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Nature, obligation and
measures of conscience



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THE
Nature, Obligation, and Measures
OF
CONSCIENCE,

Deliver'd In A

SERMON

PREACH'D At

Leicester,

AT THE

ASSIZES Held There,

July 25th, 1706.

By *HENRY SACHEVERELL*, M. A.
Fellow of *Magdalen-College*, OXON.

Publiſh'd at the Request of the Gentlemen of the *Grand-Jury*.

O X F O R D :

Printed by *Leon. Lichfield*, for *John Stephens*, Bookseller :
And are to be Sold by *James Knapton* at the *Crowne* in
St. Paul's Church-yard, LONDON. 1706.

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To the RIGHT WORSHIPFUL
CHARLES MORRIS, Esq;
HIGH-SHERIFF of the County of
LEICESTER,
AND TO

The Honourable Gentlemen of the *Grand-Jury,*

Sir *William Villiers, Bar.*
Sir *Gilbert Pickering, Bar.*
Sir *Richard Halford, Bar.*
Sir *George Beaumont, Bar.*
Sir *William Halford, K^t. and Bar.*
Sir *Edward Wigley, Kn^t.*
Edward Smith, Esq;
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George Ashby, Esq;

Charles Jennings, Esq;
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Robert Wilson, Esq;
Rowland Browne, Esq;
Bartlett Streete, Esq;
James Halsall, Esq;
William Hartopp, Esq;
William Welles, Gent.
Leonard Vow, Gent.

GENTLEMEN,

IF This Discourse has any thing
Considerable, to Recommend
it to the World, it is chiefly
Owing to Your Favour, and In-
dul-

The Epistle Dedicatory.

dulgence, *as having had the Honour of Your Patience, in its Delivery, and Your Joint Commands, for Its Publication.*

I wish, I had Treated this Weighty Subject Equal to Its Dignity: it being so Necessary to be Thoroughly Understood, at a Time, when the Confederate Adversaries of Our Church, Presume as much to Found Dominion in Conscience, as They did formerly in Grace: when They not only Plead the Liberty of the One, to Resist and
Quench

The Epistle Dedicatory.

Quench *the* Other, but by counte-
nancing a Form of Godliness,
Deny the Power thereof, and
Destroy *the* very Substance of
Religion, under a Specious Ap-
pearance of Defending it.

But whatever Success, my En-
deavours in this Matter, may meet
with, it is the Peculiar Happi-
ness, and Advantage of the
Church of England, that it can
yet, notwithstanding all Oppo-
sition, Glory in so many Un-
blemish'd Patriots, and Un-
daunted Champions for the
Sup-

The Epistle Dedicatory.

Support of its Constitution ;
whose Lives are the Best Illustrations of its Doctrines ; whose Merits are as Great and Conspicuous as their Fortunes ; whose Conscience is as Unfollied as their Honour ; and who, by the Justice, and Regularity of Their Principles, and Actions, have Completed the Character of a True Christian, as well as That of an Accomplish'd Gentleman.

Were the Shining Examples
You give to Mankind, as Happily
Imitated by All Persons of the
same

The Epistle Dedicatory.

same Rank, *and* Condition,
neither Our Church, *or* State,
would have Reason to Fear any
Danger from its Avow'd Ene-
mies, *or* Pretended Friends:
and that You may Live long to
Controul, *and* Frustrate the
Designs of Both, *is* the Hearty
Wish of

GENTLEMEN,

Your most Humble Servant,

HENRY SACHEVERELL.

The Epistle Dedicatory.

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neither Our Church, or State,
would have Reason to Fear any
Danger from its Avow'd En-
mies, or Pretended Friends:
and that You may Live long to
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Designs of Both, is the Henry
Wife of

GENTLEMEN,

Your most Humble Servant

HENRY SACHEVERELL.

THE
Nature, Obligation, and Measures
 OF
CONSCIENCE.

Acts xxiii. 1.

*And Paul earnestly beholding the Council, said,
 Men and Brethren, I have liv'd in all Good
 CONSCIENCE, before God, until this Day.*

THESSE Words are as 'twere a short
 History, and compendious Character
 of the Life of That Great Apostle
St. Paul; and of the *Upright and Sincere
 Conscience*, that Adorn'd every Action in it.
 This was his Efficacious and Triumphant Ar-
 gument, which he so Boldly urges in his Vin-
 dication; that he was Able to *insist* upon his
Integrity, and *appeal* for its Proof to a *Tryal*
 before GOD, *the Searcher of all Hearts*, and
 the whole World, the visible Witnesses of his
 Practice; that *He had kept a Conscience void of
 Offence,*

Offence, towards God, and towards Men. 'Twas *This* that Fortify'd him with such a Manly Spirit, and Unshaken Courage, to Out-face all the malicious Accusations of his insidious *Persecutors*, to Bear up with a steady Chearfulness against the many Miseries and Disasters of a troublesome Life, and put to Silence the Reproaches of his most implacable Enemies. When we see him *Arraign'd* before the insulting *Jews*, from whom he cou'd as little expect *Justice*, as *Mercy*, how did *This* Astonish *Felix*, that Lustful and Covetous Magistrate, who thought to have Condemn'd him, and made the *Affrighted Judge Tremble*, instead of his *Suppos'd Criminal*? Such is the Power of a pure and unblemish'd *Conscience*; it casts a distinguishing Lustre, and amiable Regard upon its Possessor, can *dignify Chains* and *Fetters*, turn a *Prison* into a *Palace*, render *Poverty*, and even *Disgrace*, *Honourable*, and command *Reverence* and *Esteem* from its most malignant *Adversaries*. To *obtain* and *preserve* which invaluable Blessing, no Difficulties or Labours can be so Painful, no Dangers or Distresses so Afflicting, no Suffering or Death so Sharp and Bitter, but what it will Sustain, Alleviate, and most amply Reward.

The nicest and most *important Enquiry*, that the *Mind* can be *employ'd* in, both for its *Im-*
prove-

provement and Satisfaction, is a *just Search* into its *own State and Nature*; whereby it may be capable of *Discovering* its *own Graces and Infirmities*, to *Correct* the *One*, and *Advance* the *Other*, and to *Ground* it self upon a *rational Peace*, and secure *Tranquillity*. Tho' indeed this requires no small *Art and Care*, thus to make the *Soul* descend and retire into *her-self*, bend all her *Faculties inwards*, and become the nearer *Object* of *her own Contemplation*; To *dive* into her own *obscure Recesses and Mansions*, and *Trace* through all the intricate *Folds and Windings* of the *Heart*, to *Unveil* its *lurking Hypocrisy*, *Traverse* its *Springs and Motions*, and to *let a Light* into those *dark Corners* of *Iniquity*, where *Vice* is first *hatch'd and conceiv'd*. Without this *Spiritual Scrutiny*, this *Domestick Inquisition* (as we may call it) in our *Breast*, a *Man's Life* can be never *just and regular*, or his *Actions even and self-consistent*, as being *Guided* by no *Law*, and *Directed* by no *Conduct*. Therefore every *Man* that pretends to the *right Use* of his *Reason*, and does not *Live and Act* at *Random*, must think himself concern'd to *establish a Certain Sett of Fundamental Notions and Principles* in his *Thoughts*; which upon a *thorough Search*, and *mature Deliberation*, he *lays down and fettles*, as the *eternal Basis* and

Touchstone of Truth, as an unalterable *Scheme* and *Model* of *Morality* to himself, and as the *controuling*, and *governing Maxims* of his *practical Behaviour*. This is what he dignifies with the awful Title of CONSCIENCE, and is That *internal Compass* of his Soul, by which he Professes to *steer the whole Course* and *Tenour* of his Actions.

