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LETTERS

ON

THERON AND ASPASIO.

ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR.

BY ROBERT SANDEMAN,

FROM THE FOURTH EDINBURGH EDITION.

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ONE THING IS NEEDFUL.

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NEW-YORK:

JOHN S. TAYLOR.

BOSTON:

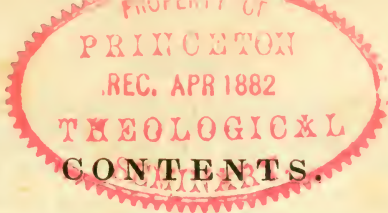
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In general these Six Letters contain Reflections on Popular, on Fashionable, on Political, and on Apostolical Christianity, more especially the first and last of these ; and also on Philosophical Religion.

#### LETTER I.

Serves as a General Introduction to the other five. Sublime Sentiments in the two volumes of *Meditations*, &c., in the Sermon called *The Cross of Christ the Christian's Glory*, and *Dialogues* between Theron and Aspasio.—Several Passages quoted from the *Dialogues*.—Capital Spring of all Mistakes about the Apostolic Gospel.—Aspasio's Account of Faith.—Passages quoted from the *Night Thoughts*, page 1.

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# P R E F A C E

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

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VERY few words are needful to introduce the present edition of the following work. The sole reason of its republication here, lies in the deliberate conviction which the editor entertains, of its being a far more faithful exhibition of Gospel truth than any other work which has ever come to his knowledge. The name of its author has long been under reproach, and will probably so continue to be, while the memory of these letters shall endure. The reader will be at no loss to discern the cause of this result. Should he dislike the general scope of the work, no skill could avail probably to justify to his estimation the severity of censure, which SANDEMAN saw fit to indulge towards the most venerated names of his day. Should he, however, believe and love the *truth* maintained in the work, he will probably see little to regret in it, on this or any other score. One eminent advantage, at least, which the controversial character of the work gives it, is, that none of its intelligent readers can complain of being kept in doubt, as to any of the author's sentiments in regard to the great principles of Gospel truth. By tracing out what he esteems the corruptions of the Gospel, in the hands of the popular preachers and writers, and contrasting with each the full light of the unadulterated truth, he has made it very easy for any one to obtain a complete understanding of his meaning. The editor is far from sure that this desirable end,—so especially desirable in books which concern the highest interests of man,—would have been so well accomplished without the peculiar feature now alluded to. Had SANDEMAN been content to set forth the positive truth, without at all bringing into view its negative aspect, he might possibly have failed—such is the listlessness of readers generally—in attracting attention to those distinctive features of the truth, in which its peculiar adaptedness to man's actual condition appears, and in which, likewise, the plainest discoveries are made of the real nature of that enmity to God, under which we all lie. Because the doctrines maintained in the work might

seem to be evangelical, and many of the writer's terms might correspond with those of religious books generally, the majority of readers would have supposed it just what they had read and heard a thousand times, and have given just as little heed to it as they had to all that had gone before. This idea is strengthened by the reception which a work, having a precisely similar end, but a different manner of reaching it, has recently met with from the religious public. The work referred to is Dr. RUSSELL's Letters, lately republished in Philadelphia, and furnished with an introduction by the Rev. Mr. Boardman. There are probably no two sentiments of any moment at variance in these two works, and yet one is highly lauded in mouths, which are unsparing in condemnation of the other. The writer has heard it asserted—by those too who would be sorry to be accounted dull theologians—that there is no perceptible disagreement between the sentiments of Russell, and the great mass of publications which have issued from the Presbyterian Church; and Mr. Boardman himself would seem, from a passage in his preface, to have left it questionable, whether even he has observed any material difference between them and the writings of Doddridge and others, which are so current in the churches. Dr. RUSSELL has seen fit to withhold all express declarations of such difference, leaving it to be found out by those whom it arrests, and for a time at least has therefore avoided—though the writer is far from imputing this as a motive to him—the reproach of such as are hostile to it. The explanation of the difference in the reception which these two works,—so identical in their great general purpose, and strain of sentiment,—have met with at the hands of those who may be presumed to have seen their accordance, is to be found perhaps in that principle of our nature, which leads us to tolerate every error, which does not pointedly and directly impugn our own favourite maxims, and to be intolerant only towards intolerance. Dr. RUSSELL holds sentiments which are eschewed by all the standard writers of his church, and the vast bulk comparatively of its communion, but has not thought it his duty to carry his difference (fundamental as he admits it to be between individuals) to the point of separation. SANDEMAN entertaining the same difference, sought in another communion a more cordial fellowship in the truth, and of course stood condemned by all whom he deserted.

*New-York, July, 1838.*

# PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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'TIS not unfrequent for writers, in subsequent editions, to congratulate themselves and their readers on the favourable reception of the first. Though the writer of these Letters is not authorized, on this occasion, to proceed altogether in common style, yet he may be allowed to express himself very well satisfied with the reception he has got. He has obtained what has been thought no bad reward even for poetry, which, says a renowned poet,

————— If 'tis truly good,  
Is best rewarded when best understood.

He has had the satisfaction to find, that his leading scope has been as generally understood, as could well be expected of a subject destined to be the object of envy and disgust in every nation; yea, so generally, that even those who have thought fit to declare publicly, that, upon reading the whole performance, they were not able to collect a single idea from it, have at the same time acknowledged, that it occasioned them no small fretfulness and disgust;—an effect neither uncommon nor improper for the gospel to have on its opponents. Men are commonly much more chagrined at stubborn truth, than at the nonsense and folly of their neighbours. For it is an old maxim, that we suffer fools gladly, knowing ourselves to be wise.

Genuine Christianity must always appear as an insult on the taste of the public, yea, the most respectable part of the public, and that in the most important matters. This, it is evident, must be the case, so long as she bears for her motto, That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God: and while, as a proper counterpart to this, her favourite topic is, to show, That the character which was, and still continues to be disallowed of men, is chosen of God, and precious in his sight. On this account, her presence every where awakens aversion and disgust. Yet she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her. And though her enemies will always find cause to despise her, yet she will ever be justified of all her children.

Being a stranger from above, come to visit the earth for

the benefit of men, and having no other errand than to distribute the bounty of heaven among the indigent, she can have no interest of her own to promote by the aid of men. Accordingly, she never makes her court to those who are best capable of introducing her into the good graces of the public. She ever wears a benign aspect to the destitute, and, with her richest smiles, diffuses joy among her dependents; while she looks with an eye of steady neglect and contempt on all who pretend ability to bring her any additional ornament or importance. She comes not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. She fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich empty away. Yea, her steady contempt of the latter is highly serviceable to ascertain and enhance her kindly regard to the former.

Though she has no reverence for the names of greatest repute in the world; yet she aims not to change or reverse the order wherein the characters of men are ranked in the estimation of the public. She never insinuates, that publicans and harlots have as good a claim to the public esteem, as decent and devout Pharisees; she only declares, that the former go into the kingdom of heaven before the latter; and that there are many, who are first in this world, who shall be last in the next. So that, though her language and temper must always be most provoking to those of first repute, as bearing hardest on their pretensions as to the kingdom of heaven, yet she never disputes their claim to precedence in the kingdoms of this world. Yea, the very nature of her opposition to them, rather serves in some respects to support that claim.

Having no political scheme to promote, she is no murmurer at the badness of the times, nor joins issue with those who urge the discontented inquiry, "What is the cause that the former times were better than these?"—a sort of discontent that points ultimately at those in authority. For the same reason, she interferes not with the state of religious parties, as having any inclination to raise one to the depression of another; nor does she spirit up any faction to rival the established church.

As she proposes no benefit to bodies politic, so she claims no distinguished privilege, nor thinks herself any way entitled to particular favour or encouragement from those in power. Yet as she is far from doing or intending any hurt to such societies, she has a right to toleration and simple protection, in quality of a harmless stranger. If she is refused this, she rebels not, but suffers patiently, or retires peaceably.



She is a zealous assertor of liberty, yet she dogmatizes with the greatest assurance. As she assumes no jurisdiction herself over those who despise her instruction, so neither is she desirous to draw upon them the frown of those in authority. Yea, she frowns with indignation at all who would thus befriend her. Her open declaration on this head runs thus, "If any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Thus we see at one view how zealous she is for liberty, and at the same time how positive and peremptory in dictating.

As she comes not to offer problems to exercise the wit of man, but to declare Divine truth, she boldly, on the part of heaven, denounces her anathema against all who oppose or corrupt that truth. Had she brought less strength of evidence, and affirmed with less assurance, she would have been more acceptable to the wise and prudent: but, then, at the same time, she would have yielded so much the less comfort to the weak, the foolish, and the destitute. For it is well known, that when the heart of man comes to sink under its proper weakness, (and the stoutest heart soon or late grows weak,) nothing less can then support it, than the all-commanding evidence and authority of Divine undeniable truth. When many of her professed sons began to think of establishing their own importance and pre-eminence, they affected to imitate her assurance in dogmatizing, and uttering anathemas in support of tradition, and the decisions of human wisdom. And the effect at last was, their hurting one anothers' bodies; a striking sign of the spiritual death attending such apostacy. But now we must consider them as under foreign influence, even that of the strange woman, against whom the following caveat is given: "Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths; for she hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." It would seem, then, to be a thing peculiar to genuine Christianity, to dogmatize tenaciously, and at the same time to be an unreserved friend to liberty and humanity. And thus, at once, she preserves the dignity of her character both in respect of heaven and earth, while, steady to Divine truth, she shows all meekness toward all men.

Ever condescending to the needy, she never fawns on those who look above her; never aims, by softening matters, to deprecate their displeasure; but despising them herself, en-

courages her children to do the same, saying with a determinate voice, *Let them alone, &c.* As for all those, who, standing above the level of her dependents, would yet claim kindred to her, she addresses them only with spiritual *weapons, mighty to pull down.* In general, as she needs not the applause of multitudes to support her cause, she never affects to gain ground upon men in the way of soothing any of their prejudices by the art of eloquence. Yet her adversaries, even by their opposition, are frequently subservient to the progress of her benevolent design. Nothing more naturally haunts the heart of man than the sense of blame, or the conviction of guilt: Yet to nothing does his heart make a more vigorous resistance than to such conviction. Now, she, in a way peculiar to herself, testifies of the world, that their works are evil, yea, in such a manner, as stings even the men of best repute, in the tenderest part. Thus she awakens the hatred of the world. And the noise thence arising, often serves as an echo to publish and spread her testimony, till it reach the ears of the worthless, to whom it proves indeed to be good tidings of great joy. It may be observed here, that the most cautious of her adversaries, the better to secure their own quiet, are commonly the most careful to make little noise with their resentment against her.

Moreover, there is, in human nature, a certain principle, called in Latin *odium tertii*, in plain English, the pleasure of seeing our neighbours and rivals properly censured, which often proves subservient to her friendly views. As her great aim is, to convince men of sin, and show the necessity of the Divine righteousness she reports, men serve her purpose by accusing and exposing one another. For, however blind individuals may be to their own faults, they are commonly quick-sighted enough to those of others. The same holds true of different religious parties striving for pre-eminence in the world. Now, however much such parties may be agreed in their opposition to the leading views of that wisdom which comes from above, yet they often find her dictates useful to expose the claims and damp the confidence of each other. It sometimes pleases the Pharisees, to hear her put to silence the Sadducees; and the latter no less, to hear her repel the high pretensions of the former; though in the main, neither party is well satisfied with the general strain of her opposition to the other, as finding but too often occasion for the murmuring complaint, "Thus saying thou reproachest us also." However, while such parties strive and jostle, they frequently prove the happy means of awakening attention to her salutary instruction, among some detached and obscure indivi-

duals, little accounted of by any party. So that she is never disconcerted in her grand design, let noisy parties behave as they will.

Though she concurs not with any of the parties aspiring after the public leading in religion, nor animates any of her children with such emulation; yet she forms a peculiar union among her children, altogether upon the maxims of the kingdom of heaven, teaching them to love one another, and never to dream that their cause can flourish and prevail till the resurrection of the dead. She animates them to maintain, with tenacious and inflexible zeal, that heavenly truth, which ascertains the purity of the Divine character, in opposition to all the corruption of the world, even that truth which is the bond of their union, and the source of their common joy; while she teaches them, as to everything human and selfish, or all things within their own disposal, to be flexible, gracious, and yielding both among themselves and toward all men.— Well knowing, that the truth which unites them will always expose them to the hatred of the world, she would have them careful as much as in them lies, not to dishonour their grand controversy, by giving men any other occasion to reproach them. Accordingly, one of her faithful sons, after describing her opposite, who assumes her garb, as earthly, sensual, and devilish, gives her true character thus: *The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

Our most serious writers, from the leading churchman down to the lowest dissenter, are commonly very earnest in pointing out the properest means to make **CHRISTIANITY FLOURISH AND PREVAIL**, sincerely regretting, at the same time, the unhappy obstacles that retard an event which appears to them, in so many respects truly grand and desirable. The two shining expressions in the last period the rather deserve a mark of distinction, as they make a part of the long established and most universally approved style in religious writings. For, however much Christian writers differ among themselves, they are generally agreed in being disposed, each in his way, to contribute their utmost, that Christianity may flourish and prevail. The reason is obvious. Multitudes not much concerned to know what Christianity is, are easily intoxicated with the fond notion of a flourishing and prevailing cause. What flourishes and prevails in the earth, will always draw the admiration of the world, even as its prevalence must be owing to its coincidence with the taste of the world. The Jews who had no taste for the appearance of



Jesus of Nazareth, were yet strongly possessed with the fond prospect of a flourishing and prevailing Messiah. And we should wrong them much, if we did not suppose them equally capable as our moderns, of embellishing that prospect with all the grand ideas of judgment running down as a stream, righteousness and piety overspreading the earth, &c.—On this head, it may suffice to add, that Jesus perceiving one of his most zealous disciples tainted with the leading sentiment of his countrymen, severely rebuked him, as influenced by Satan in that sentiment, as an offence to him, and as savouring, not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

It has already been noticed, that the scope of these letters has been pretty generally understood. The writer has likewise had access to observe his reflections, on the aspect the religious world bears to the apostolic gospel, notably confirmed. In both these respects, the general conduct and language of his readers serve greatly to keep him in countenance. While he perceives his notion of the apostolic gospel opposed by the same temper and dispositions, that opposed that gospel when first preached, he finds, at one view, both that his design is understood, and that his reflections are verified. And thus he is furnished with fresh evidence, serving to confirm in the persuasion, that his notion of the gospel is a just and true one.

