and he frequently mentions the pleasure he took in thinking of God in the night watches, whenever he could not sleep. Till this be our case, we cannot be said to have attained a proper habitual devotion.

Now, such is the unavoidable influence of the world around us, that this state of mind

is not to be attained without many efforts, or a course of discipline, in which the mind must be at first constrained to look off from the things of time to those of eternity. But repeated *acts* will at length beget any *habit*. And when by this means, we shall come habitually to *set our affections on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God*, our most pleasing meditations, the subjects to which our minds will naturally revert, when no other shall be particularly pressing for attention, will be those which relate to religion. Something concerning God, or concerning Christ, and the gospel, will first present themselves, and be uppermost in our thoughts; and whenever they are diverted to other objects (which is unavoidably the case in the usual business and commerce of the world) they will recur with double strength and pleasure. It will be like the sight of a friend after a short absence?

Indeed, we make quicker advances in the *divine life*, as it may properly be called, by means of these intervals, in which the mind

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is occupied by the cares, or even the innocent pleasures, of life, than when we endeavour always to preserve a frame of direct devotion. For then, like the perpetual presence of the nearest friend, it would become dull and insipid. That generous invigorating ardour, which is experienced by men of true piety, who mix with the world, and exert themselves to be useful in it, is unknown to the professed devotee, who abstracts himself from the world, in order, as he thinks, to give himself wholly to God. This frame of fervent devotion advances like the tide in the ocean, with intervals of recesses between each flow. In this, I am confident, that I speak to the experience of all who cultivate a habit of devotion, and who attend to their own feelings.

This I observe, lest those persons who wish to cultivate this *habitual devotion*, which is the only proper test of their spiritual improvement, should be discouraged by that languor of mind, of which good men sometimes complain. It is only a call to the duties of life; after the chearful dis-

charge of which, their fervour of devotion will return with double warmth.

Unless, however, in time of prosperity, a man can attain to this state, in which religion, and the great objects of it, shall be his principal concern, he can have but little ground to conclude that he would, in time of persecution, *take up his cross, and follow Christ*; and therefore that he is one whom Christ will consider as his disciple, and of whom he will not be ashamed when he will come in his glory. But if a man can preserve a truly christian temper in prosperity; if his heart be above the world, at the same time that he lives in it, and engages in the business of it, he need not doubt but that he would approve himself a christian in time of persecution. *As his day is, his strength will be.*

4. Notwithstanding this state of outward rest, and though no person is directly persecuted for being a christian, yet the strict profession of christianity is, in reality, at all times in a state of persecution. The world in general is but nominally christian, and
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perhaps will never be wholly otherwise. For the great bulk of mankind, even in countries termed christian, have other objects than christianity, and indeed think very little about it. In consequence of this, a true christian, one who values his religion as he ought to do, who feels as he ought to feel, and who acts as he ought to act, will be regarded with dislike. His conduct will be a reproach to that of others, and he will never be carested like a man, whose virtue is of a more pliable kind, and who can accommodate himself to the prevailing taste.

To a certain degree, the principles of honour, integrity, and benevolence, will always be admired, and make a man esteemed. But that *kind of honour*, and that kind of *generosity*, which the world most admires, is very consistent with many things with which a true christian cannot comply. The common hero of our stage is by no means a christian character. And let a christian behave in a manner the farthest from stiffness and moroseness, his sentiments are so elevated, compared with those of mere men

of business or pleasure, that they cannot long accord together ; and the latter being the more numerous, will be able to keep themselves in countenance, and will regard others with aversion and disgust. Now the man who is so much a christian, as to be unmoved by this contempt of the world, and who can bear to be ridiculed for his principles at present, would, I doubt not, be able to die for them.

