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Natural and revealed Religion at Variance :

A CURIOUS
CONTROVERSY
BETWEEN THE
Bishop of London,

A N D
DR. THOMAS SHERLOCK,

FOUND IN THE
Fourth Volume of several DISCOURSES

Preached at the
TEMPLE-CHURCH,

BY THE LATE
MASTER of the TEMPLE.

Caleb Fleming

A just conception of God is the right rule to form our judgments by, in all particular matters of religion, and the only thing that can secure us from either atheism or superstition.

Dr. SHERLOCK.

The fall of man was the loss of so many subjects to Christ, their natural Lord, under God, in virtue of his having created them.

Bishop of LONDON.

L O N D O N :

Printed for W. FENNER, at the Angel and Bible in Pater-noster-row ; and C. HENDERSON under the Royal-Exchange. 1758. [Price Sixpence.]

[The text on this page is extremely faint and illegible due to the quality of the scan. It appears to be a multi-paragraph document.]



Natural and revealed Religion at Variance, &c.

WE shall endeavour to state the controversy between the *Bishop of London*, and his opponent, *Dr. Thomas Sherlock*; as it is concerned with some principles of natural and revealed religion.

It is not expected that in his Lordship's advanced age, he should retain that strength of recollection and judgment, sufficient to render him capable of making proper distinction and decision in the merits of the debate.

Observations had been made, by the reverend Mr. *Charles Bulkley*, on his three former discourses;—but, as he is no other, nor any better than a little schismatical dissenting teacher, it was not likely his *Lordship*, or his *Editors* should so far forget themselves, and step out of the road of priesthood, to take notice of a writer, who was so stupid, as to maintain, that the revelation has been made to man, as well by nature and reason, as by divinely inspired writings. And that these do and must universally harmonize.

Or, that the light of nature has not been wholly and absolutely insufficient for the purposes of religion. — A man of such a fanatical cast, richly deserved the inattention of ecclesiastical contempt.

Dr. *Sherlock* has indeed confessed, in this fourth Volume, that

“*Cornelius was a Gentile, no observer of the law of Moses.*” p. 328.

But though this concession would imply, perhaps, full as much, as that fanatical teacher can ask for: yet it must have far more significance *where* it is found, than an hundred such propositions in his insolent performance.

As to the doctrine of *remission*; a very capital doctrine in the religion of man, *Bulkley*, it is true, pointed out much obscurity, and great confusion in the Bishop's three discourses, as they had to do with this doctrine: but that was extremely trifling, and deserved no sort of correction in the fourth Volume; on the contrary, it is spit upon with the utmost prelatical indignation. And now

The Bishop declares,

“*Christ has reconciled God to us. He has procured our pardon.*” p. 103. This, you may rely upon as an undoubted truth; for the Bishop has said it. He has thus peremptorily, and without any hesitation said it. The truth you have now *in verbum sacerdotis*.

dotis. Who would dare to dispute the certainty? None; unless he chooses to be church-damned. — swallow without mastication, or examination. — Read not the Scriptures — they may raise scruples in you, for these have never said any thing like it. They report the *enmity* as lying wholly in the sinner. And accordingly, they beseech *him* to be reconciled to God. — But then, the apostles *were but apostles*. And though they write according to the best of their judgment, yet they never so much as mention any attempt ever made, either by their master, or any other, *to reconcile God to men*. Nor have given one hint of our pardon being procured, any other way than by our personal repentance and reformation. But who can help their ignorance? Had they lived in later ages, and been favoured with the advantage of learned interpretations and commentaries on their writings, they might have known much better. —

As to such who want to see the evidence of the truth of this proposition, they seem too impertinently curious; and therefore may expect an episcopal reproof.

So the good Bishop, watchful over his flock, —

“*You cannot see that the death of Christ was a proper means to reconcile God to sinners. — Does it belong to you, or to your offended master, to judge what are the proper means of reconciliation?*” p. 103.

“*The*

"The counsels of God are too deep to be fathomed by the short line of human reason: and surely this can be no news, no surprize to a considering man, who sees every day the same truth confirmed in an hundred instances."

p. 104.