The remarks of his readers generally concur in this, that his scheme will *never take*. Thus it appears, they understand as much about it, as to perceive wherein it differs from every scheme fitted to flourish and prevail in the world. And to understand that such a scheme will never take, is, with the bulk of the people, found a sufficient reason to reject it, either as false or foolish. To this way of thinking they are accustomed, by having frequent occasion to perceive the manifest absurdity of adopting any political scheme, which yields no prospect of its ever succeeding or prevailing. Besides, as to religion, we may easily perceive numbers of people, having no great taste for it at present, who yet show a readiness to disclose their zeal for it, so soon as it shall be in a more flourishing condition; that is, so soon as the reasons of their present coolness are removed, and the endearing motives in prospect have begun to exert their influence. To this observable disposition in mankind, we may, in a great measure, attribute the success which many preachers have had in awakening an occasional fondness for religion among the inhabitants of whole regions, while they have been exerting their eloquence to give them a prelibation of happier times.

To the same purpose with what is above noted, it has been

observed, that the strain of writing in these letters can never serve to promote the *interest of religion*. This observation likewise deserves the attention of the reader: and it readily calls to mind the reason why the Jews were so averse to the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah. The whole tenor of his language, temper, and conduct, appeared to them so much the reverse of being fit to promote the interest of religion, that, for the sake of that very interest, they conspired against him; as they did afterward, on the same account, against his apostles. Nor did the Christian cause begin to flourish and prevail in the world till the Christian leaders began to be more concerned about the interest of religion, than about the truth of the gospel in its native simplicity; yea, in our own country, matters have proceeded so far, that many zealous Protestants, moved with the deepest concern for the interest of religion, have bound themselves by oath, to extirpate such as maintained the heavenly nature of Christ's kingdom, and the ancient Christian order.—But more particularly.

The writer has had the satisfaction to find, that he has been pretty generally understood on the doctrine of faith. The ferment of the religious keeps him in countenance here.—Here is a book, says one, writ to decry all practical godliness; another, he gives a very lame account of faith; a third, he makes nothing at all of faith, he makes it a mere non-entity; a fourth, the faith of devils! Hence it appears, that the writer's doctrine has been as well understood as the gospel can well be supposed to be by those who dislike it. As his obvious and often declared aim, was, to transfer the whole stress commonly laid on faith and its actings, in the matter of justification, to the simple truth known or believed, even that same truth which is the object of envy, and source of torment to devils; how could his opponents, or those who impugn the all-sufficiency of the bare truth, to justify and give peace of conscience, more clearly have shown their apprehension of his meaning? As for those who incline to wink hard, lest they should see too much, and, for want of a better way of showing their dislike, still affect to say, they do not understand him, 'tis presumed they might learn to express their meaning more properly, from the vulgar story of the Quaker's reply to his creditor, who, meeting him at unawares, complained he could not find him at home, when he formerly came in quest of him. The reply was, "I did see thee, but I did not love thee." However, allowing them to use their own style, we are commonly at no great loss to guess his meaning, who has no other reply to give his neighbour, urging upon him a mortifying truth, than, "Sir, I don't understand you."

A cry has been raised against these letters, as if they meant to determine the future state of some persons whose doctrine is censured in them. Though the writer is sensible, that none but the more weak and foolish can seriously hearken to such a cry; yet he is likewise sensible that the wise, for their own ends, often indulge and encourage the foolish, in believing what they themselves see no foundation for: therefore, as he is persuaded, that the latter have as much concern with the gospel as the former, he thinks it proper to inform them, that when once men have wrote books, so acquired an existence as authors, they never die in that capacity, till their books are forgot, or have lost all influence; consequently, till that happen, they lie equally exposed to every one's censure or applause, as public edifices, statues, or pictures.—The zealous cry in favour of the dead, in this case, is well known, by all people of middling reflection, to have no force, no pertinent meaning in it, farther than as it resents an insult shown to the reigning taste of the living. All such likewise know, that the names of authors and public speakers, dead or living, are, on all hands, conveniently used, as the readiest index to various points of doctrine, and particular branches of the public taste, when there is not the reinotest intention to determine about any man's future state.—Yea, the writer is so far from having any occasion to stand upon the defensive here, that he has in readiness enough, and more than enough, to put all his opponents to the blush, if they are capable of it. He has warmly opposed, with arguments hitherto unanswered, all those eminent preachers, who grudge mercy to the greatest sinners, even at the last hour: and though he has reason to conclude enemies to mercy to be none of the least sinners; yet he has nowhere grudged, but, on the contrary, expressly maintained the freedom of mercy, even to them at the close of life. The open state of the fact, then, supports him in affirming, that he has shown a more benevolent temper to such preachers, than they to their fellow creatures. But what avails it to the reader, what sort of men are either they or the writer? The great question that concerns the reader is, what is Divine truth? If he has found that, he may boldly say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."—But to proceed:

If the writer, when he composed his letters, needed any farther evidence to support the vehemence of his style against the teachers and people most exposed to his censure, he has got it abundantly now. The main force of his censure turned upon this, that he considered them as enemies to his notion of the gospel, or of what saves men: and now, since his book was published, he has got manifold recent proofs of their

enmity to that notion; and what is remarkable in this case is, that those same people who avowedly oppose that notion, complain loudly, as if their favourite authors were highly injured, by being charged as opposers of that same notion. Thus their opposition to the doctrine maintained in the letters, while it operates in such indirect ways, bears the manifest badge of opposition to truth. Now, though some diligent observer should be able to make it appear, that the writer has mistaken any one or all of their favourite authors, in supposing their notion of the gospel, or of faith, differed from his; yet still it remains clear as sunshine, that such people act an absurd part, in calling it injurious to censure such authors, yea, to censure them severely, if it be true, that there is but *one faith* that saves men. Yea, farther, though the writer himself should, upon more careful inquiry, find that those authors agree with his own notion of faith, still he would have reason to reject them as the favourite authors of such people; or, in other words, he would have reason to reject them in the sense wherein they are at bottom understood and admired by such people.—The writer professes to agree with the apostles, so do these people, so also do Roman Catholics and Scotch Covenanters; but when they and he come to explain themselves, they differ about the sense of almost every notable expression in the apostolic writings: yea, the apostles themselves are considered by some people as so many popes or cardinals, or rather as so many deities and by others as so many political projectors of plans for national churches, and the dominion of the clergy; while the writer considers them only as so many self-denied witnesses for a truth, which neither flatters the pride of any man, nor yet yields any prospect of its ever prevailing in the world.—The like turn of reflection may easily be extended to the different notions men have of the character of the Messiah.

Remarkable has been the zeal for *piety and holiness* which the doctrine exhibited in these letters has awakened in the minds of the religious. The doctrine of unlimited mercy, scorning all the boasted distinctions among men, seldom or never fails to move the spleen of those who plume themselves most on their devout character, and have the words *piety, holiness*, and the like, most familiar in their mouths. The zeal of the most forward of this class, however much restrained in this land of liberty, does yet sufficiently show itself to be of the same nature with the vaunted holiness of those who said, "For a good work we stone thee not," but—for what? in one word, for impiety.

The writer has of late got many recent proofs, clearly



showing, how much our modern Pharisees reverence their renowned rabbies above the Scriptures. He has got abundant reason to conclude, that they would easily have indulged him in using great freedom with the gospel, had he only shown greater deference to the revered names of the demi-gods of his country. Moreover, by the general stupid surprise which they have openly avowed at the notion of a devout path to hell, they have shown themselves no less inattentive to the New Testament, than their ancestors were to the Old, who had the assurance to say, *Search, and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*; though their own Scriptures showed not only that the *great light* was to shine in Galilee, but also that the first prophet who preached repentance to the Gentiles, (even Jonah, whom Christ referred to as his corresponding sign,) was a Galilean. As to the notion of a devout path to hell, the passages ascertaining and describing such a notion are too numerous to be quoted here. But if any of our modern Pharisees should think the inquiry worth their while they may consult a concordance, at the word HELL. He who has not a concordance, may read the 23d chapter of Matthew's gospel.

The writer has no reason to be chagrined at his readers. He is sensible, he is by far too small an object for the resentment they have shown. That which provokes them is well able to bear all the weight of their resentment. The cause is far from being his. He was never worthy to stand among the meanest retainers to it; nor would it suffer any loss by the want of him; he only would be the loser.—He is likewise sensible, it would be very foolish in him, to attempt, by any reconciling methods, to soothe or allay that resentment; being persuaded, that the voice of him, who, at the beginning of the world, ranging mankind into two classes, said, **I WILL PUT ENMITY, &c.**, will as certainly have its constant effect to the end of it, as the word which at first separated the waters from the dry land.—And though the cause of the disallowed Messiah\* will never prevail in this mortal state,

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\* It may not be improper here to take some notice of a memorable saying used by Christ for the instruction of his disciples, when they were anxious about how and where his kingdom was to appear, and after he had given them various cautions against imposition on that head. The saying runs thus, "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Nothing could be more fitly chosen, than this similitude, to show his disciples, how he would always be *disallowed of men*, yet *precious to them that believe*. What more nauseous to men, and what more inviting to eagles, than an exposed carcass? the latter are led, by the rich savour of the most delicious food, to resort with pleasure to that wherein the former can perceive nothing but what is dispiriting and

but remain as a bruised reed, and smoking flax: yet all its numerous and powerful enemies shall never be able utterly to break or extinguish it. In the midst of weakness, poverty, and disgrace, it will continue to be supported by the sacred aid of heaven, till the grand revolution shall take place, when the bruised reed shall become an iron rod, and the smoking flax a flaming fire. Then the cause, hitherto just not crushed, shall flourish and prevail effectually, and all its enemies be confounded with everlasting shame and contempt.

As the writer never had the honour to be a *reverend* gentleman, he has no title to urge on his neighbours his notion of the gospel, under pretence of his being vested with any commission, or bearing any message from heaven.—As he never had any pretensions to *priesthood*, it would be absurd in him to move them, by declaring how much he would offer, suffer, or intercede for their benefit.—As he stands perfectly on a level with them all as to the kingdom of heaven, he has no title to dictate to them, or assume any airs of authority over them; nor does it become him to quarrel with them for neglecting his creed: yea, he is well satisfied, that they run no risk by despising any thing that comes from him, provided they reverence their Maker to whom alone they are accountable. On the other hand, they cannot reasonably grudge him the liberty of expressing himself with the utmost confidence in behalf of his own creed.—Again, as he is persuaded, 'tis not his business to consult the interest of religion, otherwise than by maintaining the truth of the gospel against all who corrupt it, and committing the success wholly to heaven, he has no reason to be greatly disconcerted at any opposition to his notion of that truth: all his readers, then, are very welcome for him

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disgusting. Wherever Christ's disciples, united only by his word, meet together to remember his death, as their only recommendation to the Divine favour, there the power of his kingdom is manifest to them that believe; and wherever he shall at last descend from heaven, there all his redeemed will be gathered together, and there the majesty and power of his kingdom will be visible to all. Let the sacrifice of Christ be divested of all the foreign considerations that have been added, in order to remove the disgust of men, and it will be found, that to talk of living by that alone, will prove as disagreeable to the religious world now as of old, and to provoke even many of the most serious to turn away, with something like the old complaint in their mouth, *This is an hard saying, who can hear it!* Yea, we are assured, that, with this same complaint in their mouth, many of those expressly called *his disciples*, went back, and, what is still more striking, walked no more with him. The forementioned memorable saying, likewise sets before us, in a very striking view, what a sovereign contempt Christ had for the applause of the world, and how careful he was to inspire his disciples with the same contempt, even while showing his concern for their welfare in the tenderest manner.

to take their own choice, and treat it as they shall find occasion. Those who incline to reject it have this to encourage them, that the great majority of those who have the first repute either for orthodoxy, godliness, or good sense, will always be ready to keep them in countenance in so doing. And as for the cause to which the writer professes himself a retainer; he can assure them that it is already as advantageously situated in the world as becomes it, so stands in no need of any of them.

Yet if one heartily approves his avowed notion, he must be desirous to see others persuaded the same way with himself; and this desire will naturally lead him, as occasion offers, to lay open the ground and reason of his persuasion. This the writer has done. Yet he is sensible it is impossible to satisfy many, who, in the face of the clearest evidence, will always resume the old complaint, *How long dost thou make us to doubt?—tell us plainly.* He is likewise sensible, it belongs only to God so to mould and dispose the minds of men, as to make them see things in their proper point of light, and accordingly understand them as they really are.—The approach of death commonly proves an effectual mean to rouse the attention of men to their real condition.—A gospel suited to the taste of the public, is apparently most advantageous in every stage of a man's life but the last—Then, nothing but the disallowed gospel can support his heart.—This would readily appear, if we could collect the suffrages of the dying.—All who admit the disallowed gospel, find the last stage of life in some sort made present to them; so they find themselves under a necessity of admitting it as the only shield from despair. The great use of the gospel is, to serve as the cure of death, and the fear that precedes it—Those who have not been much pressed with the fear of death and its consequences, can see very little in the gospel worthy of their attention, however much they may flourish, and make fine speeches about it.

This preface may properly enough be concluded with a summary view of the scope of the letters, in the words of a motto, somewhere observed in a church.

—*Errantia lumina fallunt,  
Cruce certa salus.*

Which may be Englished thus,

“ Each wand'ring light bewilder'd men betrays;  
The cross alone salvation sure displays.”

March, 1759.

\* \* What farther the writer has to say on occasion of this edition, may be seen in the Appendix.



LETTERS  
ON  
THERON AND ASPASIO.