Now from the infinite *Multiplicity*, and *Variety* of *Opinions*, wherein Mens *Minds* as much *differ* as their *Features*, there may seem to Arise as many *Sorts* of *Consciences*, as there are *Diversity* of *Judgments* in the World: Hence we find *Vertues* and *Vices* taking their several *Colours* and *Denominations*, according to the different *Capacity*, or *Use* of *Reason*, the fundry *Tempers*, *Inclinations*, *Interests* and *Designs* of *Parties*, that Form and Espouse *such and such farring Sentiments*. So that he who takes an impartial Survey of all the multifarious, unaccountable, and repugnant *Conclusions* of Mankind, and their *Department* Consequent thereupon, and considers their irreconcilable Contrariety to each other; and yet sees with what tenacious *Confidence*, and perverse *Obstinacy*, they are on all sides *embrac'd* and *asserted*, will be inclinable to suspect, That there is no such Thing as *True Conscience* in the World; or

that Men are not yet *Agreed* in the *Meaning* of This *amusing*, but *unintelligible Word*. A *Word*, the *Force* of which, is much sooner *felt* than *understood*, that strikes the *Senses*, deeper than the *Judgment*; and usually carries in it all the *Mischief*, that *Ignorance* and *Prejudice*, *blind Zeal*, and *inveterate Malice*, *Enthusiasm*, and *Superstition* are able to *Attempt* and *Execute*. Upon which account, this *mistaken Word*, *Conscience*, has bin often found to be no better than a *meer Sound and Shadow*, to *disguise* the most *Fatal* and *Devilish Impostures*, to *cover* the blackest *Treason* and *Rebellion*, *Heresy*, *Schism*, and *Blasphemy*; and *shelter* the most *astonishing Impiety* under its *specious*, and *sanctify'd Umbrage*. For what else is it, that has bin the *Cause* of almost all the *Civil Wars*, *Persecutions*, and *Massacres*, that for so many *Years* involy'd *Christendom* in *Blood* and *Fury*, *Destroy'd* so many *Princes*, and *Churches*, with *Regicide*, and *Sacrilege*, *depopulated* so many *Dominions*, and *lavish'd* so much *Treasure*; and in a manner *Overturn'd* the very *Foundations* of *Christianity*, under the *Goodly Pretence* of *Religion*? What is it, I say, but this *Word*, *Conscience*, *Misunderstood* and *Misapply'd*, which like an *Holy Sham*, or rather *Diabolical Inspiration*, has seiz'd and *possess'd* the *giddy*, and *senseless Multitude*, with *Infatuation*, and

Phrenzy, and driven them Headlong into their *Own*, and their *Country's* Perdition? Nothing certainly has brought *greater Calamities* upon the *World*, or led the way to more *dangerous Mistakes*, than the want of a *due Distinction* in its *Nature*, and a *just Limitation* of it, in its *Rights* and *Power*. Which as 'tis a weighty Subject, proper for all *Times*, as containing the *Grounds* of our *Happiness* or *Misery*, as well in *this World* as *the next*; so I presume, it may be in no wise *Unsuitable* to the *present Solemnity*, which may frequently have no small Share in the *Examination* of its *Pre-tences*, in order to the *right Administration* of *Justice*, by the unquestionable *Authority* of such *Legal Magistrates*, as we are bound to *submit to*, not only for *Wrath*, but *Conscience sake*. I shall therefore within as *little a Compass*, as the *Copiousness* of this *large Point*, and the *small Portion* of *Time* allow'd me will permit, endeavour

I. First, To Enquire into the *True Nature*, and the *Just Bounds*, and *Measures* of *Conscience*.

II. Secondly, To Propose some *Considerations*, whereby a *false* and *erroneous Conscience* may be *Distinguish'd* from a *sincere* and *true One*.

III.

III. Thirdly, To lay down those *General Laws*, whereby the *Conscience* is to be *Regulated*, and shew how they ought to be *Apply'd*.

I. And First, I will Enquire into the *true Nature*, and the *just Bounds*, and *Measures* of *Conscience*. And this I shall do, *First*, from *Scripture*, and, *Secondly*, from *Reason*.

Some of the *School-Men*, as well as Others, of the *Ancient*, and *Modern Writers* of *Casuistical Divinity*, in their Speculations on this Subject, have not undeservedly, bin Tax'd for *Darkning* it with so many *unnecessary frivolous*, and *intricate* Notions, that they seem rather to have endeavour'd to *confound*, and *perplex* Mens Minds, with *impertinent Doubts* and *Difficulties*, than to propose such *Remedies*, as might effectually *solve* their *Scruples*, and *Fears*. Tho' the *Scripture* is so very *clear* and *plain* in this Matter, that from the frequent *Use* and *Energy* of this Word, *Conscience*, therein, it will be found to carry this *General Import* in it, namely, *The Knowledge of a NATURAL, or DIVINE Law, join'd with an Application of it, to some particular Instance of Practice, to which it is adequately suited, and adapted*. Out of the many Places that occur

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occur in the *New Testament*, to establish this Notion of *Conscience*, it may be sufficient to quote one or two, which give in the Sense of the rest. *St. Paul*, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, Chap. II. v. 14, 15, 16. speaking of the *Gentiles*, who had no other *Guide* of their *Actions*, but the *Law of Nature*, or *Reason rightly inform'd*, expressly declares, that *this* was to them, the *Rule of their Conscience*, whereby they were to be *Judg'd* at the last *Day*, and *Acquitted* or *Condemn'd*. For (says he) *when the Gentiles which have not the Law* (that is the *Mosaick* or *Reveal'd Law*) *do by NATURE the things contain'd in the Law, these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves; which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their CONSCIENCE also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while ACCUSING, or else EXCUSING one another, in the Day when God shall judge the Secrets of Men, by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.* In the same Chapter, v. 12. Discourfing concerning the State of the *Jews*, who had the *Lively Oracles of God's written Word*, and the *Law of Moses* superinduc'd upon the *Law of Reason*, to illustrate and inlarge it, says, *as many as have sinn'd in the Law, shall be judg'd by the Law*, which extends the *Obligation of Conscience*, with regard

to them, from the *Law of Nature* to that of a further *Reveal'd, Positive Law*. But in his *Epistle to Titus*, c. I. v. 15. the *Apostle* speaking concerning the State of *Christianity*, that had the *Supream Priviledge* of an *entire Revelation* of the *Divine Law*, he says, of *Errors in Judgment, and Practice, Unto the Pure all things are Pure, but unto them that are Defil'd and unbelieving, is nothing Pure, but even their Mind and Conscience is Defil'd*, where we find *vs. Mind* added to *conscience*, to *Explain and Adjust its Meaning*, denoting the *Intellectual Faculty* of the *Soul*, Judging upon any *Moral Point*, together with an *Application* of it to *Practice*. So that here is a *Complex and Relative Idea*, carrying a *double Notion* in it of *Conscience*, which with *Respect* to its *Operation*, is also *Twofold*. *First*, Relating to what is *pass'd, Judging* it self to have either done *Well, or Ill*; or *Secondly*, Relating to its *present Duty, Advising and Directing* us, in the *Necessity, Legality, or Illegality* of any thing, that *ought to be done, or not done* by us. Which *Division* results from the *Two Faculties*, or rather *Reflex Actions* of the *Soul*, in *Contemplating and Judging* what is *present*, or in *Deliberating* on what is *Pass'd*, either *Justifying and Acquitting*, or *Accusing and Condemn-*

ing us before *God* and *Our Conscience*. Under one of these Two Notions, most Places in the *New Testament*, and those that may seem to correspond to them in *the Old*, are Understood.

This is the *Short* and *General* Account that *Revelation* has given us of this Matter; and it would have bin well, if Men had *Rested* here, and bin Contented with the *plain* and *easy Determinations* of the *Scriptures*; which had left *no Room* for *Doubts* and *Ambiguities*, and had prevented all those *Sophistical Subtleties*, which have bin since *Invented* by Men of *Jesuitical*, and *Fanatical* Brains; who have *Refin'd* the exprefs *Rules* of *Human Duty* into *Whimsical* and *Inexplicable Theories*; have *Clogg'd* and *Surrounded* it with useles and surprizing *Questions*, *Spinose Obstacles*, and *abstruse Distinctions*, laid in the *Dark*, as so many *Mystical Snares*, and *Spiritual Gins* to catch Men's *Consciences*, and *Plunge* 'em into the unfathomable *Abyss* of *God's Prescience*, *Decrees*, and *Predestination*; Things which the *Thoughts* of Men, *which are not as God's thoughts*, can never *Fix* or *Determine*. These *Legerdemain Craftsmen* in *Divinity*, *who thus Handle the Word of God deceitfully*, ought justly to *Inherit* the *Woes* denounc'd by *God*, (*Ezekiel*, Chap. 13.) against *their Brethren*, the false *Prophets*, *Who Dawb'd with un-*
tem-

temper'd Mortar, prophesy'd out of their Own Hearts, follow'd their Own Spirit, saw Vanity and Divin'd Lyes, seducing the People. Will Ye Pollute Me (says GOD) among my People, for handfuls of Barley and for pieces of Bread, to slay the souls that should not dye, and to save the souls alive that should not live by Your Lying to my People that hear Your Lyes? Wherefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I am against Your Pillows, wherewith Ye there Hunt the Souls to make 'em fly, and I will tear them from Your Arms, and will let the Souls go, even the Souls that Ye hunt to make 'em fly. Because with Lyes Ye have made the Heart of the Righteous sad, whom I have not made sad, and strengthen'd the hands of the Wicked, that He shou'd not return from his wicked way by promising him Life. How Applicable is this Character to those Men, who instead of serving the Great Purposes of Morality, and Religion, which ought to be represented as Easy, and Practicable, as 'tis Inviting, and Agreeable (which certainly Raises both the Dignity, and Excellency of the Law, and supream Legislatour,) when They should have helpt the Lame, and Blind, out of the Pit they were faln into, and assisted the Infirmities, and Necessities of the Weak, and Impotent, Intangle 'em deeper in the Mire,