What then are there of those curious inquiries which we should discourage? Has God made a mystery, an impenetrable mystery of the means and method of our comfort, peace and life? He has not hid from us the means of our temporal animal supply and succour, nourishment and support. And has he been less liberal in opening to us the methods and means of our spiritual support? With the *prelate's* good leave, we are here too much interested, to admit of any thing dark, dubious, or uncertain. And we now naturally expect full information in the terms of pardon or remission. The tranquility of our minds does absolutely depend on the satisfactory judgment we form of the term or condition. And verily, the blessed Jesus has divinely shewn us, the true nature of remission; that it wholly depends on our own penitence and disposition to forgive those who offend us. That prayer so universally made by Christians—*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*: is in full evidence. And especially, as we add, our blessed Lord's own enforcement; *for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father*

ther will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

But notwithstanding this plainness and simplicity in the doctrine of remission, and its universal instruction, there must be something supposed in it very mysterious, else it will not require the explications and illustrations of the learned. *Priestcraft* can have no advantage for its own support and influence, if once the doctrine of remission be made intelligible, and as clear to the clown as to the cleric. All the power of superstitious tyranny becomes a phantom, if nothing more than personal penitence, is the stipulated term of pardon in the divine constitutions. But the full manifestation of this doctrine, was reserved to be the glory of the Gospel Scheme. And because the divine Jesus has given mankind the utmost assurance of it, he has deserved the name of a redeemer and saviour.—

It is not because of the darkness, or mystery that covers moral truth from the eye of man, that it deserves from us any veneration. For the more remote it lies from the understanding or discernment of man, and the more remote it will be from his attention or concern.

Notwithstanding this, the *second* and *third* of the Bishop's discourses contain a misrepresentation of the Gospel doctrine.

Dr. Sher-

Dr. *Sherlock's* observation is here pertinent.

"There is nothing more complained of, and yet nothing more commonly practised, among all parties, than the perverting the Holy Scriptures, to support and maintain the opinions and doctrines, which are the distinguishing marks and characters of different communions. This holds true of all sects, in proportion as they have departed from the genuine doctrines and practices of Christianity, for all sects equally labour to maintain their tenets, and more or less pervert the Scriptures, as they have more or less gone astray from it."
p. 169.

Methinks we may be allowed to understand the Bishop, as very intimately concerned in this observation. At least, he will allow us to conclude, that as he is a leader of one sect, so far as that sect, to which he belongs, has gone astray from the sense of Scripture; so far he has equally laboured to maintain those tenets which pervert the Scriptures. His *four Volumes of discourses* may be subpœnied in evidence.

Dr. *Sherlock* denies that the *Bishop of London* has any authority belonging to his interpretations.

"The apostles themselves were but teachers and witnesses of the faith, and had no authority or commission to make new articles of faith." p. 315.

And

And in the Bishop's twelfth discourse, the *Doctor* thus contends for the New Testament writings themselves, as *the faith once delivered to the saints* : and says, “ *if they (the papists) urge us with the authority of the Church which has received their articles? Our answer is; no church has, nor have all churches together, any authority to make articles of faith; that Christ Jesus was the author and the finisher of the faith, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken.*”
p. 336.

This is truly protestant, and worthy a Christian teacher; but how far it is consistent with a prelate on a civil establishment, who has subscribed the 20th *article*, and encourages others to do it, is not so evident; for that *article* does expressly affirm, that “ *the Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in matters of faith.*” And the 8th *article* affirms, “ *the three creeds, Nice creed, Athanasius creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.*” How does the Subscription of these articles agree with the *Bishop of London's* sincerity, when his *Doctor* declares, that no church has, nor have all churches together, any authority to make articles of faith? If any sort of solution can be given to this, it will, I am persuaded, rather astonish than

convince a mind that has been accustomed to reasoning, and can assent only with evidence.

We will now proceed to some other observations made by this celebrated writer, in this *fourth* volume of his discourses. They are laid down by him as fundamental principles, which govern the mind of man in its religious conceptions and operations. Take the following Specimen from

Doctor Sherlock.

"A just conception of God, of his excellencies and perfections, is the true foundation of religion. This just conception of God, is the right rule to form our judgments by, in all particular matters of religion, and the only thing that can secure us from atheism or superstition."

p. 132.

Again, *"Take from the notion of God any of his moral perfections that belong to it, and you will find such alteration must influence religion likewise, which will degenerate in the same proportion as the notion of God is corrupted."*

p. 141.

Again, *"Natural religion is the foundation upon which revelation stands : and therefore revelation can never supersede natural religion without destroying itself."* p. 143.