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LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

THE uncommon, and, therefore, the more amiable zeal shown for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, in your two volumes of *Meditations, &c.* and in your sermon, entitled, *The cross of Christ the Christian's glory*, afforded no small satisfaction to such as professed a hearty attachment to those doctrines, and filled them with the warmest prepossession in favour of any thing that should drop from your pen. It gave them pleasure to see the grand article of the Christian religion, which, you now well say, "seems to be little understood, and less regarded, if not much mistaken, and almost forgotten," so warmly, and with such a winning address, maintained, in a book, which on account of its various ornaments, readily insinuated itself into the hands of many who seldom think the more important truly worthy of their attention.

It behooved to please all who worship, as their God and Saviour, him who wrought that righteousness, to see you, in all your excursions through nature, making every thing that is beautiful, every thing that is grand in the creation, to serve as foils to the glory of his divine person, and to the importance of that service he has done for men. How different is your strain of reasoning here, from that of most of our religious philosophers? While they awaken our admiration at the number, magnitudes, and distances of the stars, and call up our attention to the wise and beneficial order of the universe, they employ all their eloquence to persuade us, that the grandest view of the divine Majesty, that the brightest display of his perfection, is to be found there. They would

regulate our devotion, and animate our hopes, according to the character of him which they are pleased to read us from thence. And all this, with a supercilious neglect of, and, as it were, in a contemptuous contrast to that discovery of the divine perfections which was shown to men when God was made manifest in the flesh.

Though these gentlemen will look down upon you with an air of scornful pity on this account; yet you are sufficiently kept in countenance, by the unanimous voice of that order of intelligent beings, in comparison of whom the greatest philosophers must be considered as children and fools. The angels, those attendants on the throne of the Most High, who were witnesses to the bringing of the creation into order; who saw his glory through the whole, and shouted for joy when it received the finishing touch; who, when the Saviour appeared, had the experience of several thousand years; and who had always been employed in messages about the concerns of men; they, surely, must be allowed to have the most intimate acquaintance with the works of God, and the quickest discernment of his glory therein: yet, in their song of praise, upon the appearance of him who was born to die for men, while they point to him as yet a babe lying in a manger, they plainly signify, that they now beheld more of the glory of God, than they had hitherto seen in all his works beside. Upon good authority, then, may you consider the greatest distances as contracting into a span, and the greatest magnitudes as shrinking into atoms, in comparison of the condescension that appears here. Though your sentiments here may seem to *sink* in the eyes of a few below; yet they receive the stamp of the true sublime, yea, I dare venture to say, of the only sublime in the eyes of the innumerable company above.

But it is not my purpose, to point out the many beautiful passages, and instances of the true sublime, that are to be found throughout your *Meditations*. I have said enough to show, with what a favourable bias I entered upon the reading of *Theron and Aspasio*. And I had no sooner opened the book, than my appetite was whetted, by hearing, that the GRAND ARTICLE of THE IMPUTED RIGHTE-  
OUSNESS was to make the principal figure. And here I cannot forbear noticing, how pertinently you adduce the sense of a passage from Witfius,\* with great propriety setting forth

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\* The passage referred to in Witfius, may not improperly be considered as a paraphrase or illustration of the designation which Luther, in his spirited manner, gave to that same doctrine, when he called it, *Articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesie*.

the strong influence that the doctrine of justification, according as it is well or ill stated, has upon the whole structure of the Christian religion. You will not, then, think it strange, if, while I read forward, my attention was chiefly awake to observe, if this doctrine was justly stated, according to its primitive simplicity, in opposition to the various ways, wherein it has been artfully corrupted, and accommodated to the pride and lusts of men. And I may add, that such was my confidence in you, that I was disposed to allow you as ample freedom in writing, as the Roman dictator had in commanding, with this sole provision, that the *grand article* should suffer no detriment. Considering the excellency of this article, and that the least foreign mixture, like the dead fly in the precious ointment, deprives us of its genuine favour and benefit, we cannot be too cautious of its purity. The apostle of the Gentiles, writing to those of whom he had borne record, that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them; to those whom he had espoused to one husband, that he might present them as a chaste virgin to Christ; yet addresses them in this manner. *I am jealous over you with the jealousy of God.—I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.\** And I am apt to think, that, had you considered, with a more jealous eye, the writings of some popular preachers which you have read, the occasion of my present address to you might have been prevented. For I am willing to believe, that you have got your first taste of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity from higher and purer sources than these.

But not to detain you, so much were my fondest hopes gratified, in reading many of the dialogues, by finding the grand article so clearly and warmly supported, that, though I met with scattered hints that somewhat alarmed my jealousy, yet, like one averse to believe what gives him pain, I was willing to overlook these, and to presume, that they did not enter into your leading design, till the sixteenth dialogue completed my disappointment. Then I was obliged to say, Alas! how is the fine gold become dim! Has our favourite author then at last so far lost sight of the imputed righteousness, as to mix another with it! Has he so embarrassed, or rather shut up our access to the divine righteousness, as to

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\* *απλοτητος της εις τον Χριστον, singleness towards Christ.* These words, as they stand in connection, must, I think, denote that simplicity, or singleness of affection towards the one husband, which is inconsistent with every the least unchaste desire toward any other.

hold forth a preliminary human one, as some way expedient, or rather necessary, to our enjoying the comfort and benefit of it!

DEAR SIR, Having thus far opened my heart to you, it is necessary that I should now set before you the passages that compelled me, with regret, to speak as I have just now done. But before I proceed, I would first beg leave to consider you, rather as the author of that first-rate sermon I mentioned above, than as a speaker in these dialogues, and to address you accordingly, while I lay before you my complaint against Aspasio. This liberty I beg on two accounts; first, for my ease in quoting from dialogues; and then for my pleasure in writing, that I may, as much as possible shun the disagreeable office of using the style of an opponent directly, to one who has afforded me much pleasure, and never intended me any provocation.

Then let me add, that as I have the pleasure of agreeing with you in your just disregard of those terms, hatched in the schools, on pretence indeed of methodizing, but which have, in effect, served to obscure and confound the plain truths of the gospel; so do I likewise judge, that it would be very impertinent to abuse your patience, by animadverting upon words or forms of expression, where things of moment are not at stake. So that, however short I make my quotations, to avoid being tedious, my only aim is, to point at what I take to be the real meaning and tendency of the places from whence they are drawn.

Lastly, let it all along be remembered, that no man professing the Christian truth, can hold any error about that truth, without, at the same time, holding some double meaning of the words wherein that truth is delivered, whether he himself be aware of it or not.

In the small first edition, *vol. 3, p. 278.* Theron, repeating a definition of faith formerly given by Aspasio, says, "*Faith*, you say, is a real persuasion, that the blessed Jesus has shed his blood for *me*, fulfilled all righteousness in *my stead*," &c. Again, in *p. 286*, Aspasio says, "—I would only maintain, that an *appropriation* of Christ is essential to faith; that none have the proper scriptural faith, but those who are taught by the enlightening Spirit to say, *He shed his blood for me.*"

*Page 272—278.* Theron, after agreeing with Aspasio about the all-sufficiency of Christ's righteousness makes, this complaint: "But——it seems to be quite out of my reach."



To obviate this complaint, Aspasio inquires, "Are you sensible that you need this immaculate and perfect righteousness of our Saviour?" This, being answered in the affirmative, is followed by another question, "Do you earnestly *desire* this righteousness?" which also receives the like answer; but still a tacit complaint remains couched in these words, "And that would be a blessed day, a day greatly to be distinguished, which should bring it *near* to my view, and *home* to my soul." Aspasio, in his reply, after putting the case of Theron being overtaken by a dark and tempestuous night, and arriving late at the house of some valued friend, addresses him thus: "Was you not *willing* to gain admittance? &c.—The adored Immanuel professes himself *equally* willing to come unto you who hearken to his voice, and consent to his overtures; equally willing to make his abode with you, to manifest his glories in you, and communicate his merits to you.—

"*Ther.* I cannot open my heart." "*Asp.* Christ has the key of David, &c. Since you hunger after the righteousness, and thirst for the Spirit of the crucified holy Jesus, he himself has pronounced you *blessed*."—"Ther. Ah! my Aspasio! I cannot believe; I feel my impotency. My mind is, as you formerly hinted, like the withered arm." "*Asp.* It is no small advantage, Theron, to be convinced of our inability in this respect. This is, if not the beginning of faith, the sign of its approach; and shows it to be, if not in the soul, yet at the very door.—Fear not, my friend; he that bids you stretch out, will strengthen the withered arm. He first makes us sensible of our weakness, and then *fulfils all the good pleasure of his will, and the work of faith with power.*

"Can you doubt of his willingness?—Since you are sensible of your impotence, beware of the *contrary* extreme. Because you cannot, by your own strength, exercise faith, let not this occasion a tame resignation of yourself to infidelity. You must endeavour, diligently endeavour, to believe; and wait and pray for the divine Spirit. Though it is his office to testify of Christ, *and bring near the Redeemer's righteousness*; yet his influences are not to supersede, but to encourage our own efforts.—*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*; here is our duty: *for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do*: here is our encouragement.—

"You was once, Theron, a zealous advocate for good works. Now, you seem to have abandoned your clients.

Remember, my dear friend, what our Lord Jesus Christ says, *This is the work of God*, of all works most acceptable, and most honourable to the divine Majesty, *that you believe on him whom he hath sent.*"

"*Ther.* The true belief, according to your notion, Aspasio, is so refined and exalted a virtue, that I very much question whether I shall ever be able to attain it."

"*Asp.* If you are unable to attain it, is the Lord unable to give it? *Our sufficiency* for this, and every good work, is not in ourselves, but in God."——

*Page 284.* "*Ther.* To trust in Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour, and rely on him for *whole* salvation, is not this real faith?" "*Asp.* If you trust in the all-sufficiency of his *will*, as well as of his power, you practice what I recommend."——

*Pag. 297.* "*Ther.* If we feel an aversion to sin, and prize the blessed Jesus above all things; if the prevailing bias of our affections be to the divine Redeemer, and the habitual breathing of our souls after a conformity to his image, may we not suppose ourselves possessed of the *truth* and *reality*, though we have not the *confidence* and *rejoicing* of faith?—I say *we*, because I apprehend this is not my peculiar case, but common to myself and many others. I ask, therefore, in their name and in my own, may we not suppose our condition safe, though we dare not presume to use the language of the spouse, *My beloved is mine, and I am his?*" "*Asp.*—Let these persons know, whatever their names or their circumstances are, that they have as good a *right* to adopt the words you mention, as Philenor has to call these gardens his own. Yet they will do well to remember, that these qualifications, however amiable, are by no means the *ground* of their right. They are to advance their claim, and hold fast the blessing, not as men ornamented with fine endowments, but as poor, indigent, guilty sinners. For such the Saviour is provided, to such his benefits are proposed, on such his grace will be magnified."

*Page 301.* On occasion of Theron and Aspasio taking shelter, in the summer-house, from a violent storm, Christ being fitly represented as *a covert from the storm and from rain*, Aspasio proceeds thus: "If this is a proper emblem of Christ, to what shall we liken *faith*? To a persuasion, that the shelter of the summer-house is *free* for our use? that we are welcome to avail ourselves of the commodious retreat? Would this defend us from the inclemencies of the weather? would this keep us dry amidst the descending deluge?"

would this bare persuasion, unless reduced to practice, be any manner of advantage to our persons? No, surely. We must actually fly to the shelter, and we must actually apply to the Saviour: otherwise, I see not what comfort or benefit can be derived from either.

“*Ther.* May I, then, from this instance, look upon Christ, his glorious person, his perfect righteousness, and his precious death, as my *certain* inheritance? May I firmly believe, that, through this grand and immensely meritorious cause, I shall have pardon and acceptance, true holiness, and endless salvation?” “*Asp.* Why should you not believe all this *firmly*? You have the same reason to believe with a steady confidence, as to believe with any degree of affiance. It is the free promise of the gospel addressed to sinners, that warrants the latter: and the very same promise authorizes the former.”

Having now quoted enough at present, I shall here make a stand. And before I proceed to a more particular notice of the several passages, I cannot help reflecting, with regret, on the many artifices that have been devised by some, and unwarily adopted and propagated by others, serving to throw mist betwixt the eyes of men, and the glory of that righteousness which delivers from death; serving to confound and perplex their minds about the way of enjoying the unspeakable comfort therein laid open to the guiltiest of mankind, in their most desperate circumstances; serving, in short, to render of none effect the gospel of our salvation. I speak not of those who have employed their weapons against the person and work of Christ, endeavouring to make us lose sight of him as a divine person, and of his acting as the substitute and representative of sinners in the whole of his obedience unto death; such as have got any taste of the good word of God, are not in the greatest danger of being subverted by these: but I speak of those teachers, who, having largely insisted on the corruption of human nature, concluded the whole world guilty before God, eloquently set forth the necessity of an atonement, zealously maintained the scriptural doctrine concerning the person and work of Christ; yet, after all, leave us as much in the dark as to our comfort, as if Jesus Christ had never appeared; and mark out as insuperable a task for us, as if he had not finished his work; while, with great assiduity and earnestness, they are busied in describing to us, animating us with various encouragements, and furnishing us with manifold instructions, how to perform that strange



something which is to make out our connection with Christ, and bring his righteousness home to us; that something which has got many names, and includes divers considerations; all which have been supposed to be comprehended under the scriptural expression FAITH; as to which, after all they have told us about it, we are at as great a loss to tell distinctly what it is, or what we are doing when we perform it, if not greater, than when they began.

Though, by all who believe the Scriptures, the power and cunning of the prime enemy of mankind, whose work stands in direct opposition to the Spirit of truth, must be acknowledged to be very active in promoting and enforcing the influence of all those glosses on the Scriptures, by which the minds of men have been darkened about that blessed truth, which contains the only ground of hope for them, and by which they have been furnished with directions setting them to work to do something, under whatever name, to make up their peace with God; yet, at the same time, it must be owned, that all this sort of doctrine draws its origin from a very broad and deep root in depraved human nature, from a principle firmly settled in the heart of every fool and of every philosopher. Hence it is that Christianity can never become popular in any nation, unless it be taught in such a manner as to leave room for the gratification of this common principle; and hence it is that philosophers will always have a copious fund of arguments against it, and will always despise it as unsuitable to nature; though the wisest and best of them, according to the history of human nature given us by its author, possess it only in its depraved condition, and can have no opportunity of observing it in others, but in that same condition.