Enhancing their Miseries, Exaggerating their Guilt, Frightening 'em with false Apprehensions, and Imaginary Scruples, and in a Word Raising that Devil, which they were never Able again sufficiently to Lay. These are doubtless faithful Pastors, and Stewards of God's holy Mysteries, who feed his Servants with Stones instead of Bread, and in lieu of a wholsom and heavenly Repast of his Word, set before 'em, noisome Serpents, and deadly Scorpions !

But to Proceed, Let us see how far the Plain Principles of Reason, and Argumentation, will carry Us in the Discovery of the True Nature of this Point. Upon a Survey of it, We shall find, that all the Modes, or Affections, of either the Mind, or Conscience, which are only so many Different States, or Degrees of its Operation, will be Comprehended under These Four, Namely,

1. *A Clear, Upright, and well-Instructed Conscience.*
2. *A Probable Conscience.*
3. *A Doubtful, or Scrupulous Conscience.*
4. *An Erroneous Conscience.*

These Four Sorts of Consciences, take their Rise from, and are Grounded upon the Different Evidence of any Practical Object, propos'd

pos'd to the *Mind*, and the *Clearness*, and *Distinction*, or the *Obscurity*, and *Confusion*, of the *Ideas* that it Frames thereof.

1. If the Matter it Deliberates upon, be a Thing in its *Nature*, *Plain*, and *Intelligible*, not Incumber'd with Difficulties, and Doubts, and such as appears either *Necessary*, or *Lawful* to be done, and consequently a *Duty*; or *Illegal*, and *Necessary to be Abstain'd* from, and consequently a *Sin*; as on the *One Hand Prohibited*, or on the *Other Injoin'd*, by *Divine*, *Human*, or *Moral* Laws; and a Man Acts accordingly in all these *Cases*, with a *Full Perswasion* of Mind, and the *Assent* of his *Conscience*, *Guiding* and *Governing* it self by such *Rules*, as are *adequate*, and *suited* to its several *Actions*; such a Person certainly goes upon the *Principles* of a *Sincere*, *Upright*, and *truly Instructed* *Conscience*.

2. But, *Secondly*, if the Matter propos'd to the *Mind*, has not this *Clearness*, and *Evidence* in it self, either through the *Intricacies*, it may be Involv'd in by its *Nature*, or the *Obscurity*, and *Ambiguity* of its *Circumstances*, or the *Want* of a *Full*, and *Exact Distinction*, in the *Law*, *Prohibiting*, or *Injoining*: the *Understanding* having fully *Weigh'd* the *Doubts*,
and

and *Objections* on all Sides, and *Ballanc'd* the Matter with all the *Justice* and *Equity* that it can; and finding the *Reasons* on the *One* hand *Preponderating* those on the *Other*: upon such an *Impartial* Survey, and *Scrutiny*, the *Conscience* Determining on the *Probable* Part, proceeds according to Its *Judgment*, and Acts upon the Decision of *Argument*, and *Colour*, not Apprehending any *Apparent Evil*, expresses *Illegality*, or *Inexpediency* in its Action. This is the *Probable Conscience*, and will Justify where all *proper Means* are us'd for its *Instruction*.

3. But, *Thirdly*, if the Mind upon a Survey of All Sides, finds it self *Pois'd* in an *Equilibrium* betwixt *Both*; if the *Reasons* appear *equally clear, strong, and convincing* on *Either* Side, and it knows not how to *Judge*, or *Determine* its *Election*, and the Law relating to this Matter, may be either *dubious, equivocal, indifferent*, or perhaps *silent*: if the *Conscience* hangs thus under a State of *Neutrality*, and as 'twere *declines* and *suspends* its *Consent*, and yet the Person *Act* without it, this is a *Doubting Conscience*, and the Man under its *Conduct* is Guilty of *Sin*, if He Does so. But if it does *Assent*, His Action is so far *Justifiable*, as it appears not *Offending* against any *Positive*,
and

and plain Prohibition, or Law. For the Negative being of Infinite Extent, and Latitude, makes Great and Just Room for Allowances, in these dubious Cases. But if the Conscience apprehends, or suspects, any Evil (tho' perhaps False) in the Matter of its Action, otherwise in it self Legal, which is the Case of a *Scrupulous Conscience*, it is under an Obligation of *Not-Acting*, because no Action is justifiable, that is *Against*, or *Without* the Consent of the Mind.

4. But, *Lastly*, if the Mind is not *Rightly Instructed*, or *Inform'd*, as to the Matter of its Action, and frames a *wrong Judgment* of its *Legality*, or *Illegality*, from a *false*, or *confus'd Apprehension* of, or *Ignorance* in, the *Law*, and *Nature* of the *Action*, or is distorted, or misled, by *Passion*, *Prejudice*, *Interest*, *Pride*, *Lust*, or any other *sinister Means*, this is an *Erroneous Conscience*, bringing always *Guilt* upon the *Actor*, and Involving Him in *Sin*, according to that Receiv'd *Maxim*, That, *the Ignorance of the Law can never Excuse a Delinquent*.

Now the *First* of these *Consciences* proceeds upon either *Faith*, or *Demonstration*, the *Infallible Revelation* of God, or the certain *Measures* of *Reason*.

The *Second* proceeds upon the Grounds of *Probable*, or *Moral Certainty*, a *Rational Belief*, *Perfwasion*, or *Opinion*.

The *Third* cannot Proceed but according to the *Degrees* of *Assent*, or *Election*, and

The *Fourth* proceeds upon *Ignorance* or *Error*.

This I hope may seem to be no *obscure* or *indistinct* Account of the *Nature* of *Conscience*, as taking in, all its *Properties*, consider'd under the *Principles* of *Reason*, and the *Gradual Light*, and different *Advancements*, that it makes under Its *Conduct*; and I presume, this may be the most *Natural* and *Just* way of *Explaining* it, and which *clears off* all those *Abstruse Perplexities*, other *Mystical Interpretations* bring upon it. For certainly every Man's *Conscience*, either *is*, or *ought* to be Govern'd by *Rational Motives*, which are the *Supream Commands* of the *Understanding* on its *Subjects*, the *Will*, and *Affections*, never to be *Disputed*, never to be *Disobey'd* without *Rebellion* against their *spiritual Sovereign*.