Again, *"The gospel was given not to exclude, but to assist the exercise of reason."* p. 153.

And once more, *"The Gospel has all the perfection requisite in a law designed for the government*

vernment and instruction of rational creatures.”
p. 156.

The *Bishop of London* thus argues :

“ Does it belong to you, or to your offended master, to judge what are the proper means of reconciliation? If to him only, (and surely that is the case) why do you debate a point (of revelation) in which you have no interest or concern, further than to accept the blessing, upon whatever motives it was granted?”

I must beg leave to remark, though the Bishop does not put in the words of revelation, which I have inserted between crotchets, yet every intelligent reader will see *the point* forbidden to be debated, is a point of the last importance in the revelation, as it respects the terms of remission ; but how this sort of representation will agree in the Gospel, with the propositions laid down by Doctor *Sherlock*, as the fundamentals of all religion, is a matter of further consideration.

The Bishop

Has given us a discourse, in four parts, upon *Philippians* ii. 6 — 11. The Doctor begins with telling his audience, “ The words now read to you, have been strongly debated by christians differing in opinion about the person and dignity of our Blessed Saviour ; and, as they are often handled, lead more certainly to the knowledge of the interpreter’s opinion than of the Apostle’s.

I intend not to press them into the service of any particular opinion, but fairly to expound them ; and to infer nothing from them, but what may evidently be shewn to be in them, even by the necessity of the Apostle's argument."
p. 1, 2.

But if the *Arian* hypothesis did ever discover its most flagrant absurdities in any writer, it must be owned in the episcopal parts of these discourses. Had I been ever so much prejudiced in the opinion, they would have alarmed my jealousies, and created in me strong suspicions of error and delusion. But let the reader judge for himself by the following citations made from the Bishop.

" St. Paul says, he did not greedily retain his equality with God, which, supposing the equality to belong to him, is a very great, the greatest instance of humility." p. 24.

" The humility of Christ consisted in changing willingly a glorious for an inglorious condition."

" The form of God belongs to God only. p. 34."

" Christ appeared under the Old Testament, in the real majesty of his Father." *ibid.*

The Doctor says,

" The fashion of a man denotes those proper and distinguishing characters which belong to a man as such, by which he is known to be what he is ; that is, by which he is known to be a man, and not any other kind of being." p. 41.

He

"He was not only a man in appearance and in likeness, but in reality, having the same common nature, distinguished by the same specific difference." p. 32.

And yet saith the Bishop:

"His nature he could not lay aside." p. 33. He laid aside nothing but the fashion; *"for that equality which he had laid aside, being nothing else but the σχῆμα Θεῶν, the fashion, or truly divine and majestic appearance of God."* ibid.

Before we are told, *the form of God belongs to God only; and the fashion of a man, is that by which he is known to be a man.* And Jesus Christ was not only a man in appearance but in reality, having the same common nature, distinguished by the same specific difference!

Again saith the Bishop.

"Jesus Christ emptied himself of what? not of his being or nature, but of the glories and majesty belonging to him." p. 42.

And, *"The very Lord of life, upholding all things by the word of his power, was superior to the necessity of human nature, and subject to death only because he chose to die."* p. 49.

"It was humility therefore to become man. After he was man, it was humility to die." ib.

Can any rational spirit go over these representations without some disgust? The Legerdemain of a Juggler, the Magic of a Sorcerer,

Sorcerer, could not more amaze and astonish! nor less enlighten and inform the human mind. And these things drop from the same pen, that says, "*Just conceptions of God are the foundation of all religion.*"

"*And this just conception of God is the right rule to form our judgments by in all particular matters of religion, and the only thing which can secure us from Atheism and Superstition. That the Gospel was given, not to exclude, but to assist the exercise of reason.*"

But the Bishop is yet more extravagant if possible.

"*Something of this sort seems to be intimated in Scripture. The fall of man was the loss of so many subjects to the Christ, their natural Lord, under God, in virtue of his having created them.*" p. 83.

Here is the character of creator affixed to Christ, and of sovereign too, in virtue of his having created. How this *Lordship*, grounded on creation, can be said to be under God, is not easy to conceive or imagine. Is not this to take from God those very excellencies and perfections, which are the true foundation of all religion? And how was Jesus the natural Lord of men by creation, and they his subjects, with another God, to whom this universal creator himself was subordinate?