But there are greater sacrifices than these which a christian, in times of rest from outward persecution, must sometimes make to his integrity. The christianity of the state, the christianity of any state, neither is, nor ever was, the pure gospel of Christ. It is therefore a thing to which an enlightened christian ought to give no countenance. It is his duty to *come out of* a corrupt church, and to *be separate, to touch none of her unclean things*. If, for example, a man, or one whom you consider as a man, or even as the most exalted creature in the universe, has been made the object of *worship* to his fellow creatures, such worship is impiety and idolatry.

idolatry. To join in such worship can bear no other construction. But how many do we find, of those whose minds are enlightened, and who in other respects act as becomes christians, fail in this, if their interest, or their connexions only, lead them to compliance. Is not this trial then, if we judge from its *effects* (which alone shew its actual power) greater than that of confiscation of goods, of imprisonment, or of death? Those who have been brought up in a dissent from such worship have no idea of a trial of this kind. They have had nothing to lose, and therefore they have nothing to boast of.

The influence of the world, pleasure, ambition, and emolument, being the same upon the human mind that it ever was, it must produce the same characters. Consequently, we must not be surprized, if there should be the very temper of the scribes and pharisees of our Saviour's time, in the rulers of christian nations, and at the head of christian establishments. On the other hand, as christianity was by our Saviour compared to

a net, which took in fishes of all kinds, good and bad, we may expect that (as in that early age) the profession of christianity, and even in time of persecution, will not always purify the mind; but that there will be some unworthy characters in all christian churches. At the same time, therefore, that we justly guard against others, let us look well to ourselves.

5. Though the proper rewards of christianity will not be conferred but upon those whose christian principles will enable them to act as becomes christians on all occasions, in prosperity or adversity, in life or in death, we are not to infer that every man will *go to hell*, as we say, who is incapable of this. As there are degrees of virtue here, there will, no doubt, be proportional degrees of reward hereafter; though, speaking in a general way, we make only two classes of men, the *righteous* and the *wicked*, and say that the former will go to heaven, and the latter to hell. A man who only shrinks from a violent death in time of persecution, or who even with his mind well informed,
conforms

conforms to a corrupt establishment in time of peace, is not to be ranked with the profligate and wicked. As to those who are truly conscientious in the most idolatrous worship, I pass no censure at all upon them. And there are many excellent men, who like Mr. Firmin and others, are not convinced of the bad tendency of encouraging an idolatrous form of worship by their presence; though one would think that a very little reflexion, and the observation of its actual consequences, might soon satisfy them with respect to it.

The *wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, but the merely timorous christian is not of this class. He forfeits, no doubt, the proper rewards of christianity, but not being therefore *a wicked man*, he cannot in justice be punished as one.

When the well disposed youth in the gospel applied to our Saviour, desiring to know what he must do to inherit eternal life, and he appeared to have kept all the commands of God, *Jesus looked upon him,*
and

and loved him, though he could not bring himself to resolve to *sell all that he had, and give it to the poor*, in order to be *perfect*. It is true that he was not perfect. But he was not therefore a bad or wicked man, and in time he might come to be that great and exalted character which our Lord held out to him. *Perfect* means *full grown*, and this *fullness of stature* in the christian character, we are all to aim at. But we must first be infants, then children, and afterwards young men, before we can be full grown. There are gradations in all nature, and in virtuous attainments as well as others; and we must not *despise the day of small things*, if we wish to see greater.

6. Lastly, I would observe that true virtue is always progressive. If we be contented with any attainments that we have already made, it is a proof that, in reality, we have made very few, or none. Let not us, my brethren, be satisfied with that degree of virtue which will exempt us from the punishment due to the notoriously wicked and profligate; but let us aspire to that *perfection*

fection of character, which will denominate us christians indeed, and entitle us to live and reign with Christ, when he comes to his proper kingdom. Let not the fear of man, of any thing that they can say of us, or do to us, be a snare to us; but, unmoved by censure, or the fear of suffering, let us uniformly follow the dictates of our consciences, adhere to the strictest precepts of christianity, keep our hearts and affections above the world, and cultivate that heavenly mindedness, and entire devotedness to God, which distinguished our Lord himself; that we may hereafter partake of that glory, which he will divide with all his faithful followers, when we shall be one with him, and also with his God and Father, as they are one; when, having overcome the world, we shall sit down with him on his throne, as he has overcome, and is now sat down with his Father on his throne.