This being Premis'd, as a *Rational View* of the *Nature* and *Obligation* of *Conscience* in *General*, and its *several Parts*, *Modes*, or *Habitudes* in *Particular*, I come in the next place,

II. Secondly, To propose some Considerations, whereby a *False*, and *Erroneous Conscience*, may be Distinguish'd from a *Sincere*, and *True One*. What has bin before Remark'd, in *Settling the Distinct Bounds of Each*, might be in it self, sufficient to Discover the *Difference*; but perhaps it will appear much more Evident to Those, who for *want of Time*, or *Skill*, at first View cannot fully comprehend These *Abstracted Notions*, and follow the *Mind* thorough all the *Dark Labyrinth* of its *secret Operations*, if We proceed more fully to *Display*, in their proper *Colours*, all those *False Pretences*, that are so apt to Delude and put upon Our *Judgments*, and Deceive Us with the *Empty Shadows*, and *Visionary Appearances* of *Religion*. Among all which there is none, that with so much *Artifice* and *Illusion*, Palms the insnaring *Imposture* upon Our *credulous Faith*, as the *plausible Disguise* of *Interest*. This will so *Fatally Over-rule* the *Conscience*, so *Warp* its *Judgment*, and *Blind* its *Discerning Faculties*, that in time, it will intirely *Depose* it from its *Dominion*, and *Usurp* its *Place* and *Authority*: so that *tho' it has Eyes, they shall not See*; *tho' it has Ears, it shall not Hear*; *tho' it has Understanding, it shall not Understand*. In this Case a Man *Forfeits* the *Exalted Priviledge* of his *Reason*, and *De-*

grader it to the base *Servitude* of His *Passions*; He Argues, not from His *Understanding*, but His *Flesh* and *Blood*; and How weak the *Demonstrative Force* of a *Syllogism* is, in *Opposition* to the more powerful *Fallacy* of Our *Appetites*, Experience is sufficient to Convince Us. For, is not this *Interest* the *Great Diana* of the World, to whose *Silver Shrines* its *Religious Notaries* pay the most *Devout Homage*, and *Implicit Adoration*? What is there that the *Exorbitant Power* of This cannot effect, when it shall teach a Man to *Renounce* his *Senses*, *Caress* *Fraud*, *Adore Nonsense*, *Abandon* his *Creed*, and give the *Lye* to the *Holy-Spirit of God* within him? When *Duty* and *Interest* Clash and Interfere, how *Purblind* does it render Our *Judgments*? how difficult is it to view the *Difference*? how many *Artificial Quirks*, *Subterfuges*, and *Equivocations*, are immediately found out, to *keep the Peace* betwixt 'em? Such *shrew'd Sophisters* are never at a *Loss* for *saving Distinctions*, To *Keep what they have*, and *Get what They can*. This being the *Grand Maxim*, which the *Wise Men* of this *World* lay down as the *Foundation* of all their *Politicks*; whereby they are so easily brought to *Comply*, and *Fall in* with such *Principles* and *Practices*, as are most likely to *Promote* it. It is the *Melancholly Amusement*

only

only of *Men of Letters and Philosophy*, to Live and Feed upon *Ideas*, and Dispute about *Imaginary Felicity*; Those who can Contemplate *Naked Truth*, and *Virtue without Reward*, are likely to get Nothing else for their Labour; but must Expect to be as Contemptible, and Destitute, as *Truth*, and *Virtue* usually are. But the *Children of this World* are taught to be *Wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light*; they Trouble not themselves with the *Merit of their Cause*, or *Party*; they are not Fetter'd, or Confin'd, with the *Little, Strait, and Notions of rigid Justice, and Honesty*; they are for a *Latitude*, both of *Thought*, and *Action*, a *Licentious Immunity from All Legal Restraint*, which, with Their *Peculiar Talents of Impudence, and Falshood*, they stick not to call *Liberty of Conscience*, and presume to Challenge, as *That Freedom of Will*, which, they say, is the *Universal Privilege of Mankind*. As if That *Liberty of Conscience*, which the *Government* has Indulg'd to *such Persons alone*, whose *Real Scruples* will not permit them to join in the *Establish'd Communion*, could ever be intended to Shelter such, as have not the least Pretence to the very *Name of Conscience*, to empower *Deists, Socinians, and Atheists*, to Re-*quile, Ridicule, and Blaspheme Our most Holy*

Faith, and Church, at their Pleasure, with Impunity. Thus Villanously are Our *Laws* Abus'd, and this *Sacred Name* play'd upon, to the foul *Disbonour* of *GOD*, and the *Disgrace* of *Religion*; which now a-days is made the *Pharisaical, and Puritan Cloak*, like *Samuel's Mantle*, to Amuse the *Witch*, and Cover the *Devil*, and Consecrate All *Infidelity, Injustice, Pride, Lust, Avarice, and Ambition*, and the most execrable Vices of *Hell*, with the Holy Title of *Conscience*; which, in sad Truth, is nothing else, but the *Vizor-Mask* of *Cousenage, Knavery, and Hypocrisy*; it is the *spiritual Tool* to serve the Turn of all wicked Designs, meer *Party-Cant, and Fanatical Jargon*, the very Sound whereof shou'd be a *Warning-Piece* to *Alarm* every *Honest Man* to stand upon his *Guard*, and *Look about Him*.

Whatever Pretences these *Timeserving Men* may *Gild* their *crafty Stratagems* with, it will be found at last, that They are Nothing but downright *Political Atheists*: For they are really *Indifferent* to every *Sect, or Religion*; Espouse Neither, but as it Suits with their *Advantage*; and, as That changes, are *Ready* still to *Obey* its *Motions, shift* with the *Scene, swim* with the *Tide, and veer* to every *Point* of the *Compass, as the Wind* that serves 'em,

commands. They are as *Dissonant* in their *Opinions* and *Practices*, as those are *Inconsistent* with the *Laws of GOD*; and, in a *Word*, on every *Occasional prospect of Gain*, are their *Own Reverse*, and one *Continued Practical-Self-Contradiction.* To *Verify* this *Infamous*, and most *abominable Character*, which 'tis a *Shame* shou'd be found in any *Nation professing* the *Name of Christian*, have We not, to the *Disappointment* of both Our *Laws, Civil and Ecclesiastical*, a *Sett of Miscreants* suffer'd amongst Us, and Those even *pretending* to more *Sanctity* and *Conscience*, than the rest of *Mankind*, who not only *Dare Openly Own*, and *Practice*, but even *Presume* to *Justify* this *Amphibious Conformity*; who to *Qualify* themselves for a *poultry Place*, can *slyly creep* to those *Altars* they *Proclaim Idolatrous*, *Join* in a *Communion* they *Revile* as *superstitious*, and *swallow* that *Sacrament*, which at other times they *Refuse*, as *Damnation.* And, indeed, in this *Tremendous Case*, it ought to be the *Wish* of every *charitable Christian*, that they may not, in such a *solemn* and *deliberate Act* of the *Worst of Hypocrisy*, *Eat and Drink* their *Own Damnation*, not *Discerning* the *Lord's Body.* Such *Men*, like *Esau*, that *Reprobate* of *GOD*, wou'd doubtless *Barter* their *spiritual Birthright* for a *Mess of Pottage*; like *Gebazi* they

they will Impudently *Lye*, (and not have so much *Shame* as He had to *Disown* it,) for *Changes of Raiment, and Talents of Silver*: they inherit *Naaman's Crime*, more *Odious* and *Stinking* than His *Leprosy*; who, to keep his *Post* in the *Government*, could *bow down* in the *House of Rimmon*, and yet acknowledge the *God of Israel*; in a *Word*, They *Out-do* that *Amazing*, and *Irremissible Sin*, of the *Son of Perdition*, the *Arch-Traytor Judas* himself, in that, they *Dayly sell* and *betray* their *Lord and Saviour*, for *Money*. And wou'd not (think Ye) the *Primitive Church* have *Thundr'd* out its *Anathema's*, against such *Daring*, and *Insolent Offenders*? Wou'd it not have *spew'd* these *Vipers* out of Her *Communion*, whose *crying Sins* call aloud to *Heaven*, for that *Just Vengeance*, they have not yet found upon *Earth*?

Thus *Fatally* can the *Dominion of Interest* *Sway Mens Faith, and Practice*, and *suborn* both, to the *Mammon of Unrighteousness*. For a *Man* to quit his *Temporal Honours*, and *Estate* in *This Life*, for another in *Reversion* in the *Next*, is such an *Uneasy Exchange of Title*, that Our *Blessed Saviour* himself (could not *humanly speaking*) *Perswade* the *Rich Man* in the *Gospel*, to *Comply* with, tho' We are told, He was no *Ordinary Proficient* in *Piety*.