Dr. *Sherlock* somewhat varies,

" God

“ God put all things immediately under him, making him head over all, and consequently entitled him to that worship and to those honours, which were not before paid him. Christ Jesus was indeed subservient to the father in the creation of the worlds.” p. 55.

I have said, the Doctor differs from the Bishop, and with reason have I said it : for though they here agree in saying, that Christ was *under God* and *subservient* to the father in creating : yet, they widely disagree in affirming the Creator, the natural Lord of the creation, who by man’s fall lost so many subjects, is, in consequence of being made head over all, entitled to that worship, and to those honours which were never before paid him. At least, if here be no contradiction, there is confusion : for it will not be easy to form any notion of a father or a God, that was not the creator and natural Lord, *only looking on*, i. e. in vertue of his not having created ! And if the father be the natural Lord because he was superior to the creator, and the Creator was indeed subservient to the father in the creation of the worlds ; it will then be evident, as far as language can make it so, that the terms, *under God* and *subservient to the father*, and *God’s putting all things immediately under him*, and *making him head over all*, do import and expressly denote, an inequality between God the father and the creator.

creator. And that consequently, there is dependence and derivation.

No ; sais the Bishop.

“ *The glories of nature, and the glories of office are very different and distinct glories. The apostle considers Jesus Christ as the same person in all his different states, of glory, humility, and exaltation : the same nature which he had being in the form of God, the same he had in his state of humiliation, and now has in his state of exaltation.——The exaltation of any person does not consist in a change of nature, or natural powers, but in acquired honours and authority. When a man is raised to be a King, he is still a man, without increase or diminution, though he receives new honours and new authority.*” p. 53, 54.

But what sais the Doctor ?

“ *Thus much we collect from the apostle’s reasoning ; and discern plainly ; that the pre-eminence of Christ as head of the church, is connected and related to his pre-eminence as head of the creation.*” p. 84.

We have here in both such an association of ideas, as seems to resemble the *resveries* of an Enthusiast, who is transported with illuminations and visions ! and who shook hands, before he ascended these heights, with reason and common sense, scorning to be confined to any of the laws of nature.

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This distinction of the glories of nature and office, is to effect miraculous things! and will give us a key to enter the chambers of the marvellous. But there is something unlucky, in the illustration, of a man raised to be a King. For though he has no change made thereby, in his natural powers; yet, there is a confessed acquisition of honour and authority. He receives new honour and new authority. And they who confer it, the people, are supposed the fountain of power. From them he derives his authority. But in the case before us, Jesus Christ is not only said to be equal with God, but to be God. "*Forasmuch as the form of God belongs to God only.*" p. 34. And not only so, "*but under the Old Testament he appeared in the real majesty of his father.*" *ibid.* We might therefore ask, what possible change of condition and state, he could be liable unto? Is it supposeable, that God the father could have passed through the states of glory, humiliation, and exaltation? Or have become a man, not only in appearance, but in reality, having the same common nature? Will not the Doctor say, this would be blasphemy to affirm of the one God the father? Then we may affirm it blasphemy, to say this of the creator of all things. For he who made the worlds, and who is not only equal with God, but God, could not
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possibly sustain any alterations; unless he could cease to be, what in nature he immutably and eternally is. And an acquisition of honours and authority, cannot be supposed of the creator of all things.

Besides, we shall find the Bishop confessing, that his Christ was absolutely incapable of the inconveniences and infirmities of human nature; and consequently, the whole of his emptying of himself, was no such thing as any degree of emptying; but he remained the same almighty, and all-perfect being he ever was! and though in reality a man, yet he was no way affected with the frailties of humanity: “*For the very Lord of life, upholding all things by the word of his power, was superior to the necessity of human nature, and subject to death, only because he chose to die.*” p. 49.

Thus the Bishop has represented the whole of the transmigration of the God, into no more than the appearance of a change; and has, at one single stroke, dashed and blotted out the whole of the sufferings and humiliations of Jesus Christ. —

There is another absurdity, among a thousand, that crowd around the Bishop's interpretations, which should by no means be omitted, and that is, “*The fall of man was the loss of so many subjects to the Christ, their natural Lord, under God; in virtue of his having created them.*” p. 83. And yet,
“*under*

"under the Old Testament he appeared in the real majesty of his father." p. 34.