THE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY
FROM THE PERSECUTION OF
CHRISTIANS.

*And they overcame him by the blood of the
lamb, and by the word of their testimony,
and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

REV. xii. 11.

IN this emphatical language of prophecy, we have a view given us of the means by which christianity prevailed in the world, notwithstanding all the opposition that was made to it.

The kingdom of Christ was to be erected on the ruins of the kingdom of Satan, that is, truth and virtue were to take place of error, superstition, and vice, though the latter were supported by all the powers of
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the world, and the former had no visible, no external, support whatever.

In the prophecy of Daniel the same thing was represented by a little inconsiderable *stone, cut out of a mountain without hands*, which, falling upon a great image, or statue, of gold, silver, copper, and iron (a work of immense labour and expence) broke it in pieces, and then of itself grew to be *a great mountain, filling the whole earth*.

The progress of christianity is a most interesting object of speculation, and must appear truly wonderful when it is considered that it prevailed by means the very reverse of what might have been expected, and which have been used to establish other systems of religion or philosophy, and the corruptions of christianity itself. Other religions had either the aid of *power*, or at least of the *learning* of the age and countries in which they were established. The founders of them were either conquerors, legislators, or men who were distinguished in life; so that independently of the *doctrines*

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they

they promulgated, they appeared in a respectable light to the world.

On the contrary, the founder of christianity was an obscure person, a common mechanic, in a country the inhabitants of which were despised by the rest of the world; without the advantage of any learned education, where the greatest account was made of that advantage, and where persons destitute of it were held in contempt. In this low and abject state he continued till, at the age of thirty, he assumed the character of a public teacher. But, exciting the envy of the rulers of the country, he was apprehended and condemned to death, both by the highest court of judicature in the country, and also the sentence of the Roman governor, and he was executed as a common malefactor, viz. by *crucifixion*, a mode of execution more ignominious than any that is in use among us.

The first followers of Christ were, in general, of the same low rank in life with himself, wholly destitute of *power*, or of *policy*.

policy. They were all their lives persecuted, as he had been, and many of them died violent deaths. Such was, in general, the fate of the avowed professors of christianity for near three centuries, in all which time this religion, notwithstanding, kept gaining ground, till it finally established itself on the ruins of the system which had every support that the power or policy of man, or a reverence for the most remote antiquity, could give it; a system on the rites of which it was imagined that the well being of states absolutely depended, and which all the learning and philosophy of the age were employed to support. The rites of the popular religion were also as *captivating*, as they were esteemed *sacred*, and gave the greatest countenance to that kind of *dissoluteness of manners* for which men are glad to find some pretence, and also to that *barbarity* to which they have always been too much prone.

What then were the means by which christianity, thus extraordinarily circumstanced, did make its way in the world, till,
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in the natural course of things, the very powers which opposed it came to be on its side; learned writers, from being heathen, becoming Christian, and without any convulsion in the state, the Roman emperors themselves professing christianity, and all the world being disposed to prefer the new religion to the old? They were, as we are informed in my text, the death of the founder of christianity, and the testimony of his followers to his doctrine, miracles, and resurrection, sealed with their blood. It is of importance to consider *how* these operated to produce this great effect, and what instruction for our own conduct we may derive from the facts.

If we consider the nature of christianity, and the object of it, we shall see that it could not be established by any other means than these, how ill adapted soever they may, on a superficial view of things, appear to answer the end.

What is christianity, but that firm belief in a future life which produces the proper regulation of man's conduct in this?

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In order to give mankind the most satisfactory evidence of a future life, Christ was commissioned to teach that doctrine, as from God, to confirm it by miracles, and what was more, to exemplify it by himself dying and rising from the dead. In the nature of things, nothing more could be done, to give mankind the most absolute assurance of a fact in which they were so much interested.