And

And where *Interest*, and *Religion*, come to stand in *Competition*, there are not *Few* who would follow His *Example*, and *Turn their Backs* upon their *Saviour*. Infomuch that the *Devil* thought himself secure of *Betraying* the very *Son of God*, when He gave him the *pompous View*, and alluring *Promise of this World*. Which really are *Temptations*, that induce *Good*; as well *Great Men*, sometimes to *Fall down*, and *Worship*, and which require no small *Pitch of Vertue*, and *Resolution*, to *Baffle*, and *Withstand*. This is the *tenderest Part of Nature*, and no wonder if it sometimes gives way, when 'tis *Affaulted* on the *Weakest* side. How often have We seen, when a *shining Preferment* has *Dazl'd*, and *Warm'd* the *Conscience*, of some *Ambitious*, or *Indigent Persons*, how wonderfully it has *Softn'd*, and *Relax'd* their *Rigid Principles*, and suddenly, and almost as effectually *Wrought a Conversion* in their *Opinions*, as the *Light* that from *Heaven struck down St. Paul*? It requires indeed a full *Conviction*, of the *Infallible Truth* of *Our Principles*, and the *Merit* of *Our Cause*, and a *Stanch Resolution*, rais'd upon the serious *Deliberation* of *Both*, with a lively *Sense* of *Our Obligations* to, and an awful *Fear* of *God's Justice*, to keep Men *stedfast Unmoveable*, and *inflexibly Persevering* in their

their *Religious Sentiments*. Yet notwithstanding the Difficulty, it will be still found to be as much our *True Interest*, as *Real Duty*, upon which a *Good Conscience* always keeps its Eye fixt and Unwavering, and is like the GOD that it serves, *without Variableness, or Shadow of Change*. It consults its *Innocence*, not its *Security*, Follows *Christ* to the *Cross*, as well as to the *Crown*, and is as Ready to *suffer for*, as to *Reign with Him*. It maintains a constant, and Uniform Course of *Integrity*, never Deviating from it self, and the plain Road of *Truth* and *Honesty*. It knows no *Latitude*, *comprehensive Shifts*, or *Doubles*, in its Principles, but is, as the *Object* of its Worship, *the same to day, to morrow, and for ever*.

2. The *Second Thing* that Deceives Us under the Pretence of *Conscience* is *Prejudice**. This is an *Infant Principle*, that takes Root deep in the *Man*, and spreads large in the *Understanding*; like the *Mustard-seed* in the *Gospel*, that from a slender, and Minute Grain, shoots up, and Enlarges into the Boughs, and Branches, of a Tree. From a Little, and insensible Beginning, it rises up to a Firm, strong, and *Irradicable Habit* in the Soul, and

* This Subject I've treated on at large in another Discourse.

being join'd with *Pride, Obstinacy, and Self-Love*, is made almost Inseparable from it. From hence 'tis, that so Great a Part of the World, owe those few Notions of *Conscience*, and *Religion*, that they have, either to the *Fashions, and Customs*, of the Country they are Born in, or to the *Methods, and Ways of Education*, in which They are Bred; nay, some to the *Callings, and Professions*, in which they are Accidentally Train'd up, not a few to the *Conversation, and Company*, that they keep, others to the *Authority* of such Persons as they Confide in, and others to their *Own Constitution, Singularity, and Condition*. And how hardly are Men brought to Search Impartially into the Truth, and Foundation of their Opinions; and therefore much more, to Relinquish those *Principles*, which they have *cherish'd*, as the Rules of their Conduct, and *Darling Friends* so long? They had rather Believe with an *Implicit Faith*, take their *Creed* by Report, and venture its *Consequence*, than be at the *Trouble, and Uneasiness*, of *canvassing* its *Articles*. Thus *Error* being first Entertain'd, Pleads *Prescription* against *Truth*, and injoying a long *Prepossession* in the Mind, Usurps its Place, and excludes its Entrance, stops up the Passage of *Reason*, and the Avenues of Conviction; it Ingrosses the *Intellectual Man*, makes him *Peevish*, and

Sour, Perverse, and Restive, and Incapacitates Him for *Reformation*. And no wonder, when his *Judgment* is thus basely *Brib'd*, and *Retain'd*, that it gives him *Wrong Counsel*; and like a *Deceitful Lawyer*, *Betrays* that *Cause*, it ought to *Defend*. A Man may therefore, in this Case, have a full Acquiescence in his *False Sentiments*, and esteem his *Conscience Sincere*, and *True*, while He is Insensible, that it is Grounded on an *Error*, because the *Mistake* is *Early* Imbib'd, and has bin *long* receiv'd. And that which makes this Matter, of so *perilous* a Consequence, is, that it may *Insinuate* it self into Our *Fundamental Articles*, vitiate and Diminish Our *Faith*, and thereby Endanger Our *Eternal Salvation*. For it is a Truth (tho' seemingly *severe*) that can never too often be *Inculcated*, that an *Erroneous Perswasion* is as *Damnable*, as an *Immoral Life*; it being, almost inconceivable, that the *Cause* and *Effect* shou'd not *correspond*, that a *Bad Tree* should bring forth *Good Fruit*, or a Man *Believe Ill*, and at the same time *Live Well*. So that there's no *Question*, but that any one may really think his *Conscience Upright*, and *Unbias'd*, when 'tis Govern'd by these *Prejudices*; and tho' He *Acts* in *Conformity* to them, find himself after his *Death*, in a *Gross Mistake* in the *other World*, and

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Recant when 'tis too late. For, GOD having laid before Us his *Law*, in the most *Obvious*, and *Intelligible Terms*, with a Command to *Try, Examine, Direct,* and *Judge* our *Consciences* by *That Rule*, has left Us without *Excuse*, for not so Doing, and may Justly *Inflit* an *Eternal Punishment* for Our Neglect in this Matter. Neither will here the *Presence* of a *Good Intention* any ways *Mitigate* the Crime, *Annul* the *Guilt*, or *Indemnify* the Offender, unless only in *Cases* of *Invincible Ignorance*. Such a Dangerous Misfortune is it, to be *set wrong* at first, and *season'd* with *corrupt Principles*, which may in time gain an Absolute and uncontrollable Dominion in the Soul, derive a Fatal and Inevitable *Propension* upon the *whole Conscience*, which may *Debauch* the *True Faith*, and subvert the very Foundations of Justice and Piety. How *High-flown*, and *Liable* foever, this Doctrine may seem to the Reflections of some *Latitudinarian Divines*, who place *Morality* above *Faith*; and who wou'd be thought to *Imitate* the *Example*, without *Believing* in, or *Trusting* to the *Merits*, and *Satisfaction* of their *Redeemer*; it is undeniably evident, from the Express Words of the *Gospel*, that the *Jews*, who *crucify'd* the *Messiah*, and *persecuted* him after his Death, in his *Apostles*, thought themselves *bound in*

Conscience, to commit these execrable Sins, and that *they did God good Service thereby*. Whereas those very *Apostles* always Charge 'em with these heinous *Crimes*, as *Unpardonable*, without *Repentance*; for that this *Erroneous Judgment*, tho' proceeding from *Ignorance*, was sufficient to consign 'em over to *Everlasting Damnation*, unless *Christ* Interceded for 'em at the *Right Hand of GOD*, as He did upon the *Cross*, *Father Forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

3. The *Third Instance*, that may Cheat Us under the Appearance of *True Conscience*, is *Passion*. This Imposes upon Us in a *Thousand Shapes*, and requires great Sagacity to Discover it. It were not Difficult to Dilate on this Copious Subject, and shew at large, how the various Representations of *Good and Evil*, and those *painted Scenes of Pleasure, and Pain*, which they so Lively Describe in the *Imagination*, Work up those several *Sensations, and Ideas*, in the *Mind*, which are as 'twere the *Internal Springs, and Wheels*, and that secret kind of *Mechanism*, that *Sets the Whole Man a Going*. Whoever looks into his Own Breast, cannot but be Conscious, how from His *Admiration and Desire*, his *Love and Hatred*, his *Joy and Sorrow*, his *Anger* and

and *Pity*, his *Hope* and *Fear*, his *Jealousy* and *Despair*, his *Shame* and *Honour*, his *Envy* or *Disdain*, &c. all his *Actions*, according to their *different Objects*, are *Produc'd*, and *Regulated*. These are the *Cords of a Man*, (as the *Prophet Hosea Figuratively* expresses it) whereby He is vehemently *Drawn*, and *Seduc'd*, oftentimes against his *Reason*, by the powerful Force of his *Inclination*, and *Affection*: Which as 'tis variously *Predominant* in Men, *Writhes*, and *Distorts* the *Conscience* into the same *Irregular Figure*. *Fear*, the strongest, and most violent of the *Passions*, when once deeply Seated in the *Soul*, *Tyrannizes* over it in a very Insolent, and Imperious manner; raising up *Mean*, and *Unworthy Thoughts* in it, and *Degrading* it to all the *Servile*, and *Pitiful Compliances* in the World. Those *Crude*, and *Unmanly* Notions of Religion, which it produces in some Persons, may be lookt upon, rather as a *Melancholly Indisposition* in the *Blood*, than a *Disaffection* in the *Understanding*, which doubtless does in a great Measure *Follow*, and *Obeys* the *Constitution* of the *Body*. Under such a *spleenatick Complexion*, the *Mind* cannot *Act brisk*, and *sprightly* upon its *Organs*, and *Judge*, and *Reason perspicuously* as it ought to do. On the other hand, *Self-sufficiency*, *Pride*, and a bitter *Zeal* make Men *Supercilious*, *Cruel*, *Aspiring*,
and.