The Bishop has made him ample amends for his original loss, for he has given him the possession of the real majesty of his father, antecedently to his changing his glorious for an inglorious condition : or, before *"his having the fashion of a man, which denotes those proper and distinguishing characters which belong to a man as such, by which he is known to be a man, and not any other kind of being."* p. 41.

So that we have more of the marvellous than might at first be imagined, for besides the creator's divesting himself of his glory and majesty as the creator of all things, taking this fashion of a man, he divested himself also of that real majesty of his father, in which he had appeared under the Old Testament ! How he came by that real majesty of his father, I do not remember the *Bishop* has told us. But I should imagine, that he had, in his own conceptions, invested Jesus Christ with these supreme honours, in order to compensate the loss he had sustained, as creator, by the fall of man, who had revolted thereby from their subjection to their natural Lord, who was so in virtue of his having created them. But then, I have thus quite lost all idea of the father. He becomes absorbed in the person of Christ, who appeared under the

Old Testament in the real majesty of the father.—Well; grant that during this dispensation there was no other God but Jesus Christ the creator and natural Lord, wholly possessed of the real majesty of the father: how comes it to pass, the Old Testament writings never take the least notice of this majesty of Jesus Christ? And why have none of the Evangelists ever mentioned any thing like it? Three of them have used no phrase that would indulge such a wanton imagination. Of which we are absolutely assured. And though *John* has some phrases which are expressive of the dignity of our Lord's mission and character; yet they are far from admitting any such construction, in a careful view of them. We own, he does, in his introduction, make mention of the creative wisdom and power, under the term, WORD. But this was a familiar term among the Jews, and understood by them to mean nothing more nor less, than the authority and energy of God. And so the *word of the Lord* gave authority to the prophets of old. It was but natural to St. *John*, who had continued in *Judea* till about the beginning of the Jewish wars, when he was writing the life of Christ, to use a phrase so common among the Jews, to denote the divine mission of Jesus, when he says, *the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* i. e. there was all the possible evidence given of the
divine

divine mission of Jesus. And such were the communications of light, wisdom and knowledge, that *he had the spirit given him without measure.* So that the Evangelist represents him as far superior to all the prophets: for Jesus could say of himself, that *no man has ascended up into heaven, but he who came down from heaven, even the son of man who is in heaven.* And when the Jews ask him, whether he was greater than their father *Abraham?* He replies, *before Abraham was, I am.* Thus plainly asserting his being of superior importance, in the system, to *Abraham.* And he pleads with God, in his prayer, that he would confer that glory upon him, which he had with him, in his design and purpose before the world was. — Many other phrases are peculiar to St. *John*, which have respect to the divine mission of Jesus: but which he has abundantly made plain, by giving us those declarations which our Lord makes of his deriving all his wisdom, and power, and dignity from the father. Expressly owning his dependence on him, for all his significance and importance to mankind.

The apostles must therefore be understood in conformity and agreement with these Gospel representations. And when they speak of God's having created all things by Jesus Christ, they can have no sort of allusion to the origination of the world; but to a *new creation,*

creation, in which he is made head of all principality, power, and dominion.

This easy, familiar, plain, and consistent interpretation, it seems will not do; and yet we have seen,

The Doctor owning,

“ That God put all things immediately under him; making him head over all, and consequently entitled him to that worship, and to those honours, which were not before paid him.”

P. 55.

In our sense of Scripture, this comes nearer to the truth of the case; and is a frank and full acknowledgment of his subordinacy and dependency on God. It will prove, he is not God: has no equality with the Father: and is under him as a minister, whom he has pleased to honour and distinguish because of his obedience. And indeed the apostle has shewn, that though God has highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess him Lord — yet this is to the glory of God the Father.

But how shall we be able to understand this exaltation of Jesus Christ, which rises no higher, at its utmost, than that of his being Lord: and does not ultimately centre in him neither; but in the glory of God the Father! This can never consist with his having been the natural Lord of the world, as the Creator
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of all things, and as having appeared in the real majesty of the Father under the Old Testament dispensation. We may reasonably ask, what now becomes of the Bishop's distinction of nature and office, by which he would artfully gain upon his audience, and divert from the sight of evidence. What, I say, becomes of his distinction? Will the Bishop presume to say, that the exaltation of Jesus is either superior, or even equal to his glory and dignity as natural Lord from creation, or as having appeared in the real majesty of the Father? His threefold distinction does him no kind of service: for his "*three states of dignity, of humiliation, and of exaltation, which, he says, makes all the difficulty vanish,*" p. 12. will avail him of no kind of advantage; but is a *whimsy*, that may well be put among the creatures of a fertile and ungoverned imagination. But the Bishop has been accustomed to deal in *sophisms*, more than in the rules of sober and just reasonings. Witness his controversy with HOADLEY.