Any attempt to gain belief to this, or any doctrine, by *power*, would have been unavailing and absurd. Men may be compelled to *act* as they are directed, because all the motions of their bodies are subject to their wills; and power may supply motives to operate on the will. While men are under constraint, they may find an interest in such compliances as nothing but constraint could enforce. But a man's *faith* is not in his own power. He may *do* what he pleases, if he have the natural power of doing it; but he cannot *believe* as he pleases, nor without sufficient evidence. Thus though a man may be compelled to say that *two and two*

make five, or that England is a peninsula contiguous to France, he cannot really *think* so, let him endeavour it ever so much.

It is evident, therefore, that nothing could make mankind *believe* that Christ wrought miracles, that he died, and rose from the dead, and therefore that there is a future life, to which themselves will be raised, but the proper *evidence* of the truth of those facts. And in distant ages, in which persons can have no opportunity of inquiring into the truth of the facts for themselves, the only evidence to them is the full conviction that they who *had* that opportunity did believe them. This is the only foundation of faith in all ancient history. We ourselves are, as it were, but *of yesterday*, and can know but little of past transactions. But men exactly like ourselves have lived in all ages. Their eyes, ears, and natural judgments of things, were the same that ours are; and as we think it reasonable to expect that posterity should receive our testimony with respect to things of which we are witnesses, we cannot refuse our assent to any thing

thing of which we have the sufficient testimony of those who have gone before us. A regard to truth is equally common to all ages; and there is no motive to falsify that is not the same at all times. We therefore know at this day how to guard against imposition with respect to past transactions, just as well as with respect to recent and present ones.

That Christ, his apostles, and immediate followers, were themselves fully persuaded of the truths which they taught, their conduct abundantly proves. Would Christ have submitted to be put to death, and especially to so cruel and ignominious a death, if he had not had the fullest persuasion that God would raise him from the dead? Would the apostles, and first disciples, have asserted that he did die, and rise again, and have persisted in giving this testimony through life, notwithstanding all the hardships and persecution they endured in consequence of it, if they had not been fully persuaded that the facts were true, and also of the greatest importance?

But I mean to enlarge more particularly on the evidence of christianity from the sufferings of the professors of it in the early ages. The world, and the powers of darkness, were overcome by *the blood of the lamb*, by *the testimony of the apostles*, and especially by their *not loving their lives unto the death*, or their not scrupling to die rather than renounce their faith. How the *death of Christ* operated to the great end of establishing his gospel, I have largely illustrated in a preceding discourse. I shall therefore now content myself with explaining the evidence that christianity derives from the persecution and martyrdom of his followers, and shewing the impropriety of attempting to promote his religion by any means besides *persuasion*, and *patient suffering*, as an instrument of persuasion.

I have already observed, that the only evidence we now can have of the reality of those facts on which the truth of christianity depends, is the firm belief of them by those who had the best opportunity of informing themselves concerning them, in
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the age in which they were transacted. That conduct of theirs, therefore, which shall appear to be the best adapted to express their firm persuasion, is the most favourable to this evidence. Now we cannot imagine in what manner any person can express his firm persuasion of the *truth*, or the *value*, of any set of principles, more strongly than by his suffering and dying for them. The comforts of life, and especially life itself, are dear to every man, as we may judge from our own feelings. No man, therefore, will sacrifice them without a firm persuasion of his receiving a full equivalent for their loss. This full equivalent for every thing in this world, the christian believes that he has in a world to come. And it is the express declaration of Christ, that the happiness intended for his followers in a future world cannot be secured without abandoning every thing in this life, and life itself, if they cannot be retained in consistency with the profession of his religion. And we find that they even joyfully bore the *loss of all things*, and did not even *hold*

454 *The Evidence of Christianity from their lives dear unto them* whenever their profession of christianity demanded the sacrifice.