and *Presuming*; *Arrogant* in themselves, *Insolent* to their *Neighbours*, and even impudently *Familiar*, and *Saucy* towards *God*. Now the *Motions* of these *Passions* being so very *Turbulent*, and *Rapid*, they *silence*, and *drown* the *still Voice* of *Reason*, allow it not Time to *Recollect* it self, but *Hurry* it away blindfold into *Sin*. Every other *Passion* has its *particular Charm* to *Intoxicate*, and way of *Operation* to *Deceive*, the *Understanding*, that it may not *Distinguish* betwixt *Specious Sophistry*, and the true *Commands* and *Laws* of an *Unbias'd*, and *Uncorrupted Conscience*.

4. To this of *Passion*, may be added another *Cause* of *Error* in the *Conscience*, not much unlike it in *Nature*, and that is, *Humour*, or *Phancy*, which is the *sensual Operation* of a *Whimsical*, and *Deprav'd Will*, which inclines *Men* through a *Sceptical Disposition*, to *Hunt* after *Novelties*, fall in *Love* with odd *Hypotheses*, and *Conjectures*, *Catch* at *Phantoms*, and at length so far *Deceive* themselves, as to *Credit* Their Own *Dreams*, and *Rêveries*. A sort of *Magick Inchantment* in the *Understanding*, a *Romantick Scene* of *Life*, made up of *Air* and *Invention*, in which *Men Walk* as 'twere *in their Sleep*, and *Converse* in a *Vision*: It usually *Possesses* *Men* of *strong Imaginations*,

tions, and *Weak Judgments*, and so Infatuates the *Reason*, that it deprives it of the Power of *Distinguishing* betwixt *Caprice*, and *Religion*, betwixt the *Spiritual*, and *Natural Inclinations*, or the *Motions* of the *Superior*, and *Inferior Soul*. This may spring perhaps from the *Irregular Heats* of a too *Volatile* and *Disturb'd Brain*, which may put the *Spirits* into a *Confus'd Ferment*, a *Precipitate* and *Violent Career*, and thereby give the *Lower Principles* of *Sensation*, a *Predominancy* over the Powers of *Right Reason*. This (as a *Learned Writer*, with a *curious Felicity* of Expression, styles it) may be call'd an *Animal Conscience*, Arising from, and being Govern'd by the *Imagination*, and bearing the same Relation to the *Sensitive Representations* of it, as the *True Conscience* does to the *Intellectual Faculties*, and *Operations*: A most *Unhappy*, and almost *Incurable Delusion*, which GOD permits some *Wilful*, *Self-conceited*, and *Headstrong* Persons to fall into; whose *Pride*, and *Ignorance*, sets 'em above the *Wholsom Doctrines*, and *Wise Ordinances* of the *Church*, and perswades 'em to Prefer their *Own vain and sottish Inventions*, before the *Eternal Oracles of Truth*, and the unerring *Light of Divine Revelation*. Whereupon the *Holy Ghost* has thought fit to Caution

tion all *sober Christians*, against the *Madness* of such *Frantick Zealots*, by stigmatizing 'em with that *just, but Vile Character, of being Deserted by his Blessed Influence, given up to their Own Inclinations, to strong Delusions, and to the Belief of a Lye*: as it is frequently Observ'd of Men much Addicted to such *Obstinate Humours*, from a long, *Habitual Indulgence* in 'em, they come at last to *Impose* more upon *Themselves* than *Others*; and which is the most wretched, and Despicable Condition, a Mortal can fall under, to *swallow their Own Falshoods, and Believe their Own Fictions*. To this Wild, and *Enthusiastick Infatuation*, We ought to appropriate the Rise of *Heresy*, (which on this very account, is doubtless, by *St. Paul* reckon'd among *the Works of the Flesh*, tho' it seems to be an *Intellectual Operation*) together with *Bigotry, and Phanaticism*, which some *Fanciful, Wayward, and Contumacious Men Create* in their Brains, and Blaspheously *Christen* with the Holy Name of the *Spirit, and Conscience*. Which in truth are Nothing but *Phrenzy, and the Lunatick Productions of Distemper'd Heads*: and what are the *Fatal Effects* of these Mischievous, and *Diabolical Intoxications*, if not kept under a Timely Government, and Restraint, scarce any *Kingdom in Europe*, but can sadly Testify, and *Our*

Own in particular, even to this Day, may Lament, and for the future Deprecate.

5. The *Last Instance*, I shall produce of a *Mistaken Conscience* in the World, is what It calls *Honour*; which, since *Religion* is grown out of *Fashion*, is now become the *Gentleman's Conscience*. *Christianity forsooth* must be Discarded by some *Men of Honour*, as a *Narrow Institution*, fit only for *Bookish Pedants*, that are unacquainted with the *way of the World*: their *Reason* must be as *Loose*, and *Unconfined* as their *Lives*; and they scorn tamely to submit, to an *Incredible*, and *Mysterious Revelation*, which to their *Refin'd Understanding* is *meer Nonsense*, and *Priest-craft*; if through an high *Strain of Complaisance*, they condescend to Own any *Natural*, or *Moral Duty*, 'tis well if they mean any thing by it, besides the *fullfilling* their *Lusts*, and *Pleasures*: As if they were Born for nothing else but *Ease* and *Luxury*, and the *World* was made for these useles *Leviathans* to take their *Pastime* therein: *Fortune*, *Quality* and *Condition*, it seems are sufficient *Priviledges* to give their Possessors a *Dispensation* from the *Power* and *Obligation* of *Laws*, and to *Exempt* these *Favourite*s of *Heaven* (as they deem themselves) from all their *Penalties*, by a *Peculiar Pre-*
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rogative above their *Fellow-Creatures*: As if, by how much the greater *Bounty*, GOD has Bestow'd upon *them*, so much the Less *Gratitude* they Ow'd to *him*, and their *Acknowledgments* were still to be *Lessen'd* by the *Increase* of his *Favours*. These are the Persons, who, by their Own Authority, wou'd *supersede* the *Law of God*, and make *Themselves*, and their Own *Licentious Wills*, the sole *Guide*, and *Rule* of their *Actions*; which, in their *Dialect*, they are pleas'd to *Varnish* with the Glittering Colour of *Honour*; a Thing, which these Empty, and Noisy, *Pretenders* to, talk as loudly and confidently about, as if they *really* Understood what it *Meant*. Whereas (GOD knows) *they* want as much to be *Instructed* in the *true Nature* of *this*, as in *that Religion*, which they so *Ignorantly* Laugh at, and so *Presumptuously* Despise. Otherwise they wou'd not, in *Defiance* of the Wisdom of All *Laws*, *Human*, and *Divine*, set up a Senseless Notion of *Bravery*, to Dignify *Malice*, and *Murder*; and take that to be the *Only Satisfaction* of the *Gentleman*, which must be the *Damnation* of the *Christian*. In short, where Men *Abandon* their *Faith*, and the *Fear of God*, *Conscience*, and *Honour*, are insignificant Sounds, and *Deceitful Expressions*, which Men that have *Neither*, make use of to *Impose* upon those that *have*.
There