In order to have a proper view of this common principle, we must trace it to its source, and consider man in his first condition. The Scripture then gives us to understand, that when man was created, and Paradise fitted up for him, he was framed to live, or enjoy the divine favour, by his own righteousness. He was not made like other animals, to live by his food alone: he was framed to know his dependence on his Creator, to hear his voice, and obey it; and thus to be conscious of his favour, so long as he was conscious of having done nothing to deserve the loss of it. So we find he received his food by a formal grant from the voice of God, and included in that grant a command to be a test of his loyalty and dependence; and his obedience was to be the security of

all his happiness. If it be inquired, what was the language of nature then, as to the concerns of man with God? we must say, that God was very profuse in his gifts, and no less peremptory in his commands; that he was very kind to the obedient, and no less severe to the transgressor: we must say, that man could have no hope of any further friendly correspondence with him, if once his righteousness was stained with one act of disobedience. And the condemnation that has since followed, of all mankind to death, for one single transgression, and that not of what is called moral, but of a positive precept, as a standing proof of the extent of the divine displeasure against sin.

When man became a sinner, nature could point out no way of relief for him. Every attempt now to become righteous before God, and much more every imagination that God would assist him in any such attempt, behooved to be criminal in man, and to carry in it a dishonourable reflection against his Creator and Judge, as if he could be pleased with an imperfect righteousness, or a righteousness stained with sin.\* Yet, as by his original constitution, he was framed to live by his own righteousness, and to enjoy an happy earthly life as its reward; and as he knows no other supports against despair, he still retains the strongest propensity toward both these. And though disappointment has hitherto attended all his attempts this way; yet his pride still flatters him with the prospect of better success, by means of new improvements in his attempts.

This propensity, this common principle in all men, must now be considered as nature corrupted; and it is from this source that we find the Scripture deducing all the corruption that is in the world.

Every scheme of religion devised by men, has been contrived for the gratifying of this principle: and from hence every corruption of that religion which came from heaven takes its rise. But when I reflect to whom I am writing, I find myself eased of the trouble of insisting on the manifold proofs that might be adduced for this: for every one who agrees with the Apostle in saying, *Far be it!† that I should*

\* Notwithstanding what is above said, I am far from thinking that any honest or sincere attempt to please God, ever failed of success. Yea, I am ready to show, that all objections and impediments have been, by a particular divine edict for that purpose, removed and dispensed with in favour of all who are sincerely well disposed, whenever they shall be found.

† Μη γοιτρω. As this Greek phrase is commonly used by Paul, to

*glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,* must see how opposite the gospel is to this universal bias, this corruption of nature.

Every doctrine, then, which teaches us to do or endeavour any thing toward our acceptance with God, stands opposed to the doctrine of the Apostles; which, instead of directing us what to do, sets before us all that the most disquieted conscience can require, in order to acceptance with God, as already done and finished by Jesus Christ. What Christ hath done, is that which pleases God; what he hath done, is that which quiets the guilty conscience of man as soon as he knows it: so that whenever he hears of it, he has no occasion for any other question but this, *Is it true or not?* If he finds it true, he is happy, if not, he can reap no comfort by it. If then we slight the comfort arising from the bare persuasion of this, it must be owing, at bottom, to our slighting this bare truth, to our slighting the bare work of Christ, and our considering it as too narrow a foundation whereon to rest the whole weight of our acceptance with God. Whereas all Christians of the same stamp with Paul, can never see it in too bare a light, and are ready to say, *Far be it!* that we should glory, save in the cross, where that work was finished.

On the other hand, if the sinner finds his first glimpse of comfort, his first ray of hope, from any other source; if he finds any good motions already begun in his heart, and finds reason to consider God as seconding and forwarding such motions; then his friendly correspondence with God is already begun: for he finds he has already begun to move in a course wherein he is favoured and assisted by God. And it may well be affirmed, that by whatever means his friendly correspondence with God is begun, much more may it be carried on and perfected by the same or the like means. For as he improves in goodness, he has still more reason to look for fresh supplies of assistance from God, than in his first feeble and doubtful attempts. Even as all who glory only in the cross, and have got their first taste of peace with God from the bare work finished there, may well reason in this manner,

repel with abhorrence some reflection against the divine character, there is a manifest impropriety in applying the phrase given by our translators to such cases; as when the reflection is signified thus, *Is God unrighteous?* to repel it by saying, *God forbid.* And all the cases wherein Paul uses the Greek phrase, will be found to be nearly a kin to this.

*Much more then being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

Whatever doctrine then teaches us to think, that our friendly correspondence or acceptance with God is begun by our own good endeavours, seconded by the divine aid, or even first prompted by the divine influence, leads us to look for acceptance with God by our own righteousness: for whatever I do, however assisted or prompted, is still my own work; otherwise the most common actions of life could not be called our own, seeing in all these we must still acknowledge our dependence on God, in whom we live, move, and have our being. Agreeably to what is now said, we may find philosophers and Pharisees, both ancient and modern, in the height of their self-applause, acknowledging divine assistance, and ready to agree in using language like this, *God, I thank thee for my excellency above other men.*

We must begin our religion then as we would end it. Our acceptance with God, first and last, must rest entirely on the work finished by Jesus Christ on the cross: or we must betake ourselves to what many call the religion of nature, and what God warrants us to call the religion of pride, as being no less opposite to the law of nature, than to the gospel.

But it is now time that we should hear Aspasio. He tells us, " Faith is a real persuasion that Christ died *for me.*"

This account of faith given us by Aspasio, seems to me somewhat to resemble the arch of a bridge thrown over a river, having the one end settled on a rock, and the other on sand or mud, so needing a great many subsidiary props to support its own weight; and which after all is liable to be undermined by every land-flood or swell of the river; and therefore, the traveller had need to be cautious how he ventures upon it.

That Christ died, that he gave his life a ransom for many, is indeed a truth fully ascertained in the Scriptures, and established there, firm as a rock, for the relief of the shipwrecked and the desperate; yea, many finding rest here, have been determined to follow Christ, at all hazards, having no other reason to give for their attachment, but, *Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

That Christ died *for me*, is a point not so easily settled: and, therefore, I am not surprised to find Aspasio labouring hard, with much eloquence and skill, to establish it by a variety of props; and after all very ready, not only to pardon,



but also to sympathize with his friend upon his remissness and inactivity to come up to it.

This is a point which the Scripture no where ascertains ; so far from it, that it often affirms the final perdition of many, not merely hearers of the gospel, but who have heard and received it with joy ; yea, of those who have made such progress, that their only deficiency is, that their fruit came not to perfection. It affirms, that such as have been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, may yet fall away irrecoverably. Yea, it declares, in passages plainly pointing to zealous professors of Christianity, that wide is the gate and broad is the way which leadeth unto destruction, and many there be which go in thereat ; that straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it ; that many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able ; yea, that notwithstanding their great confidence about their acquaintance with Christ, and their interest in him, and their experience of his presence with them, he will at last say unto them, *I never knew you, depart from me.* When they are condemned then as hypocrites and unbelievers, they are not condemned for want of Aspasio's faith ; and that for these two reasons. The first is, It was never true that Christ died for them ; the second is, They were not faulty in this respect ; for the sacred text describes them as rather too confident about their interest in Christ.

The gospel proposes nothing to be believed by us, but what is infallibly true, whether we believe it or not. For shall our own unbelief make the faith or veracity of God of none effect ? Far be it ! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one of his words shall fall to the ground. The gospel, which foretells the final perdition of so many of its hearers, so many seriously and zealously exercised about it, can never warrant us to persuade every one who hears it, to believe that Christ died for him ; unless we shall say that Christ died for every individual of mankind, and consequently, that none of mankind owe their salvation wholly to his death.

Though I do not see how Aspasio's account of faith can be maintained without saying this, yet I would be far from charging a consequence of my drawing, upon Aspasio, as his doctrine. Though in his beginning to persuade the young Eugenio to be a Christian, he directly affirms to him, that Christ died for him, *vol. 1, p. 237.* I would rather

choose to look on this as spoken by way of ingratiating address to gain the young gentleman's favourable attention, or on account of some amiable disposition he had observed about him, than to conclude from thence that Aspasio would affirm the same thing to every individual of the human race.

Aspasio's favourite poet seems to me to be more consistent with himself on this point; for he roundly maintains, that Christ died, as well for infidels as for believers, as well for the damned as for the saved. Addressing infidels, he says,

"And was the ransom paid? it was: and paid  
(What can exalt the bounty more?) for you."\*

*Night 4.*

Pointing to Caiaphas at the last judgment,

"*Mistaken Caiaphas!* ah! which blasphem'd,  
Thou or thy pris'ner? which shall be condemn'd?  
Well mightst thou rend thy garments, well exclaim,  
Deep are the horrors of eternal flame!  
But God is good! 'tis wondrous all! ev'n he  
Thou gav'st to death, shame, torture, died for thee."

*Last Day, book 2.*

Describing the horrors of the damned,

"Ah! mercy! mercy! art thou dead above?  
Is love extinguish'd in the source of love?  
Bold that I am, did heav'n stoop down to hell?  
'Th' expiring Lord of life my ransom seal?  
Have I not been industrious to provoke;  
From his embraces obstinately broke?"

*Ibid. book 3.*

According to him, then, the damned are originally as much interested in the death of Christ as the saved; and if we inquire what constitutes the difference, or to what the happy state of the latter is originally owing, we may gather it from such lines as these.

"*Nature* delights in progress, in advance  
From worse to better: but when *minds* advance,  
Progress in part depends upon *themselves*."

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\* I presume that the emphatic *you*, so often repeated in an address to the *wicked* in the close of the sermon, entitled, *The Cross of Christ the Christian's glory*, is not to be understood in the like extent as in the *Night-thoughts*. Look unto the crucified Jesus, why does he hang "on that bloody tree? why is his flesh rent with irons? It is for *you*, sinners for *you*. That blood is poured out to cleanse *you* from guilt. Those wounds are sustained to heal *your* consciences."

Here I beg leave to make one obvious reflection, that when one imitates the style of his favourite author, on a point about which they think differently, some care ought to be taken to note the difference of sentiments.

Heaven aids exertion ; greater makes the great,  
 The *voluntary* little lessens more.  
 O be a *man* ! and thou shalt be a *God* !  
 And *half self-made* !—ambition how divine !”

Night 9.

Addressing man,

“ Dread *eternity* has sown her seeds  
 Of bliss and wo in thy despotic breast ;  
 —Heaven and hell depend upon thy choice.”

*Ibid.*

Addressing Lorenzo,

“ And *JUST* are all, *determin'd* to reclaim ;  
 Which sets that title high within thy reach.”

*Ibid.*

After expressing aversion to insist on the torments awaiting the wicked, he addresses the muse thus :

“ But rather, if thou know'st the means, unfold  
 How they with transport may the scene behold.

Ah how ! but by repentance, by a mind  
 Quick and severe its own offence to find !  
 By tears, and groans, and never ceasing care,  
 And all the pious violence of pray'r ? *Last Day, book 2.*

--Reason rebaptiz'd me when adult,  
 Weigh'd true and false in her impartial scale,  
 My heart became the convert of my head.

*Reason pursued is faith ;*

*Reason* the root, fair faith is but the flower.”

Night 4.

“ 'Tis guilt alone can justify his death ;  
 Nor that unless his death can justify  
 Relenting guilt in Heaven's indulgent sight.  
 If sick of folly I relent, he writes  
 My name in heaven, with that inverted spear  
 (A spear dipped in blood !) which pierc'd his side ;  
 And open'd there a font for all mankind,  
 Who strive, who combat crimes, to drink and live.  
*This, only this, subdues the fear of death.*”

*Ibid.*

These lines, and many others to the same purpose, need no comment ; we need not wonder, then, that a poet so nervous in his diction and so bold in his images, and whose leading sentiment in religion is so agreeable to the universal bias, should be very acceptable to the public, and that the press should scarcely supply the demands for his writings.

In this author, we have a lively instance, showing us, to what heights men may go, in fervent expressions, and even rapturous sentiments, about the atonement ; while yet they consider all the grand things revealed concerning it, only as



so many good and excellent materials to work upon, in order to establish their own righteousness, and attain some distinguishing qualification beyond others for acceptance with God; or, in fewer words, while yet they consider them only as a proper footstool for human pride. What uninspired man ever expressed a bolder sentiment about the atonement, than what is contained in these lines?

“ My heart! awake.  
What can awake thee, unawak'd by *this*  
*Expendèd Deity on human weal?*”

*Night 4.*

Yet, perhaps, it will appear in the sequel, that mistakes about the divine grace manifested in the atonement, mistakes far less obvious and glaring than those of this author, have proved the fatal means of utterly excluding such as entertained them, from partaking of the great and eternal benefit conveyed by that grace, to all who know and understand it in simplicity.

Having now begun to enter upon my plea with Aspasio, I shall here put an end to this letter, and subscribe myself, with great respect.

Dear Sir,

Your friend and servant.

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## LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

THUS I am still led to address you, from the endearing view I have of you in the sterling part of your creed; though I must own I behooved to have held you much dearer, had I found your faith first and last fit to bear the apostolic stamp; the stamp which the apostles put on the faith of the first Christians, whom they addressed thus: To them who have obtained ΙΣΟΤΙΜΟΝ equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet as

the precious metal disentangles itself from the vile in the furnace, I am not without hopes that your faith, on a proper trial, may work itself clear of the ingredients that sink its value. This I may hope from the great excellency of divine truth above human artifice, and its genuine abhorrence of every mixture.

Since I wrote my last, I have been taking a fresh view of the dialogues and letters, that I might the better assure myself of Aspasio's real meaning; for the same end I have been looking again at the two volumes of Meditations, &c., presuming that Aspasio's meaning could receive no hurt by any illustration drawn from thence; and I must own, that while I made my survey, such was the effect of the 16th dialogue, that it seemed like a dark cloud arising in the west, and extending itself eastward, till it makes all the beauties of the morning to languish, and damps the hopes excited by the cheerful dawn; or like the chilling influence of the torpedo, which benumbs the hand and arm of him who touches it. Many glowing pages seemed to abate their fervour, and many nervous expressions to lose their natural vigour; or perhaps it will be said, that when once the eye is tinged, every object begins to appear in a more disadvantageous light; but whatever be the cause, such was the effect.