Whence then could arise that full assurance of faith, which this conduct manifests, but from the evidence of their own senses, that what they related of Christ, and especially concerning his resurrection, was true? On his death all his disciples, and the apostles among the rest, forsook him and fled. What then could have given them courage to reassemble, and to preach boldly in his name, in the face of danger and of death, but the certain knowledge that he was risen from the dead, of which themselves, and themselves only, were the proper witnesses? The testimony of strangers would never have satisfied them. They did not even give credit to one another, but, naturally enough, insisted on the most satisfactory *personal evidence*, of a fact in which they were so much interested. Since, therefore, they did all assert that they *had* received this personal evidence of the resurrection of Christ (and their account of it is so circumstantial, and so

so natural in all respects, as to give us no suspicion of a fallacy) we have all the evidence of the truth of this remarkable fact that it is possible for us, at this distance of time, to have.

Still, however, there would have been room to doubt, if they had not *persisted* in their testimony, and if they had not also had both sufficient *opportunity*, and sufficient *motives* to consider, and reconsider the thing. Now the witnesses were numerous, and, living together, they must have had frequent opportunities of conversing with one another on the subject, and of comparing their observations. And surely no *motive* could be wanting, when all the happiness of their lives, and even life itself, was depending. If they had been suffered to live unmolested, they would have derived no advantage from maintaining an imposture; but still it might have been said that they had no great inducement to divulge the secret; and that, in different circumstances, the truth might have been *extorted* from them. They were not *put to the question*, as it is called.

How satisfactory then is the evidence of the truth of christianity from the testimony of almost all its proper witnesses, *as sealed with their blood*, and therefore not given without the most deliberate consideration, and in opposition to the strongest inducements to declare the reverse of what they did. No circumstances, therefore, can be imagined in which testimony shall be more credible. It was the testimony of men unquestionably the best informed concerning the facts, and who could have no motive to impose upon the world with respect to them, if it had been in their power; because they evidently had nothing to gain by it, but, on the contrary, were unspeakable losers. Their prospect of reward was not in *this*, but in *another* world. And no interest can be imagined to have enlisted them into the service of a dead impostor.

How much more convincing is this kind of evidence, than that of men who draw their swords in defence of any cause? The man who *fights* hopes to get the victory, and most probably expects to secure to himself

himself some temporal advantage. This, therefore, may well be supposed to have been his object from the first; and with such motives as these, what frauds, as well as villainies of all kinds, will not men attempt? It cannot by any means, therefore, be inferred that a man may not fight for a falsehood, provided it promises to be a gainful one.

This circumstance renders the testimony of the followers of Mahomet so justly suspicious. As he led them not to *martyrdom*, but to *battle*, they might hope to be gainers by their attachment to him, though they had known him to be an impostor; and might then contribute to impose upon others. His success in war might, however, in time give even *them* an idea that his designs were countenanced by God. In this state of things, many insignificant circumstances would be interpreted into divine attestations. But does it at all follow that the men who fought with Mahomet, would have submitted to a voluntary and painful death rather than relinquish their faith in his divine mission?

This

This is highly improbable, especially as he exhibited nothing that could be called a *miracle*, or any proper token of God being with him.

We see then the infinite superiority of the pretensions of Christ to those of Mahomet, or of any who have endeavoured to establish a religion by *violence*. Our Lord, confiding in the power of *truth*, disclaimed all other aid, and therefore ordered his disciples not to *fight*, but to *die*; trusting that the deaths of some would be such an evidence of their firm persuasion of the truth for which they suffered, and of the infinite importance of it, that though those disciples would be lost to the world, the loss would be abundantly made up by others, who would be gained by their means. And so many converts were, in fact, gained by this means, as to give rise to the saying, *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church*.

So much confidence had our Saviour in this natural method of propagating his religion, founded on *truth*, that he strictly forbade any other; and on one occasion he seems
to

to have foretold that, if ever his disciples should have recourse to violence, it would be fatal to themselves. When Peter, in order to defend his master, drew his sword, and smote a servant of the high-priest, he had him *put up his sword into the scabbard*; saying, *they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*. Whether this was delivered with a prophetic spirit or not, it is remarkable, that when bodies of christians have attempted even to defend themselves by arms, they have generally been overpowered, and have suffered more in consequence of it, than they probably would have done by yielding to the storm. The friends of reformation in France, in Hungary, and in Germany, who opposed force to force, were always defeated, and the progress of the reformation was evidently retarded in consequence of it.