There are doubtless many Men, who abstain from the Commission of some Impious, and Detestable Actions, purely with respect to *common* Decency, a Sense of *Generosity*, or the Rules of *Good Breeding*, without any Regard had to those of *Religion*, or the *Commands* of GOD. That is, to speak the plain Truth, they Scorn to be Guilty of any thing that may render 'em *Little*, and *Contemptible* in the Esteem of Men of *Worth* and *Gravity*; so that indeed it is their *Character*, not *Integrity*, the *Reputation* and *Applause* of Men, not the *Answer* of a *Good Conscience*, that Governs their *Conduct*. How little are these *Gentlemen* acquainted with the sound Notion of *True Honour*, which is a much more *Exalted Principle*, than they take it for, and Springs from a more *Noble* and *Beautiful Original*? This is not the Degenerate Off-spring of *Sin*, or *Villany*, does not arise from any *Vicious Qualities*, as *Pride*, *Hypocrisy*, *Ostentation*, *Revenge*, or *Ambition*; but is founded upon the *Real Worth*, and *Intrinsic Goodness* of Things; Springs from *God*, and the *Law*, the *Sole Fountains* of *Honour*, to whose *Precepts*, and *Injunctions*, it always pays a *Just Subordination*, and *Final Reference*. This indeed is not so much a *Single Vertue* in it self, as the *Seasoning Qualification*, and *Embellishment*, of *All other Vertues*; Which (to

Draw a Compendious Description of its Lovely Properties) Sets a Man above All Fear, but that of doing any thing Base or Dishonest; which makes Him Abhor, as much to Detract from his Enemy, as to Flatter his Friend; to Scorn Hypocrisy, tho' 'twere for his Interest; and Detest Injustice, tho' it might Gratify his Revenge; which renders him Dutiful and Submissive to his Superiors, Affable, Obliging, and Generous even to his Inferiors; and, in a Word, that makes him, on All Occasions, Exemplify his Steady Loyalty to his Prince, his Inviolable Love to his Country, his untainted Fidelity to his Friend, his open Hospitality to Strangers, his Perpetual Charity to the Poor, and his Universal Beneficence to All the World. This is that charming Character, which alone Constitutes a Man of True Honour, who certainly is the Best Man in the World, next to a Man of Conscience, who still Rises higher in his Principles, and makes GOD and his Duty the Sole, and Ultimate End of All his Actions.

Thus I have Run through All those Causes, which I take to be the Grounds of an Erroneous, and Mis-guided Conscience; all which I have Drawn from the Nature, and Motives, of Human Actions, which is Resolving them into their Principles, and (as I humbly Conceive)

the

the Best, and Truest Way of Explaining them. Such as are *Interest*, and *Prejudice*, the *Delusions* of Our several *Passions*, and *Affections*, *Superstition*, *Pride*, *Fear*, *Ignorance*, and mistaken *Zeal*, *Imagination*, and *Fancy*, *Reputation*, and *False Honour*: All which are *Wrong Grounds* of *Practice*, and can never properly *Justify* Our *Conduct*. We see how many *Ways* there are that *Lead* to *Error*; for that *single One*, that *Directs* Us Safely, and Infallibly to *Truth*, and how liable We are to be *Betray'd*, into *Any*, or *All*, of them. And methinks the *Dangerous Consequence* might Forewarn Us to Beware of Taking up *False Principles* at first; for if These are founded on an *Unsound*, and *Treacherous Bottom*, the whole Course of Our Lives being Grounded upon *Sin*, and *Error*, must needs be One *continued Mistake*, and so insensibly carry Us on to, and at length *End* in *Ruine*, and *Confusion*. So *Bewitching* is the *Imposture*, We may be *Seduc'd* into it, and not know what We are Doing: *There being a Way* (as the *Wise Man* tells Us) that *may seem Right in a Man's Own Eyes*, when nevertheless the *End of that way is Death*. And without doubt in this Lamentable Case, a Man may Govern the whole Course, and Tenour of his Life and Actions by a *Rule*, that
may

may thro' *Prejudice*, or a want of *due Examination*, appear *Just*, and *True* in his *Own Judgment*, and notwithstanding find himself *Judg'd* of *God*, by a quite *Contrary* one at the *Last Day*. This is the *Vast*, and *Frightful Danger* of *Founding Our Conscience*, upon *Wrong Principles* in the *Beginning*, which is the *Great*, and most *Common Occasion* of *Error*; but there is *Another*, which tho' not so *Frequent*, is however of no less *Perilous* a *Consequence*, and that is a *False Application of Right Principles*. In this *Case*, a *Man sets out well* for his *Journey*, but for want of a *Guide*, or *Conduct*, *Mistakes his Road*, *Wanders up and down*, is at length *Bewilder'd*, and *Lost*, and so *Falls short* of the *Design'd*, *Happy End*, of his *Travels*. Of such *Infinite Concern*, and *Importance* is it, if *We wou'd Avoid* these *Dismal Miscarriages*, to make *Our Selves* throughly *Acquainted* with the *Nature*, and *Obligation*, of the *Exact Rule* of *Our Actions*, and the *Proper Use* that *We shou'd* make of it in the *Application*; which brings *Me* in the *Last Place*,

III. *Thirdly*, To *State* those *General Laws*, whereby the *Conscience* is to be *Regulated*, and to *shew* how they *Ought* to be *Apply'd*. Now
the

the Whole *Extent*, and *Obligation* of *Conscience*, tho' seemingly so very *Copious*, is Bounded by These *Three Laws*.

1. *The Divine*,
2. *The Political*, and
3. *The Moral Law*.

1. The *First*, being the *Immediate Command* of *GOD*, is the *Great*, *Supream*, and *Transcendent Law* of all, wherein is *Summ'd up* a *Full*, and *Comprehensive View*, of Our *Christian Duty*, and the *Will of God*, entirely *Reveal'd* to the *World*.

2. The *Second* is the *Law* of All *Civil Societies*, by which are to be *Try'd* All *Actions* relating to *Government*, and whatsoever is *Committed betwixt Man, and Man*; which in *Subordination* to the *First*, and if not *Contrary* to it, lays *Great Force*, and *Indispensible Obligation of Duty* upon every *Subject*, this *Obligation* being *Ratify'd* by the *Divine Law*.

3. The *Last* is that *Law*, whereby We are to *Try* the *Good*, or *Evil*, of Our *Actions*, as they stand related to *Vertue*, or *Vice*, and are *founded* upon the *Principles of Reason*, and the *Light of Nature*. The *Other Two Laws* are

are *Superstructures* upon *this Law*, which being the Dictate of Nature, *written by God in Our Hearts*, was, and is the Rule of Our Actions, when ever the Other *two Laws* are *Silent*.

By the *Conformity* of Our Actions to these *Three Laws*, as those Actions lie under their *Peculiar Jurisdiction*, and *Cognisance*, We are to take the *Measures* of their *Rectitude*, or *Obliquity*, and Denominate them *Good*, or *Bad*, *Vertuous*, or *Vicious* : and a Man's *Conscience* may always *Acquit* Him, where it does not appear *Obnoxious* to one of *these Laws* ; according to That *Eternal Maxim* of the *Scriptures*, *Where there is no Law, there is no Transgression* : Now tho' the *Holy Scriptures* are the *Grand, Sovereign Law* of all, so that *Nothing* can be *Authoriz'd* in any *Inferior Law*, that is any ways *Repugnant*, or *Contrary* to That, yet it must be *Acknowledg'd*, not to be, *the Universat, Adequate Rule of Conscience* : neither must We expect *Every thing* to be *Commanded* therein, which may be the *Injunction* of *Particular Laws* ; for this wou'd *Supersede*, and *Frustrate* their *End* ; neither is there any *Absolute Necessity*, of *Justifying* any *Peculiar Law* with *Authority* drawn from the *Scriptures*, unless as it is *expresly Prohibited* therein ; or by *Manifest, and Undeniable Deductions*,

ductions, concluded from thence to be *Unlawful*.

That these *Laws*, take in the *whole Compass of Humane Duty*, is Evident; in that they Answer to the *Three Great Branches*, or *Distinct Offices* of it, relating to *God*, Our *Neighbour*, and Our *Selves*. The *First*, shewing what We *Owe* to Our *Creatour*, as *Men*, and *Christians*; The *Second*, what We *Owe* to Our *Brethren*, as *Members* of the *Body Politick*, in Our *Publick Capacities*; and the *Third*, what We *Owe* to Our *Selves*, in Our *Private Capacity*; as far as it is Discoverable by the *Principles of Revelation*, the *Rules of Civil Justice*, the *Light of Nature*, and the *Dictates of Reason*.