In the Bishop's scheme, there is a view had to a vicarious sacrifice, a proper and real propitiation, a reconciliation of God.

"For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself. The scheme of thought which runs through this passage of scripture, seems to be this; that as Christ was the head
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of the creation, and made all things, so when God thought fit to restore the world from sin, it pleased him that Christ should be the head also of this new work, the first-born from the dead himself, and the giver of life to every believer : for this purpose he made peace by the blood of his cross, and reconciled all things to God, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. Thus much we collect from the apostle's reasoning; and discern plainly, that the pre-eminence of Christ, as head of the Church, is connected and related to his pre-eminence as head of the creation." p. 84.

But what saith Doctor Sherlock ?

" Natural religion is the foundation upon which revelation stands ; and therefore revelation can never supersede natural religion, without destroying itself." p. 143.

" The Gospel was given not to exclude, but to assist the exercise of reason." p. 153.

" The Gospel has all the perfection requisite in a law designed for the government and instruction of rational creatures." p. 156.

These several clear and strong propositions of the Doctor's, will allow and countenance our reasoning on the above observation and interpretation of the Bishop.—And we ask him these questions.

How could it please the Father, that in Jesus Christ should all fulness dwell, in consequence of his having made peace by the blood of his cross, when there could be nothing

thing real in his humiliation or sufferings, "*for this very Lord of life, upholding all things by the word of his power, was superior to the necessity of human nature, and subject to death only because he chose to die.*" p. 49. Is there any thing in the mere appearance to propitiate an offended Deity? Or, how shall we consider it as the pleasure of the father, that in Christ all fulness should dwell, in consequence of his sufferings, when he had, under the Old Testament, appeared in the real majesty of the father? Should we not rather conclude, with Muggleton, "*that when Jesus Christ died, God died; and then there was no God at all remaining!*" This extravagance does not exceed the interpretations of our Bishop.

Again, here is nothing, even in this text, which he thought so much to his purpose, that will favour his interpretation of the Gospel Scheme, or Christ's reconciling God to us. Here, in the text, it is reconciling all things to himself. And moreover, this effect is brought about by the blood of his cross, and therefore all fulness does not dwell in Christ, as creator; or his pre-eminence is neither connected, nor related to his pre-eminence as original head of the creation. For, if reason may be hence assisted in its exercise, the exaltation is in reward of his sufferings; and therefore must intend a pre-eminence not in the old, but in a new creation.

The *Bishop* will not allow that forgiveness is inferrable from the mercy and goodness of God.—See his reasoning,

“*The religion of a sinner must be a revealed religion, and the principle of it must be faith.*” p. 96.

Dr. *Sherlock* owns,

“*Cornelius was a Gentile, no observer of the law of Moses.*” p. 328.

We ask, whether *Cornelius* could not, did not infer forgiveness from the mercy and goodness of God? of whom we read, that *He feared God with all his house; and prayed to God always. And that his prayers and his alms came up for a memorial before God.*—

The *Bishop* confronts the Doctor;

“*If you say only, that it is probable, that a merciful God will pity the folly and weakness of human kind, and recede from the strictness of justice in his dealings with them; so say we too: but probability cannot infer necessity; and if it be not necessary that he should do it, it must thus depend upon his will, whether he will do it, or no; and your hopes and your religion must be resolved, not into the evidence of nature, but into the evidence of free grace; which evidence can be no other than revelation; for the spirit only searcheth the deep things of God, and the spirit only can bring them to light.*”

P. 97.

But

But Dr. *Sherlock* shall ask the *Bishop*, what he meaneth by this raving? Is not natural religion the foundation upon which revealed religion stands? and therefore revelation can never supersede natural religion without destroying itself.—