I found evident marks of one spirit breathing through the whole; I cannot, therefore, agree with the suspicion I have heard hinted by some of your fondest readers, that you had drank out of some impure fountain since the writing of the two volumes of Meditations, &c., and far less with others, who have dated your change of sentiments since the writing of the two first volumes of Dialogues. After all, I must do you the justice to own, that I find the grand peculiarity of the Christian religion, the capital point, making a more striking and distinguished figure in your writings, than in any that I have seen of the popular ministers, for some of whom you possess the highest regard. But never did the ancient proverb hold truer in any case than in this, *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*. In most of their practical writings and sermons, I perceive the leaven almost at every opening of the book, but more especially when they come to make their *applications*, where I can find little beside. In yours I shall only say, I wish I had not found it at all. This is that leaven of which Jesus called his disciples to beware, even those disciples who had their religion from the very lips of the object of worship, and whose faith he had, by his approbation, stamped as genuine and divine.

Can any of us now imagine that we stand in less need of that caution than they did? But the great difficulty is, to persuade us that our danger is equal to what their's was. All the names and designations under which the ancient opposers and underminers of the truth are pointed forth to us in the Scriptures, are now held odious, especially by such as walk in their very footsteps; in like manner, almost every notable expression by which the truth is asserted and illustrated in the Scriptures, has been stript of the ancient simplicity of its meaning; not only so, but almost every passage of Scripture has been dislocated, and every clause or verse regimented according to the fancy of self-seeking men, in their several systems.

If I should say, that our modern demagogues have done more hurt to the souls of men, than all those stigmatized with the name of infidel writers have done together, the reflection would be thought odious. I would be referred to many passages in their treatises, asserting almost every branch of the Christian doctrine, in words not easily to be contradicted; and though I might fairly show a complete system of self-dependence to be contained in these same treatises, yea, to be the leading scope and design of them, yet it is easy to see that such a discovery, or any attempt toward it, behooved to meet with the greatest opposition from all who feed on this compound doctrine, especially from those who have the largest share of religious pride. For men do not choose to be scared away by arguments from the food which they love best.

If you should throw some handfuls of barley among ever so great a quantity of pearls, the poultry will indeed resort to the pearls; but it is their natural food that draws them: and if they should swallow a few of the pearls, it is only as they sometimes do gravel, for the better digestion of their food; for it is the barley that fattens them. And well do the pastors, I speak of, know how to season and mix up the Christian truth with proper ingredients to suit the taste of the people, and the people accordingly flock in multitudes after them; or, to express myself in more obsolete style, *They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.* That I may not seem to have disjointed this ancient saying from its context, I would have it noticed, that the chief thing aimed at there is, to make us cautious of hearkening to every spirit or doctrine, by which men pretend to assure themselves of the favour of God, or that Christ abideth in them. The sacred writer, after showing us by what spirit he and his

fellows were assured of this, adds, *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God.* Then giving us several rules to judge by, he sums them up in these words, *We (the apostles) are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.* Keeping then this rule in our view, let us return to the examination of Aspasio.

I WOULD willingly know by what authority Aspasio calls every one to believe that Christ died for him. The Scripture no where says, that Christ died for such a one who now for the first time hears the gospel; what then shall persuade him that it is true?

Will the grave affirmation and earnest call of a devout and revered preacher be of any weight in this matter?

Or is this a point whose truth or certainty is made out by the pains taken to believe it?

Or does the Spirit that breathes in the Scripture, whisper any thing privately to the hearer in confirmation of this, beside what he publicly speaks in the Scripture?

Perhaps it will be found upon inquiry, that the *appropriation* in question is supported by a concurrence of all these imaginations; and not only so, but is also subservient to several purposes extremely foreign to the design of the gospel.

As to what is hinted in the first of these three queries, seeing Aspasio is not one of what is called the sacred order himself, what I have to say on this head will more immediately regard those of that order, who have taught or encouraged him in his account of faith, and whose honour is not a little concerned in it; especially such distinguished leaders of the people as escort him at the foot of his page? leaders who have been considered as burning and shining lights in that part of the island where they lived, by multitudes who yet rejoiced in their writings. And it must be owned, that when the honour of the clergy is entwisted with any error about the truth, and there are few wherein it is not more or less interested, it becomes, then, the more difficult to disentangle the simple truth from the rubbish wherein it is buried.

Do not imagine that I am going to shock your delicacy, by entering upon the trite topics of wit against the clergy, by which the mirth of every fool is promoted; no, my plea is of a graver nature, and I am the rather encouraged by the singular modesty which appears in your writings, to express myself with freedom to you on this subject.



What I have chiefly in view, is the great hurt done to the consciences of many, in their most serious moments, by those leaders, who, along with what they tell the people about Jesus Christ, have the address to insinuate into their minds a high sense of their own importance; to insinuate did I say? yea, to maintain it with a high hand, and to proclaim it with as great solemnity as any part of the gospel; by which means they have a great advantage over the minds of the people, and have it in their power to mould and fashion the gospel according to their pleasure. There is no occasion for a very nice survey of their writings in order to evince the spirit of their doctrine; we have the old striking rule to judge by, *So we preached, and so ye believed.* The apostles refer us to the faith and practice of such as were influenced by them, as palpable proofs of the spirit of their doctrine; so, in the case before us, we may easily perceive the spirit of our modern leaders, as it breathes and acts in multitudes who are influenced by it. And among such of their followers as are most deficient, even in their kind of devotion, we may at least, perceive a very devout regard to the preacher, which is a manifest proof of his steady attention to one favourite point.

But perhaps it will be inquired, What has all this to do with Aspasio's account of faith? We shall see presently.

Many popular preachers have considered themselves as a kind of factors, or rather ambassadors for God, commissioned and empowered by him to make *offers* of Christ and all his benefits unto men, upon certain terms, and to assure them of the benefits on their complying with the terms. Accordingly, they have not been negligent in setting forth the dignity of their character in this view, and they have plumed themselves not a little upon the offer they had to make, making frequent repetition of this their offer with great parade. But any one who reads the New Testament with tolerable attention, may see that there is as little foundation for any such offer, as there is for bestowing the title of God's ambassador on any man since the days of the apostles. The apostles were witnesses for God concerning Jesus of Nazareth; they laid before men the infallible proofs, arising from their own knowledge, and from the prophecies of the Old Testament, showing that Jesus is the Christ. The effect of this was, that some believed and comforted with the apostles; and some disbelieved, and opposed them. The apostles then proclaimed a truth openly in the hearing of all men. And if it be still pled that they made offers we shall very willingly say, that they offered evidence for all that they testified; yea, that they not only offered, but

freely produced it, let men make what use of it they would. They were witnesses for God to men, but they never bargained for God with men, however much some scriptural metaphors have been strained to that purpose. They never taught men to put forth any act, or to make one step of advance towards God, on the prospect that God would condescend and come down\* the rest of the infinite distance to meet them. This was neither suitable to their office, nor to the honour of that God whose character they drew. As to ordinary teachers, or ministers of the gospel, it is well if they be able to declare the simple truth, as contained in the writings of the apostles, and maintain it in opposition to every lie that men would endeavour to mix with it, in order to undermine it. This will procure honour enough to them in the minds of those who love that truth; and such teachers will be far from assuming an air of importance over others, as if they had any thing to offer to them more than the meanest lover of the truth has, who will be ready, as occasion requires, to offer any man an account of the evidence by which he himself is convinced of the truth.

The preachers, whose honour is concerned in what they call the gospel-offer, commonly take hold of the promises of the gospel, which it is easy to show are made only to believers, and by the dint of their authority, with the help of a little art, extend them to all their hearers, without distinction. And to obviate the difficulty, How shall I know that the promise is to me, or that Christ died for me? they address their hearers in this manner. "We are the ambassadors of God, to us the word of reconciliation is committed; we are sent and commissioned to bring Christ near to sinners, and sinners near to Christ; we make an offer of Christ and all his benefits to you, and you, and you; in the name of the great God we declare, that the promise is to thee, and thee, O man, woman, whosoever thou art; in his name we call you this moment to stretch forth the withered hand and the withered heart, and take hold of Christ, saying, *He is mine, and I am his.*" I give here only a short specimen of what is to be found at large interwoven in almost all their sermons; and I am sensible they would as soon allow any article of the Christian doctrine to be attacked, as suffer this their offer to be called in question. We may find them busy moving questions, and warmly disputing with one another

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\* *The rest of the infinite distance*; the impropriety of this expression must be laid to the account of the doctrine here opposed.

about the nature and extent of Christ's death, trying which of them shall lay the most convenient foundation for their universal offer, and the particular application or appropriation connected with it; but this same offer, so highly serviceable to their extravagant pride, is like to be one of the last things they will entertain a doubt of.

These men, it must be owned, receive no small encouragement to their spiritual pride from their public standards of doctrine, affirming, that, "the Spirit of God maketh the *reading*, but *especially the preaching* of the word, an effectual means—unto salvation;" *i. e.* God concurs with the preaching of the apostles, which can only be heard now by the reading of their writings, but especially with the preaching of our modern ministers. And thus far I am disposed to agree with their public standards for once, that I frankly acknowledge, that their sermons are, by far, better adapted to the purpose of setting the minds of the people in motion to do something toward their peace with God, than the writings of the apostles, which in this respect, must appear extremely insipid. Accordingly, I find our most popular preachers, after they have given various motives and directions for stretching forth the withered hand, commonly enforcing them with this earnest and pressing call, "Up therefore and be doing."

Agreeably to what has been said, we find that the gospel offer, or the universal offer, or, as it is sometimes called with great propriety, the *ministerial offer*, has been admitted as fixed and uncontroverted style, in place of the ancient apostolic style, the *record*, the *witness*, or the *testimony of God*; and the embracing or accepting of an offer, with all the formalities and requisites necessary to constitute a genuine acceptance, has come in place of *believing the record*, or *crediting the testimony of God*.

The preachers I speak of, seem to be sensible of the difficulty there is in laying a sure foundation for every one of their hearers to conclude, that Christ died for him; and they suppose that the same difficulty must press the minds of their hearers, as is evident from the many objections which they put in their mouths, not easy to be answered: however, after they have laboured the point sufficiently, and done their best to set the minds of the people in motion, they boldly declare, by virtue of all the titles and all the authority with which they are clothed, that they are bound to believe this, otherwise they shall perish eternally. Such a declaration must be of considerable weight with people who are used to have



their hearts affected, and their religious conduct influenced, more by the preaching of their minister, than by the words of God in the Scriptures.

ASPASIO, unadorned with any religious title or dignity, is indeed far from assuming any airs of importance; yet in his zeal for the doctrine of these ministers, or in the warmth of his friendship for Theron, he seems to go a step beyond them in asserting upon this point. He affirms to Theron, while yet an unbeliever, or an opposer of the imputed righteousness, that the obedience of Christ was wrought out in his name and in his stead. So we find Theron, who had been opposing the imputed righteousness in dial. 13, ruminating on this assertion of Aspasio, in his soliloquy at the beginning of dial. 14. "——Aspasio urges me to fly, without any delay, to the covert of Christ's meritorious obedience. This, he says, was wrought out in my name and in my stead: this will be admitted both at the throne of grace and the bar of judgment, as my justifying righteousness."

Now, the abovementioned ministers, at least the two celebrated gentlemen who flourished lately, to whom we are referred for the fullest account of Aspasio's doctrine about conversion and faith, will not allow this assertion of Aspasio to be true or certain with respect to any man till once he believe it. They would not have affirmed to Theron, before he believed, that Christ died for him; but they would have affirmed to him that it was his duty to believe so; and they would have strongly encouraged him to make a bold venture to exert an act of faith to that end, assuring him, that the truth and certainty of this matter would some how turn out clear and evident in his believing it. And thus, I find some propriety in the term which they have chosen to express their belief by, when they call it *the appropriating act of faith*; that is, an act by which I am enabled to conclude that to be mine, which could not appear to be so by any evidence, till once I exerted that act.

Hence, we see, that, according to them, *This is mine*, or, *This was done for me*, is a truth whose evidence takes its rise from the pains that I take to believe it; or it is a proposition which begins to serve the name of truth, when I begin to believe it, and not till then. This, I must say, is indeed a very strange and uncommon way of finding truth; and they themselves, acknowledge as much, while they call it "a mystery which we cannot comprehend or account for."

The forecited assertion of Aspasio to the unbelieving



Theron, would indeed remove the difficulty, and afford a very intelligible foundation for faith, provided it were supported by any sort of evidence, or enforced by sufficient authority. But I cannot help thinking, that such an assertion makes but a very naked and defenceless appearance, from the mouth of the modest and untitled Aspasio.

I made a shift formerly, the best way I could, to account for Aspasio's making the like assertion to the young Eugenio; but I would not choose to account for him in that manner often. I was, then, and still am, very loath to charge Aspasio with maintaining, that Christ died for any but those who shall be eternally saved by him; for if he died for them who perish, then the happiness of them who are saved, must be owing to something else beside his death. And then I behooved to look on all that Aspasio has said about the necessity and excellency of the imputed righteousness, as words without meaning. Christ, speaking of himself as the good shepherd, says, John x, *I lay down my life for the sheep.* But to unbelievers he says, *Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.* How then can Aspasio say to any not hearing Christ's voice and following him, that they are of his sheep, for whom he laid down his life?

If I look for an illustration of Aspasio's meaning in the two volumes of *Meditations, &c.*, I find there\* a way of speaking, for which, I must at least say, I find no foundation in the Scriptures. That I may not be led away too far from my purpose, I shall only copy a sentence or two from the note on these words. "The first Adam being disinherited, the second Adam† was appointed heir of all things, visible as well as invisible." The note proceeds thus:

"† *Heb. i. 2.* In this sense, at least, Christ is *the Saviour of all men.* The former and latter rain; the precious fruits of the earth; food to eat, and raiment to put on; all these he purchased, even for his irreclaimable enemies.—The Christian should ever keep in mind his forfeiture of them, and the price paid to redeem them."