Thus I have given as *Short*, and I hope as *Clear* a View of this *Momentous Point*, as the Time wou'd Allow Me, and to Close up the Whole, shall further Intreat Your Patience, whilst I briefly shew, how those *Rules* may be Apply'd:

1. To *Settle a Doubtful*,
2. To *Quiet a Scrupulous*, and
3. To *Correct an Erroneous Conscience*.

1. And *First*, to *Settle* a *Doubtful Conscience*. In Order to which, this *Maxim* is to be Observ'd, That the *Commands* of Our *Conscience* should be *always* *Regarded*, but the *Prohibitions* must be *strictly* *Obeys'd*. For We ought as much to *Abstain* from *Doing* any thing, that is but *Probably* *Lawful*, as from *Doing* what may be *Possibly* *Unlawful*; because the *Mind* must *Act* by its *Light*, *Will*, and *Consent*. And there is *Great Hazard* lying on *That Side*; whereas upon the *Other*, a Man may be *Satisfy'd* in what He does, and *Runs no great Venture*, at least *Falls into no Sin*, if in the *Matter of Debate*, He has us'd *All just*, and *Requisite Endeavours*, to *satisfy* himself about what shou'd *Possibly* prove *Unlawful*. *Doubt* always *Implies* a *Thought* of *Injustice*, and therefore the *Holy-Ghost* *Guards* against it, with the most *Positive*, and *Peremptory* *Threat* of *Hell*, and *Damnation*: He that *Doubteth* (says He) is *Damn'd* if He *Eat*, for whatever is not of *Faith*, is *Sin*. Rom. 14. 23. But in *Case of Necessity*, where *Two Things* are *Propos'd* to Us to be *Done*, and the *Mind* hangs in *Suspence* as to the *Apprehension* of *Evil*, certainly it must place its *Election* where there is the *Least Danger*; for

for here the *Less Evil* puts on the *Nature of Good*: but where the *Choice* is *Free to Act*, or *not to Act*, He Flies in the Face of *God*, and *his Own Conscience*, that Presumes without a *Full Perswasion*. The most *Effectual Method*, I know of, to *Settle*, and *Compose* the *Doubts of Our Conscience*, is to be *Contented* with those *Probable*, and *Moral Evidences*, that Things are *Capable* of, and to *suspect* the *Illegality of Nothing*, but what Lies under a *Positive Prohibition*, either from the incontestable *Demonstrations of Reason*, or the *Express Words of Scripture*; according to that Rule of the *Apostle* in a *Case of the same Nature*, which may be a *Standing Direction* to Us in all others, *I know, and am perswaded* (says He) *by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing Unclean of it self: but to him that Esteemeth any thing to be Unclean, to him it is Unclean.* Rom. 14. 14.

2. Secondly, To *Quiet a Scrupulous Conscience*. And in this Case, I think, there is often more need of a *Physician*, than a *Confessor*; for the *Body* (as I said before) is Generally more out of *Order*, than the *Soul*. For those *Groundless Misapprehensions*, *Mis-*

giving Jealousies, and Imaginary Fears, that usually Disturb its Repose, are many times, not so much the Results of Reason, as the Natural Effects of Vapors, and Melancholly; and what are to be Cur'd, rather by a Corporal, than a Mental Application. If they are not Prejudicial to the Health of the One, they can scarce affect that of the Other; and Deserve, in Some Cases, to be Answer'd with Neglect, and Contempt. However, it is the Duty of such Persons, whose Just Scruples proceed from the Ignorance of, or Mistakes in, the Knowledge of the Means of Salvation; or from the terrible Dread of GOD's Judgments, and the Consciousness of their Own Manifold Iniquities; to have Recourse to those Spiritual Guides only, whom Christ, and his Church has set over them, to Watch for Their Souls; that from Them they may Receive Sound Instruction in their Faith, Fatherly Advice in their Conduct, and Ghostly Consolation in their Troubles. And let all such Persons rest assur'd, that the Ruine of their Souls, will as inevitably follow, as the Destruction of their Bodies, if at any time they Presume to Trust the State of either, with Itinerant Quacks, and Pretending, Ignorant Empiricks in Physick, or Divinity.

3. *Lastly*, to *Correct* an *Erroneous Conscience*. In order to which this *Maxim* must be Observ'd: That the *Conscience Misperceiving* the *Nature* of any thing, may from its being *Essentially Good*, or *Indifferent*, render it *Accidentally*, and *Relatively Evil*, to the *Person* so *Erring* in his *Conceptions*. But on the contrary, no *Misperception* of the *Conscience*, can render any thing that is *Evil*, or *Illegal*, *in it self*, any ways *Good*, or *Valid*. For a *Man* may be *Bound* by his *Opinion*, in the *One Case*, but can never by *It*, *Justify* himself, or *Alter* the *Unchangeable*, and *Intrinsic* Nature of Things in the *other*. It is a most *Wretched*, *Unhappy*, and *Slavish Condition* to *Follow* an *Erroneous Guide*; for which way soever We take, either *With*, or *Against*, This *Erring Conscience*, We are *Concluded* under an *Unavoidable Necessity* of *Sinning*: for if We *Obey* its *Commands*, We *Neglect* Our *Duty*; and if We *Do Our Duty*, We *sin against* Our *Judgment*. And tho' it may seem *safest* to *Transgress* upon the *Side* of *Conscience*, yet the *Mistake* of *That*, can never be a *Plea* for *Unjustifiable Actions*. What a *Fatal Dilemma* does the *Devil*, and a *Man's Own Folly* bring Him into in this *Case!*

Case! He casts a *stumbling Block*, and a *Rock of Offence* before Himself, which He cannot Avoid *Falling*, and *Splitting*, upon. So unhappily do some Men *Fetter* themselves with their *Own Notions*, and lay such *Chains*, and *Burdens* upon their *Consciences*, as they are not Able to bear. There is but One Way to get out of this *Hellish Snare*, and that is to *Break these Bonds*, and *cast these Cords from Us*: To *Examine* throughly Our *Principles*, and to *Rectify* Our *Judgments*; to *Divest* Our Selves of *Interest*, *Prejudice*, and *Affection*; to keep the *Upper Region* of the *Soul*, *Clear*, and *Serene*, neither *Clouded* by *Lust*, nor *Discompos'd* with the *Heats* of *Passion*; for these never fail to *Stupify*, and *Besot* the *Mind*, and will in time, not only make the *Conscience* *Insensible*, but (in the *Elegant Language* of the *Scripture*) *Sear it with a Red-hot Iron*. To prevent which *Lamentable Condition*, We must frequently *Retire* into Our Selves, to *State*, and *Adjust* the *Great Accounts* betwixt *God* and Our *Souls*; that no *Crime* may pass *Unretracted*, no *Slip Unobserv'd*, no *Infirmity Uncorrected*, no *Presumptuous Sin*, *Unsubdued*. Thus We shall Preserve a *Tender* and *Quick Sense* upon the *Mind*; the

least

least *Approaches of Vice*, will *Alarm*, and *Rouse* its *Faculties*; that no *Temptation* may *surprize*, no *Passion* entice it into *Guilt*. Since it is so *Easily Betray'd* into, and so *Difficultly Reclaim'd* out of an *Error*, We cannot with too severe *Circumspection* *Watch* over all its *Motions*, *Obeys* all its *Checks*, and *Revere* its *Verdict* and *Sentence*. Which *Labour* however, will be *Amply Rewarded* with the *Blissful*, and *Rejoicing Testimony* of a good *Conscience*, that in *Simplicity*, and *Godly Sincerity*, not with *Fleshly Wisdom*, but by the *Grace of God*, We have so had *Our Conversation* in this *World*, that *Our Conversation* will be always (what it has bin in some *Measure* here too) in *Heaven*. Upon this *Depends* all the *Tranquillity*, *Peace*, and *Enjoyment* of *this Life*; as well as the *Happiness* of the *Next*. For the *Reviling Clamours*, and *Upbraiding Reproaches* of a *Wounded Spirit* who can *Bear*? When that which shou'd *sustain* a *Man's Infirmities*, is it self *Broken* and *Confounded*, what can *Support* him, thus *Be-reav'd* of his *Last Comfort*, and left *Destitute* of the very *Pillar*, and *Bottom* that He must *Stand* upon? He must *Inevitably Sink*, that thus *Fails* in the *Foundation*. So
much

much is it *Our Interest*, as well as *Duty*, if We ever think to *Bear up* against the *Calamities of This World*, or go with Satisfaction into the *Next*, and Manfully meet Death in its most Ghastly Visage, *herein continually to Exercise Our Selves, to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men.*

FINIS.

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