We conclude by the assistance of the *Doctor*, that this being an eternal truth, it is more than probable, that a merciful and good God will pity the folly and weakness of humanity; because in the penitency of the sinner, and in his reformation, he has peace in his own breast, and confidence, or a well grounded hope in his maker. And this is the universal tendency of true penitence. What the *Bishop* meaneth by necessity as here contradistinguished from probability, is not so evident. For its depending on his will, opposed to that necessity he should pardon, seems a very silly contrast. Unless the *Bishop* wants, as I suspect he does, to put the deity under a necessity that shall be a better and more secure foundation of hope and confidence, than the dependence we can have on his will. But what consideration can be more satisfactory than the dependence I may have on the will of a being of invariable and eternal goodness, and of unfailing pity and compassion? All the hopes of man, and all his religion must be resolved ultimately into the evi-

dence of nature, however the revelation may be made of the grace of God.—It must be so, if we can at all depend on the truth of those propositions laid down by Dr. Sberlock, which shew the supports revelation has on natural religion. And we may add another excellent observation of the Doctor's, with which we may close these controversial pages.

“ This assurance of God's favour is but one and the same thing with what we call a good conscience : for what force is there in a good conscience to give us peace, but only this, that it is our testimony, that we have faithfully and diligently served our God ; which is the ground of our hope and confidence in him ? ” p. 249, 250. And again, *“ It is worth our while to lay the foundation of this peace betimes, that we may be able to look that day in the face, at which, even at a distance, the stoutest heart may tremble : for it is not courage, but folly, not to think of death with some concern, since so much depends from that moment. ”* p. 251, 252.

Enough

Enough of the combat: we may upon a review form some judgment, and make some conclusions.

I. If the *Doctor's* fundamentals are right, the *Bishop's* interpretation of Christ's *emptying* himself has no foundation in nature, truth or religion. "*For take from the notion of God any of his moral perfections that belong to it, such alteration will influence religion, and degenerate in proportion as the notion of God is corrupted. And a just conception of God is the right rule to form our judgments by, in all particular matters of religion, and the only thing that can secure us from Atheism and Superstition.*" — But the notion of the fall of man being the loss of so many subjects to Christ, their natural Lord, in virtue of his creating them; must be a mere whimsy, a flourish of the imagination; especially as we are told, that Jesus Christ appeared under the Old Testament in the real majesty of the Father.

So that the *equality* supposed, is a corruption of the notion of God. For one all-perfect being can have no equal. And the distinction of the glories of nature and office, is to corrupt the notion of God also. An *office* implies, according to the idiom of language, some public employment, or delegated

legated power, some charge given, and can be no ways applicable to the Deity. Indeed the very terms of *humiliation* and *exaltation*, are absolutely unapplicable to a being of immutable perfection.

Consequently, the three states have nothing in them that will at all explain the condition of an original creator, who had appeared with the real majesty of the father. And the *Bishop* felt the absurdity when he said, that the very Lord of life, upholding all things by the word of his power, was superior to the necessity of human nature. —But how depraved and corrupt the sentiment, when he added, *subject to death, only because he chose to die*. He that upholds all things by the word of his power chose to die! What is it that this very artful mystic divine dare not say? What heresy ever more shocking!

II. We may conclude, there is a much better interpretation which may be given of the *emptying*, mentioned by *St. Paul*. One that has no reference to any thing more than the condition of the man Christ Jesus, who, throughout his public ministrations, had the presence of God so with him, as that he appeared in the form of God, by miraculous attestations which did attend his mission: during the exertion of which energy, no
hand

hand could fasten on him; and to the withdrawalment and suspension of which power, he did so willingly consent, which gave the superior merit and lustre of his obedience; in the dolorous and painful, disgraceful, and excruciating change of his condition; in which he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a slave, and was made in the most debasing likeness of men; in which condition he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Which was not true of him, till the hour came of the power of darkness. For though the *envy* of the great sought to destroy him, yet he appeared with great dignity, and superior glory in the eyes of the people. He had so much reputation, that they would gladly have made him their King. And more generally looked upon him with a veneration due to the Son of the most high God. This condition of the man Christ Jesus, was not the state of his *humiliation*, but of his God-like ministrations, when he went about doing good, and speaking with divine authority. When all nature was doing him homage. This was the season, antecedent to his sufferings, when Jesus did appear in the form of God, and shewed his submission to the will of God, in a resignation to infamy, insult and torture. And thus

thus can we understand his exaltation as real : and in consequence of this his exemplary humility, we are able to confess him Lord, to the glory of God the father ! Thus we avoid the confusion of human interpretations: do preserve, just and adorable conceptions of the one immutable God ; and escape those corruptions of the Gospel Scheme, which tend to Atheism and Superstition.

The E N D.