This way of speaking, savours much of the Jewish apprehensions about their Messiah. And, since the corruption of Christianity has taken place, the bulk of its professors have

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\* Vol. I. pp. 146, 147, 9th edition, 1752.

been ready to acknowledge a Messiah assisting them in the recovery of their righteousness, and removing, more or less, their forfeiture of earthly happiness. But all this is quite foreign to the gospel; which shows, that Christ's people suffer the punishment of Adam's sin, as well as other men: yea, it sets forth the certainty of their hope, by this argument, 'That they shall as effectually partake of the reward of Christ's righteousness, as they suffer the penalty of Adam's transgression. Compare what is said, Rom. v. with 1 Cor. xv. 22. We had best take care, then, how we weaken the latter point, lest we undermine the former; lest, seeking to open a window to let in more light upon the life that now is, we darken the prospect of that which is to come. And if we look to the matter of fact, we shall find the apostles themselves, who, we are sure, were the favourites of heaven, acknowledging that, take away the life to come, the balance, in point of happiness, lay much in favour of unbelievers; as is evident from the chapter last referred to, and from the whole of the New Testament.

The first Christians were distinguished from other men, not by any greater share of earthly comforts, as must have been the case if their peculiar Redeemer, who says, *I pray for them, I pray not for the world*, had removed the forfeiture of them; but in their patiently submitting to that forfeiture, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ unto death, in the hope of eternal life from the dead; life of quite a different nature from that which was forfeited: whereas, other men, conceited of their own worth, are always showing their dissatisfaction with the forfeiture, and struggling against it, accordingly as they are impelled by their ambition, avarice, or other worldly lusts; and, consequently, must be disaffected to the gospel, which affirms the forfeiture, and makes it to be more especially felt and experienced by them who believe and obey it.

This topic calls to mind a remark I lately heard made by some of your readers on the general air of your writings. That you seemed desirous to have Christianity make a respectable appearance in high life. They seemed to be of the mind, that Jesus Christ would not have vied with you as to the elegant figure of the personages to be pitched upon for a specimen of his kingdom and subjects, considering what a strange contrast he once drew, in a parable recorded by Luke, chap. xvi. 19. The chief design of which seems to be, as hinted, v. 15, to give a standing portrait of what is most sightly in the eyes of God, and what is so in the eyes of men.

But the first words of the note, "In this sense, at least, Christ is *the Saviour of all men*," deserve my attention most at present, as they take hold of a text of Scripture, and as they indicate some bias toward the sentiments of those, who, seeking to extend Christ's redemption beyond the limits fixed in Scripture, do most effectually exclude all men from the benefit of it. Perhaps no words in the Bible have been oftener punned upon than these, *the Saviour of all men*. It will be proper, therefore, to quote the whole verse: 1 Tim. iv. 10. *For therefore we both labour, and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.* If our translators had been as careful here to prevent punning, as they have been in many other places, this plain text had perhaps never been the subject of any dispute. I shall only produce, out of many, one instance of their caution from the Old Testament, and another from the New. In Psal. xxxvi. 6, they say, *O Lord, thou preservest man and beast*; instead of saying, *thou shalt save man and beast*. In Acts iv. 9, they render the words of Peter thus: *if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole*; instead of saying, *by what means he is saved*. Had they showed the same caution about the text in question, we should have had this plain truth before our eyes, that the living God is the preserver of all men, especially of those that believe; that he who *giveth to all life and breath, and all things*, has a peculiar care about those *who were redeemed from among men*. And whatever way this peculiar care about them was exercised, one thing is evident, even from the very text in question, that it did no issue in making their lives less subject to pain and trouble than those of other men.

One thing remarkable as to this text is, the great inclination which many who have occasion to point at it, show, to present us with a different form of expression from that used by the Apostle: some choosing rather to use the name descriptive of the Son of God, as redeeming from the curse, saying, "Christ is the Saviour of all men;" others in the same view, "God in Christ is the Saviour," &c. What is the reason of all this shyness and aversion to speak as the Apostle does? Is there any obscurity in his words? or have they any purpose in view which his words will not so conveniently answer? Are they afraid, lest any Christian will dream, that there is any other God but he who is made manifest in Christ? Or are they afraid lest any Christian will scruple to say, that whatsoever things the Father doth, these also doth the Son likewise? or does it not rather proceed from an inclination to give us



some other view of the redemption which is by Christ, than the Scripture gives ?

Let us make a trial of their method of commenting here, on other parallel passages of Scripture, and see where it will carry us. Having only premised this much, which every Christian will own, *viz.* that that Divine person, who in due time was found in fashion as a man, and who was called Christ, or the Anointed, on account of his being anointed of God with the Holy Spirit to attend him in fulfilling all righteousness, and redeeming from the curse ; and on account of his being again anointed with that same Spirit as the oil of joy and gladness, in testimony of his having completed his work ; that that Divine person, I say made the world, and could with the greatest propriety say, as to all divine works, from the creation downward, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

In making the trial, I shall go no further than to a passage I lately glanced at, Acts xvii. 24, 25. Here I shall only vary the first word, and, instead of God, say, Christ *that made the world, and all things therein—giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* Now, I freely declare, that my real purpose and intention, in this deviation from the words of the text, is to introduce the consideration of the Son of God as doing what he does, and giving what he gives, as the Redeemer from the curse of the law, mentioned Gal. iii. 10, and in virtue of the price of redemption which he paid. Having thus modelled my text, I proceed to deduce a few plain inferences. 1. Hence it is manifest, that all men, at least, are as much indebted to the Redeemer for their life and breath, as for all other things which they enjoy. 2. If, then, the enjoyments of all men are redeemed by a price, so are their lives. 3. Suppose enjoyments only are redeemed, yet the having of children has always been considered as none of the least of these ; therefore all men are redeemed, as having been once granted as children to their parents, the first pair only excepted. It is easy to see what a wide field is opened for imagination here : and how much wider it would be, if I should proceed to consider what would follow from saying, in the same view, Christ *made the world, and all things therein ;* and, *In Christ we live, move, and have our being, &c.*—But I forbear.

IN speaking of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, we had need to keep clear of all human systems, and hold close by the Scriptures. Jesus Christ, by the price of redemption, which he paid, delivers his people from the wrath to come, and he entitles them to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled,



and which fadeth not away: all the pains from which he delivers are eternal, and so are all the blessings he procures; every thing which takes place, by virtue of his redemption, is eternal; as he redeems not by corruptible things, when he redeems by laying down his own precious life, so nothing restored by his redemption can ever be subject to corruption. He is indeed appointed heir of all things, and the divine appointment hath put all things under his feet; but now we see not yet all things put under him. He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; but at present he rules in the midst of his enemies, until they be made his footstool. His people are comforted in the midst of their sufferings by the hope of what they see not, waiting for the redemption of their bodies, at the resurrection, and for the restitution of all things, or the deliverance of the whole creation, from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. I content myself at present with glancing at a few passages of Scripture on this subject, as I go along; a more particular notice of them would lead me too far off from my plea with Aspasio.

Some who espouse the doctrine of the two gentlemen above pointed at, as warmly as Aspasio, finding some difficulty in pressing men to believe, what cannot be called true before it be believed, have fallen upon an expedient to ease themselves, not unlike what is asserted in the note we have been considering. They maintain, "That Christ satisfied so for the sins of all men, as to procure many temporary benefits to them, and so as ministers might have sufficient ground to call every man to believe that Christ died for him." And to show what absurdities would follow upon the denying of this, they say, "But now, if Christ, in no sense died for any but the elect, how are these glad tidings to every creature? How shall this good news, this great salvation, be offered unto them through the blood of the Lamb, if he in no sense satisfied for them?" Hereupon I shall only observe, that it must be extremely difficult for any who maintain the appropriation in question, to maintain at the same time, the account which Christ himself gives of his death, and peculiar connection with his people therein.

This observation is confirmed to me, when I look into the sentiments of the adversaries of the above-mentioned expedient, who are as zealous for the ministerial offer and the appropriation, as their opponents. I find them, indeed, maintaining strongly, that in no sense Christ died for any but the elect; and yet at the same time affirming, as Aspasio's two friends have taught them, that Christ, by his taking on the human

nature, stands related to the whole human race; yea, roundly asserting, that he “doth stand in an *equal or undistinguished* relation of a *Kinsman-Redeemer* to mankind-sinners, as such;” not considering what inference necessarily follows, *viz.* That he died for the eternal salvation of all with whom he partook in flesh and blood; not minding that the Scripture says only, “He partook in flesh and blood with the children whom God gave him, even the many sons whom he brings into glory,” Heb. ii. For it nowhere says, that he partook in flesh and blood with any who shall perish. Now, in order to get over the knotty point of the appropriation, these men go to work thus: Speaking of “a person’s *special saving interest in Christ and his death*,—as being actually invested with his justifying righteousness, and accepted in the sight of God on that account;” they add, “which never becomes *true* in the case of any, *till* the moment of believing; for though a person has sufficient grounds in the word of grace, whereupon to believe this particular interest in Christ and his death,—and though it is never *true* in the person’s case till the time of his believing; yet, this doth not make *the act the cause of its object*: only, according to the mysterious order of grace, the Lord gives *truth* to that saving interest, *at the time* of faith’s applying Christ to the soul.”\*

But to return to Aspasio; I have said already, and still say, I am loath to charge him with flatly opposing the scriptural account of Christ’s death; I am rather disposed to think, that his views of this matter are somewhat unsettled and indistinct, which might occasion his expressing himself inaccurately at times, and who can guard himself against inconsistencies at all times? I presume, he would not venture broadly to contradict the account which Christ himself gives of his own death; and I am encouraged to think so, by his commonly connecting the death of Christ with eternal salvation, so as it should mean the same thing to say, Christ died for any person, and, That person shall be eternally saved. I will, therefore, consider this as a fixed point in the procedure of my controversy with Aspasio. And agreeably to this,

I find, notwithstanding Aspasio’s assertion to the unbelieving Theron, that Christ died for him, that Theron is at a great loss to find any evidence to support that assertion, and therefore, must be prompted to try what he can feel about himself in support of it. He is obliged to take all the pains,

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\* See preface to a late edition of Dr. Owen’s *Death of death*, in the death of Christ. Edinburgh, 1775.

and go through the whole course commonly enjoined, in order to turn that assertion into truth; and, after all his labour, though very willing and very desirous to find it true, he seems to be at a loss how to make it out. Had an apostle laid before Theron the divine truth, with all its evidence, he would have been far from pardoning him, or sympathizing with him in his incredulity, or hesitating about it. He would have treated him with the language commonly addressed to unbelievers in the New Testament. But Aspasio certainly acts a very humane part, in sympathizing with his friend, in the difficulty he finds to believe a proposition, whose truth or certainty must be made out by the pains taking to believe it.

I AM sensible, all the while, that neither the *authority* of the preacher, nor the *pains* taken by the hearer, are sufficient to perfect the appropriating act of faith; some further aid is necessary, and this is said to be the powerful and efficacious influence of the Spirit of God. Accordingly, we find Aspasio's two friends, supposing the hearer to have essayed and attempted often to perform his act; and yet still to be complaining, that he is as far from making it out as at the first. However, they encourage him to persevere steadfastly in repeating his essays and attempts, comforting him with many promises which they adduce to that purpose, that if he do what he can, the Spirit will help him, or do for him what he cannot. They are sensible, that the bare word of Scripture is not sufficient to support the conclusion necessary to be drawn; so they make this one of their great mysteries, "How the Spirit of God turns the word of Scripture, though in itself but a dead letter, into a living principle." Aspasio maintains, that none have the proper Scriptural faith, but those who are taught by the enlightening Spirit to draw that conclusion. But I must have recourse to his friends for a proper view of the agency of this Spirit in the matter.

They maintain, that reprobates have as fair a revealed warrant to draw the conclusion as the elect have. But here lies the difference: The Spirit opens up the revealed warrant, which bears a general aspect toward all men, in a particular manner to the elect, so as to enable every one of them to say *Christ loved me*. They attempt, indeed, sometimes to explain the matter by such logic as this: Christ came to save sinners, I am a sinner; therefore Christ came to save me. But they are soon sensible of the deficiency of this reasoning and resort to what they call *mystery*, or what cannot be accounted for.



Here they introduce the Spirit, and resolve all difficulties by his mysterious working.

We are not, then, to be surprised at finding their way of speaking on this subject somewhat perplexed, and more profound than can be accounted for; while they tell us almost with the same breath, that we are first to exert our natural power, and do our utmost, in the prospect that the Spirit will come at last and help us out; and yet, that all this exertion of our natural powers, is the effect of the Spirit's work upon us. Nevertheless the same men are often pleased to say, that nature begins the work, and then grace seasonably interposes to help out the well-meant, but feeble efforts of nature.

However, then, the matter be brought about, one thing is plain, that the mysterious work ascribed by the Spirit, issues in this, to turn the *dead letter* of the Scripture into a living principle, and to persuade a man, though he be not mentioned in the Scripture, either by name or surname, that Christ died for him. And it is no less plain, that if this assisting spirit be the Spirit who speaks in the Scriptures, he must, in this case, whisper something privately to the ear or the heart of the sinner, beside what he publicly speaks in the Scriptures. But will any lover of the Scriptures allow the possibility of this? Will he allow, that the Spirit, who breathes in the Scriptures, ever speaks a word or syllable to any man, beside what he publicly speaks there? Or will he bear to hear the living and powerful word of God, on any pretence, or under colour of any distinction whatsoever, called a *dead letter*? No! he will abhor the thought; and, without being overawed by the weight of any man's character, he will be ready to say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." But I forbear to enlarge on this at present. And I presume, that, with all freedom, I may call, whatever spirit speaks or suggests any thing not already publicly spoken in the Scriptures, a *private spirit*; even as the Apostle Peter teaches us to call every gloss on the Old Testament Scriptures, not supported by the public interpretation of them in the New, a *private interpretation*.