I would farther observe, that violence in support of truth is utterly contrary to the nature and genius of the christian religion; as it supposes a temper of mind inconsistent with it, viz. hatred and revenge. It may
be

be pretended that religious wars and persecutions are undertaken with no other view than to correct and reform, or to punish some as a warning to others; and I do not say that this is absolutely impossible, or that there never have been pious and well meaning persecutors. But the great probability is, that this has been nothing more than a pretence for having recourse to violent methods. In general, it is but too apparent, that they who have engaged in those scenes of blood have been actuated by a spirit of greater rancour than those who have engaged in civil contests. We cannot conceive any thing more diabolical, as we may say, than the spirit with which the persecution of the Protestants was always carried on by the Papists. How then can it be right to propagate christianity in a way in which the christian spirit and character must be abandoned?

Not only should we forbear all violence in the propagation of christianity itself, but in enforcing any particular doctrine of it. What christianity in general disclaims, ought
not

not to be admitted in any thing belonging to it. And not only should we avoid all actual violence, but every thing that approaches to it, as anger and abuse. If calm reasoning fail, *those* are not likely to succeed. It is the free and chearful assent of the understanding that is to be gained, and to this anger and reproach are not at all calculated to contribute. A degree of *earnestness*, suited to the subject, is proper to shew our own conviction of the truth and importance of our principles; but every thing beyond this christianity strictly forbids. At every thing that favours of *force* the mind of man revolts, and hardens itself. It is felt as an insult, and a provocation, and will be repented. In consequence, ourselves, and our opinions, will appear in an odious light.

As we must not make use of violence or abuse ourselves, so we should take it patiently when it is offered by others. It is generally a proof that our adversaries have nothing better to offer, and therefore is a presumption that we have *truth* on our side; and surely the sense of *this* may well enable

us to bear up under any insult to which we may be exposed. The apostles rejoiced that they were *counted worthy to suffer shame* in the cause of Christ; and so shall we, if we have their temper, and the same firm persuasion that the cause in which we engage is a good one, and consequently that *in proper time* it will *appear* to be so; when all the insult and reproach that have been thrown upon us will recoil upon those who had recourse to them.

A state of persecution has been the lot of truly good men, and especially of all great and distinguished characters, whose aim has been to reform abuses, and introduce new light into the minds of men, in all ages. It was, therefore, with reason that our Saviour said to his disciples, Luke vi. 26. *Wo unto you when all men speak well of you, for so did the Jews of the false prophets.* If the world love us, it is a proof that we love the world, and conform to it, that is, to the follies and vices of it. Whenever, therefore, we find ourselves in this situation, we ought to suspect ourselves, and aim at higher degrees
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of purity and excellence, aspiring to that truly dignified conduct, which the bulk of mankind, not being equal to, will view with dislike, as reproaching themselves, though on some occasions they cannot fail to admire it.

To distinguish ourselves from the world we have no occasion to affect any peculiar austerity of manner, and much less seclude ourselves from the world. We must live in it, and make it our study to improve it. We are to have our *conversation, or citizenship in heaven*, and live as those who are *strangers and pilgrims here*. But while we reside in the world, though not as *citizens* of it, or properly *belonging to it*, we must do the duties of it, live as social beings, and discharge, in the most exemplary manner, whatever is incumbent upon us in the various relations of life, doing good against evil, and *overcoming evil with good*.

Thus will our light shine *before men*, not in a cloister; and others *seeing our good works will glorify our father who is in heaven*. We shall walk *worthy of God to all well*

pleasing, being perfect in every good word and work to do his will; and having done the proper duty of this life, having fought the good fight of faith, and having finished our Christian course with joy, with joy even in the midst of tribulation, an abundant entrance will be administered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Having suffered with him, we shall also reign with him, and be glorified together.

F I N I S.

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