It would require a large letter by itself to describe the *spirit* of the popular doctrine; and if any one who has already gained the ear of the people, should, in consequence of full conviction of the many deceits of that doctrine, lay them plainly open by evidence from the Scriptures, it might, perhaps, prove the means of gaining some few from the error of their way. And it would be foolish to expect more. For the course of the world will continue the same while the



world lasts; and popular preachers will always be attended to by the body of the people. The author of Christianity assures his disciples, that his religion will be hated by all nations to the end; and he cautions them against marvelling at this. A Christian, then, ought not to envy those preachers the attention paid to them, though he will find it his duty to maintain the despised truth, in opposition to all their artifices.

I MIGHT NOW consider how the AUTHORITY OF THE MINISTER, THE PAINS TAKEN BY THE HEARER, and the WHISPER OF THE PRIVATE SPIRIT, concur to persuade the hearer, that he is a FAVOURITE OF HEAVEN, or that Christ died for him. But to have a proper notion of this, one would need to have a whole sermon or two in his view at once.

It may suffice, at present, to observe, that the preacher having largely insisted on the progress of a genuine conversion, and the various actings of faith; and possessed the mind of the hearer with a high notion of the arduous task that must be performed, and with a view of the blessings which attend his right performance, as well as the miseries that must attend his failure; the mind of the hearer is, by this time, supposed to be in some commotion, and to be very anxious to do something, or exert some act, in compliance with the pressing call of the preacher. But while his thoughts are thus busied, various difficulties occur to him, how he shall accomplish so great a work.

The skilful preacher knowing, that when matters are once brought thus far, the work is half done, now exerts himself for the relief of the hearer, who now begins to be considered as an *exercised soul*; and he is now as careful to lower the terms and abate the demands on the hearer, as he was before to heighten them. "A single essay will now do the business. The Spirit is just at hand to second and perfect it. For although the act be at the beginning but natural, yet in the very acting, promised and purchased grace strikes in, and turns it into a supernatural act." And to enforce this, the preacher, in the height of his warmth, will sometimes take upon himself boldly to falsify the plainest facts recorded in the gospel; for instance, saying, "Do as the man with the withered hand did; the poor man *minted*, or attempted to obey, and in the attempt of obedience, he got power to stretch out his hand as he was commanded. We must be essaying before we find the Spirit working effectually in us."

Now, you know he might with equal justice add, do as Lazarus did. In obedience to the call, *Come forth*, he

attempted to rise; but happening to be dead, he was not able fully to rise up and come forth; till he got more power than his own. Now the preacher makes the utmost use of his authority; and as he rises in dignity, he stoops in condescension, and encourages the devout hearer to cheapen his offer still lower and lower, till he come as low as can well be imagined, even to what is the very next to nothing. "You can complain that you are dead, that you have not the least spark of spiritual life in you: if you be but groaning under a sense of your deadness, it is a sign of some life; for the dead use not to tell such tales of themselves. You say you want power. Do not say so; for all the power of Heaven is ready for your use, and ready to *do all*, only *put to thy hand*. Though you want power, have you but the will? Christ will accept the will for the deed. It is true, you cannot come; are you willing then to be drawn?—You complain you want the will too.—Perhaps your will is only *impotent*. It is well if it be not *obstinate*.—Are you willing then to have your will bended? There are promises at hand to make you willing.—Well, then, put your unwilling will into Christ's hand, and leave him to do all;—and the work is done."

The devout hearer, by this time, finding some motion in his heart, corresponding, in some measure, with one or other of the terms proposed by the preacher, begins to hear some spirit secretly whispering to him, that his state and condition is changed; that he is now removed from a state of nature to a state of grace; in short, that he is a *gracious person*.

Now the preacher, well knowing the common effects of his doctrine, and the spirit which attends it, exerts himself with all boldness and freedom of speech, to second and enforce the secret whisper of the private spirit, which the devout hearer entertains at first with some degree of timidity and hesitation: "Why, then, it is to be hoped, that the good work is begun in you, which will be perfected at last. You have been favoured with the heavenly visit. Many perplexities may befall you afterward: but one such visit secures your state for ever. Be thankful to him who hath made such a difference betwixt you and others; and when you behold the sins of others, from which you are restrained, let it be matter of joy to you, *when you are helped to say thankfully, what the Pharisee said boastingly, 'The Lord be thanked that I am not as other men.'* You may indeed fall into many sad miscarriages, failings, and shortcomings; but your faults shall never properly deserve the name of damnable sins, or sins

exposing you to the curse of God's law, and the fear of his wrath. Such a fear would be unsuitable to your state, and behooved to proceed upon an allowed act of unbelief, calling it in question, if God be your God, and ye his children. This would be razing the foundations. Therefore such fear, as being unsuitable to the grace we have, cannot enter into the notion of the reverence and godly fear whereby we serve God acceptably; *for not our God* in Christ, but a God out of Christ *is a consuming fire* to all the workers of iniquity; that is, to those who are not like us converted, and brought into a state of grace." See the two last verses of Heb. xii.

But to have a more full view of the above-mentioned concurrence, it must be noticed, that the chief season, or day of power, or time of the agency of, what I call the *private spirit*, is while the preachers are declaiming with greatest fervour. If Christ be compared to a fruit-tree, now is the time of the shaking of the tree and the distribution of the fruit; if to Noah's ark, the preachers open the doors and usher in the people; if to a dove-cote, and the people to doves, the preachers open the windows. If the communication of the divine love be spoken of, the preachers are the earthen vessels into which it is poured, in order to be conveyed to the people. In short, they are commissioned to bring Christ near to sinners, and sinners near to Christ. So that if they are so modest as to decline the title, they effectually assume the character and work of *mediators* betwixt God and the people. The title of *ambassadors* is that which they use the greatest freedom with, and they no doubt reckon that they put considerable honour upon Christ, while they call him *GOD'S AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY*.

It must likewise be noticed, that the popular doctrine is so contrived, as to keep the people in constant dependance on the preachers, for their comfort, and in continual expectation of the season of power in giving heed to them. In allusion to the impotent man, who, indeed, according to the sacred text, laboured under an infirmity for thirty-eight years, and who, according to their imagination, lay so long at the pool; some exercised souls may be occupied so many years in fruitless essays and attempts. However, the preacher encourages them to wait and persist in their attempts, assuring them of success at last: and for their comfort in the meantime, he will not scruple to pervert the Scriptures, in order to pronounce them all blessed who are thus waiting. Again, in like manner, in allusion to Jacob, they who have been favoured with the season of power, and have enjoyed the wished-for visit, may remain unvisited for twenty years, be-



twixt one Bethel-visit and another, or perhaps all their lifetime. However, though it be still held true, that one visit secures their state forever, they are not to content themselves with a *reflex act*; that is, with the remembrance of their first visit, and its attendant impressions; but they must be still endeavouring to obtain a new visit, by attempting again to put forth, as at the first, what they call a *direct act of faith*. In short, the frequent repetition of these attempts, or the straining hard to obtain some motion, or feel some impression on their hearts, is the great thing in religion, that first and last must employ the most serious moments of their lives. And herein it is imagined, the exercise of godliness consists. And however much the people may be thus kept in bondage for lifetime, groaning after some inward feeling or impression, yet both the unconverted, and those said to be in a converted state, provided they attend on the preacher, and continue waiting and essaying, are encouraged to consider themselves as in a blessed state; as being distinguished from the ungodly and profane, under the character of *serious exercised souls*.

Any one who has heard the preachers I have been speaking of, or read their printed sermons, may easily see, that the short sketch I have given of their doctrine, might be supported by numerous quotations; and that I have even retained their principal phrases as nearly as the gravity of the subject, and the shortness of this abstract, would allow. I know their doctrine appears ridiculous in the eyes of many who aim at much the same end with them at bottom, but who think to gain it by a shorter and easier course; yea, they are laughed at by many who, at the same time, laugh at Christianity. This is what I can easily account for. But that any one who has learned his religion from the New Testament, should mistake their doctrine for the Christian, is indeed astonishing! If we should be so easily imposed upon, how could we rank with those whom the Apostle John once addressed in this manner, *I have not written unto you, because ye know not the truth; but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth?*—But it would require a treatise by itself, to lay open the many deceits by which these men *change the truth of God into a lie*.

I might now consider, how the doctrine which *thus* teaches men to look on themselves as the favourites of Heaven, is subservient to several purposes, extremely foreign to the design of the gospel. But this may partly appear from what has been said, and may occasionally appear more fully as we go along; a particular consideration of this would open too large a field for me at present. I behoved to notice, first, the design



and tendency of the gospel, as illustrated by the real effects it had on them who first believed it; and then show how different these effects were from those commonly produced on the minds of the people, by the doctrine of the most zealous popular preachers.—Yea, I behoved to notice the difference between the God of these last, and the God whose character is drawn in the New Testament:—betwixt their Christ and the Christ preached by the apostles;—betwixt their spirit and the Spirit which breathed in the lives and writings of the apostles;—in short, betwixt their sense of the words *grace, conversion, regeneration, holiness, charity, church, kingdom of God, &c.*, and the sense given of them in the New Testament. Nor need the extent of these differences he wondered at; for if a man differ from the apostles, how little soever, how covertly soever, upon the point of acceptance with God, that difference will be found, more or less, to affect his every religious sentiment.

Having now taken a general view of some of Aspasio's principal friends, I will be at liberty to pay a more close attention to himself in my next.

I am, &c.

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### LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

As the controversy we have entered upon, is of such a nature as it can be decided only by the Scriptures, it gives me no small encouragement to proceed, that I have one to deal with, who manifests a very uncommon esteem for these writings.

No question has been agitated with greater warmth, among men, than that about acceptance with God. And indeed, no other question can claim the precedence in point of importance. Yea, the importance of every other question must be rated according to the connection it has with this.

Yet we may well say, how rarely is that question stated upon the same footing whereon it stood betwixt Christ, and his few disciples on the one hand, and all the world beside on the other; but more especially the Jews, who maintained the opposition on more advantageous ground than any other people, then, or since, could do, and so gave the best handle for the fullest discussion of that question? Amidst a multitude of disputes about the Christian religion, that have employed the mind of men, the capital question has been "much mistaken, and almost forgotten."

The greater part of the reasoners about acceptance with God, have generally made the question to run thus, How are we to be exercised, and under what influence, prompting or seconding? What shall we do, or endeavour? What shall we feel? or, *What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?* Whereas, the first question ought to be, Can any doing, feeling, endeavouring, any exercise of the soul, either prompted or seconded, be of any avail to us in this matter? or, Whether or not did Christ finish upon the cross, all that God requires, every requisite, without exception, to procure acceptance for, and give relief to the guilty conscience of the most profane wretch that lives? For I need not add, that it must be the very same thing which placates divine justice, or which fully expresses the necessary opposition of infinite goodness to evil or sin, that can relieve the sinner from the sentence of condemnation, which is no other than the voice of God, naturally residing in his conscience. We must not go to borrow distinctions from the schools, and say, What Christ hath done is indeed the *only* meritorious cause of our acceptance, and that our assisted or prompted endeavours, are to co-operate by way of some subordinate cause, under whatever name. No; we must either take the one side or the other of the first and main question: "No trimming, no reconciling expedient," must take place here.

My plea with Aspasio then proceeds upon this cardinal question, What is the *turning point* from despair toward good hope? The hinge of the hope of mankind is the hinge of our controversy.

In this controversy, then, I have this advantage, that I have only one object, one single point to keep in view. I have it to maintain upon all occasions, that *one thing is needful*. My chief labour and care again must lie in this, that I do not suffer the change to be put upon me by means of any distinction,

that I be not imposed upon by well-sounding words, to suffer any diminution of, or addition to the one thing needful.

Aspasio's faith rests, one foot on grace, and the other on nature; or, to adopt a contrast often stated in the New Testament, one foot on *the spirit*, and the other on the *flesh*; or, to make myself, perhaps, still more readily understood, one foot on the work of Christ, and the other on human efforts, or the motions of man's heart. Aspasio, then, having two things in his eye, behooved to be greatly straitened, how to assign each of them its proper place. And though, in the general, he has handled the matter with as great, yea, I will not scruple to say, with greater skill and address, than any I have seen on the subject; yet to suppose that he could do it without falling into inconsistencies, would be to suppose him capable of doing that which never yet was, and, I am confident, never will be done by any man. Who could have imagined, that he, who said so many simple, clear, and striking things with respect to the work of Christ, in opposition to all the pleas of human pride, in the latter half of the sixth dialogue, and almost throughout the whole seventh, would have perplexed himself in the manner he has done in the sixteenth, blending together two things as unfit for mixture as iron and clay?

Having premised this much in the general, as to the state of the controversy, I shall now proceed to a more particular notice of Aspasio's words.

I TOOK notice, in my first letter, that Aspasio's faith needed a variety of subsidiary props, beside the work of Christ to support it. Let us now hear what these are.

Aspasio, in order to conduct Theron within reach of the imputed righteousness, or to show him that he is not so far from it as he apprehends, first puts several questions to him, which he is so happy as to answer in the affirmative, and then comforts him against several discouragements; upon which Theron proceeds thus. "If we feel an aversion to sin, and prize the blessed Jesus above all things; if the prevailing bias of our affections be to the Divine Redeemer, and the habitual breathing of our souls after a conformity to his image; may we not suppose ourselves possessed of the *truth* and *reality*, though we have not the *confidence* and *rejoicing* of faith?—I say *we*, because I apprehend this is not my peculiar case, but common to myself and many others, I ask, therefore, in their name and in my own, may we not suppose our condi-

tion safe, though we dare not presume to use the language of the spouse, *My beloved is mine, and I am his?*"

I am sorry that Aspasio did not here check Theron with the Spartan IF,\* once returned in answer to a threatening embassy from some of the neighbouring states, which is so pertinently disclosed in the sixth dialogue. But he has now got into better company, to whom more deference and respect must be paid. He was then talking to guilty sinners, to mere sinners; and having the righteousness of God in his eye, was confidently setting at nought all pretences to it among men. So that, whoever presumed to say, If I love God, if I love my neighbour, may I not hope—; he was ready to confound him by retorting the IF upon him. But now he is in presence of another sort of sinners, sinners endowed with amiable qualifications, not sinners pretending by their virtue and morality to supersede the necessity of the imputed righteousness, but devout sinners seriously engaged in pious labours to come within reach of it.

Let us see then what reception he gives them. "Let these persons know," says he "whatever their names or circumstances are, that they have as good a *right* to adopt the words you mention, as Philenor has to call these gardens his own." A *right!*—Strange! when shall we come to the far end of the question about right? Let us try. What gives a right to eternal life? The imputed righteousness. What gives a right to that? The work of faith. Who have a right to act faith? Those who feel an aversion to sin, &c. Who have a right to say, they feel this?—Perhaps—those who feel an aversion to its punishment. This calls to mind the vulgar story of the answers given to the question, Whereon stands the earth? which served only to provoke the renewal of the question.

If we are not satisfied simply to believe, that the earth continues to be upheld by the same power which poised it at the first, we must wait till the students of natural philosophy be agreed in fixing to us another support. If we are not satisfied to answer all questions about acceptance with God, with the imputed righteousness alone, we must wait till our moral philosophers be able to settle to us the principle of moral

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\* Dialogues, vol. i, p. 264. "Those neighbours gave them to understand by their ambassadors, That if they entered their territories, they would burn their towns, make the inhabitants prisoners, and spread destruction wherever they advanced.—To which insolent menace, the brave Lacedæmonians made no other reply, than IF."



virtue, about which they are far from being as yet agreed. And, indeed, if once we depart one step from the revealed righteousness, the whole plea about acceptance with God is nothing else, at bottom, but a mere philosophical dispute, whatever mask of scriptural phrases it may be clothed with. Accordingly, philosophers have found the people called Quakers, notwithstanding their mask, to be at bottom their faithful friends and allies, and they are daily coming into a better understanding with many others. For, except where Christianity is maintained in that ancient simplicity which moved the spleen of their ancestors, they can have no violent or common quarrel against it; though they may maintain such disputes with its professors, as they have always entertained among themselves. And, indeed, it may cause them to smile, or, shall we rather say, move their generous compassion, to see so many of their fellow-creatures labouring hard to maintain and defend the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and after all, in the manner of acceptance with God, setting out from the same common principle with themselves.

But stay! I must not run so fast; Aspasio calls me back, "Yet they will do well to remember, that these qualifications, however amiable, are by no means the *ground* of their right. They are to advance their claim and hold fast the blessing, not as men ornamented with fine endowments, but as poor, indigent, and guilty sinners. For such the Saviour is provided, to such his benefits are proposed, and on such his grace will be magnified."

More strange still! Why, then, must I be at so much cost and pains to dress so fine, to put on so many ornaments? Is it that I may the better remember that I am naked, or clad in rags? Must I be clothed like a gentleman, that I may be the fitter company for beggars? I am told, that any man fashionably dressed may appear at court. How shall such a one be brought to think that his dress no way contributed to his obtaining the readier access? Can all the panegyrics and dedications that ever were wrote, persuade us, that men may be ornamented with fine endowments, and yet be insensible of their importance: or that every man's pride is not equal to his worth? The Scripture itself does not strip men of their self-confidence, without divesting them of every pretence to it, without convincing them that they have no fund for it. It convinces them that they are poor, indigent, guilty sinners; that they are so in reality and nothing else. It does not admit that they have any amiable qualifications to abate the force of this charge, and, then, I leave it to their own generous

condescension to forego the consideration of them. Aspasio would have us to be very good and very humble, in order to meet the imputed righteousness; to be very holy, and to have a great sense of our defilement; to be very rich, and to have a great sense of our poverty. But in that case, it is to be presumed that whatever compliments we may pay that righteousness, it will meet with but a very cold reception from our hearts.

Avaro, by great diligence and success in trade, has acquired a large fortune; yet one can scarcely perceive any alteration in his dress or behaviour. If you compliment him upon his wealth, he modestly replies, that if he has got some small trifle, it is more owing to kind Providence than to his industry; for he has seen many traders, of greater abilities than his, decay into extreme poverty;—and after all what is it but dross! yea, his confidence in his wealth is sometimes at so low an ebb, that he is sincerely afraid that he shall die a beggar. A stranger one day, happened so far to mistake some of his modest and diffident appearances, as to entertain suspicions of his credit, and to intimate some doubts if he was a *good man*. As soon as Avaro perceived this, his temper warmed, his style changed,—in short, were I to relate his whole behaviour on this occasion, you would say—a purse-proud tradesman indeed!

But Aspasio will still insist, “that these qualifications, however amiable, are by no means the *ground* of their right.”

Let us see, then, where the ground of their right lies. I think the obvious meaning of Aspasio’s words is this, these persons, so qualified, have the right, exclusive of unqualified sinners, or of those who are nothing else but poor, indigent, guilty sinners. Where, then, can the ground of the right lie, but in the distinguishing qualifications? It cannot lie in any thing common to both; for in that case the unqualified would have as good a right as the qualified. Therefore it must lie in that which constitutes the difference betwixt them.

LET US now attend them both at their prayers, and notice how they present their supplications before God.—Methinks I see first a decent respectable company advancing to the house of prayer, and then stepping forward with a graceful assurance, beginning their address thus: “We give thee thanks, O God, for the aversion we feel to sin, and for every other amiable qualification by which thou hast distinguished us from other men; we bless thee for every fine endowment wherewith thou hast ornamented us, and more especially for

the peculiar right thou hast given us of advancing our claim to all the blessings of the kingdom of thy Messiah; whom we prize above all things, and to whose merits we are indebted for every advantage we enjoy. We humbly acknowledge that our qualifications are by no means the ground of our right. For, had it not been for thy grace assisting our feeble efforts, we might have been as yet like other men, drinking up iniquity like water. We acknowledge the righteousness of thy Messiah to be the only meritorious cause of all our happiness. For his sake, therefore, we earnestly beg the continuance of thy grace, that we may always come into thy house of prayer with a comfortable assurance, and may never be filled with confusion of face in thy presence."

Behind them, at some distance, I see an abject company approaching, with remorse in their faces, as if they had just come from the gratification of some guilty passion. They dare not venture beyond the porch, as if afraid to pollute the sacred mansion, but pointing toward the inner recess where the propitiatory stands, they are encouraged to utter these words, "God be propitious to us sinners."

Methought, as they went up, I overheard one of them saying to his fellow, "Surely there is not a wretch upon earth riper for hell than I. My life has been one continued course of injustice, profaneness, and excess, by which last I have so reduced my health and circumstances, that instead of having any opportunity of lessening the debt I owe society, through my injustice, I must necessarily increase it, by the claims of my wants upon their compassion. Upon occasional touches of remorse after satiety, I have often made resolutions of amendment; but the first temptation always broke them.—In short, the more I look into my heart, the scene appears the more shocking. Whether I look backward or forward,—reason,—experience,—feeling, suggest nothing but matter of anguish.—But I am informed upon good authority, that there is a propitiation for sin,—that there is forgiveness with Him who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy.—Let us therefore draw near."

These last neither have the qualifications of the former, nor do they pretend to their right. They can perceive no promising sign about themselves. They feel no mark, no token, but what marks them out for wrath and destruction. They have nothing in the heaven above, nor in the earth below, to keep their hearts from sinking into utter despair, but the bare propitiation. This, and this alone, encourages them to make their address to God. By this, and this alone, God conveys



the first taste of his favour and peace into their hearts. Now, and not till now, do they begin to love God and hate evil. Now a ray of good hope begins to dispel the gloomy fears of future evils: and faith continuing to work by love, they go on to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

I complain, therefore, of Aspasio, for his discouraging such as God comforts, and leading forward those whom God holds at a distance. *Let these persons know*, says he, why *these persons* more than others? Surely, because these persons are in better circumstances than others. Nay, I am not allowed to say that fully either: for he immediately adds, "whatever their names or circumstances are," But after all, I cannot see how they can be in very bad circumstances; at least, they are far from being in such destitute circumstances, as those to whom God is said to commend his love, Rom. v. They are not *ungodly*, for they are averse to all evil; nor are they *without strength*, for the prevailing bias of their affections, and the habitual breathing of their souls is toward the perfection of all virtue and goodness.

Yet, when my friend deviates from the truth, it gives me some sort of satisfaction to observe, that his tongue falters, that every second word weakens or destroys the force of the former. And it pleases me to find, that Aspasio had not courage to close this period, without bringing forth the plain truth at last. For pointing to poor, indigent, and guilty sinners, he concludes, "For such the Saviour is provided; to such his benefits are proposed; and on such his grace will be magnified."

That I may not seem to be too severe upon Aspasio, I will keep him in countenance, by taking notice of a rebuke that was once given to one of the chief apostles, for an instance of behaviour, which he was drawn into through the fear of giving offence, but which favoured strongly of Aspasio's doctrine, Gal. ii.

The rebuke which his fellow-apostle gave him, was, I think, to this effect; "You are indeed one of the peculiar people, highly distinguished, on account of many qualifications and advantages, from mere Pagans and idolaters. But you have been taught by revelation to know, that all these qualifications and advantages are good for nothing in point of acceptance with God; and that, in this respect, you are perfectly on a level with the vilest alien, who has nothing else to make him clean, nothing else to bring him nigh to God, but the bare report he has heard concerning Christ crucified. In consequence of your knowing this, you have, till now, re-



gulated your practice accordingly; consorting and eating, in a friendly manner, with the believing Pagans on all occasions; as knowing them to be, in all respects, as clean and nigh unto God as yourself, or any of your qualified brethren. Why, then, have you now suffered yourself to be so far overawed, by the presence of some of your qualified friends, as practically to dissemble your avowed principles, by your withdrawing, on this occasion, from the company of the believing Pagans? This your conduct is far from being upright according to the truth of the gospel, and has moreover the worst of tendencies. You hereby administer fuel to the religious pride of your qualified brethren. You give these persons to know, that they have some better right to eternal life than others, who are not so qualified. You hereby tempt the Pagans, who have nothing else to recommend them to God, but what they believe Christ has done, and who have hitherto, and that upon good ground, considered this as enough, to call in question their faith, and suspect that nothing more, beside what they have already believed, is necessary. In short, you compel them to seek after your qualifications, in order to complete and make sure their right and title to the favour of God. You compel them, in effect, to deny the truth of the gospel."

While we are speaking of Jews, it may not be amiss to compare, for a little, the disposition which shows itself in us who call ourselves Christians, with the account given of their's in the New Testament, as to the point of righteousness, or acceptance with God: for whatever contributes to our acceptance with God, must come under the notion of our righteousness.

If in this matter we would fix our attention more upon things than words; more upon the leading features than the inconsiderable differences, I am persuaded the likeness would appear very striking.

We Christians have been led by prejudice, rather than by any just reason, to entertain a contemptible notion of the ancient Jews, in comparison of ourselves. And this notion has, among other causes, served to make us less attentive to the grand controversy that was once carried on among them; a controversy, wherein the true character of God, and that of man, are set forth in the strongest colours. No Christian nation can justly claim the precedence of them, as to the knowledge or practice of virtue or piety. The Pharisees had the foremost reputation among them, both for integrity of life, and fervour in devotion. We are not to imagine, from the character given of the Pharisees by the searcher of hearts, that

they were worse men than ourselves. For even he grants, that they outwardly *appeared righteous* unto men, and speaks of them as *highly esteemed* among men, who knew as well how to judge of characters as we do. And we find by several testimonies, that they were men who studied to keep a good conscience, and were zealous for God.\*

The chief thing for which we find them censured in the New Testament, is, that they presumed God had a peculiar regard for them, and would accept them on account of the excellency of their lives. This, their presumption, did not arise from a firm persuasion that they had done enough to procure the favour of God and eternal life. For, as to this, their hearts failed them upon occasions, and the question recurred upon them, What good thing shall I do? What lack I yet? but it proceeded upon the difference they perceived betwixt their own character and that of other men. This naturally drew their attention and care to increase that difference, and make it as clear and sensible as they could; seeing from the contemplation thereof arose their chief satisfaction, and the readiest means for stifling the uneasy question, or keeping it out of sight. Consequently they had the less attention to spare for noticing another difference of greater moment; that is, the difference betwixt their own character, and the perfection of the divine law.

Hence it was, that they became very wise and very scrupulous, as to every thing that regarded the first-mentioned difference, even making additions to the divine law in that respect; and, at the same time, very superficial in their knowledge, or rather very ignorant, as to what regarded the last: whereas, had they given their chief attention to the last, as they ought, it would have appeared so immensely great, as to make the first utterly to disappear; even as he who takes a great mountain into his eye at once, loses sight of the

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\* I think I need not take time to describe the ridiculous notion entertained by the populace and their chief leaders, of the character of the Pharisees; by means of which a great part of the gospel history has become of no more importance to them, than an old legend, and, instead of conveying them to the most useful instruction, serves only to awaken in them the old self-applauding reflection, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them."—The same reflection is in like manner cherished by a more fashionable sort of teachers, who maintain, that the character given in the New Testament of the Gentiles, at the first publication of the gospel, was peculiar to the Gentiles of that age; that they indeed deserved to be called *ungodly, without strength, &c.*; but that it would be very foolish to apply such epithets to the people of good Christian nations.

difference betwixt one pebble and another at the foot of it. It was this inattention and ignorance that Paul bewailed, when he said, *they being ignorant of the righteousness of God, are seeking to establish their own.* And hence it was, that they had but a very partial and imperfect notion of the law of God, regarding it chiefly as it furnished them with the means of distinguishing themselves, as well from the looser sort of their own nation, as from the heathen.

The law, according to which they sought to be found righteous, or accepted with God, was indeed no other than the law delivered by Moses; the law which requires **GODLINESS** and **HUMANITY\*** in perfection, as also the law of nature requires. So the Apostle says, *They followed after the law of righteousness.* But when he speaks of their manner of following, or the course of life by which they sought acceptance with God, he says, *They sought it, AS IT WERE, by the works of the law,* Rom. ix. 32: that is, *Though their works were far from coming up to what the law required, in order to constitute them good, or well pleasing in the sight of God; yet they bore such a conformity to its precepts in the eyes of men, as to pass for the works of the law in their esteem, and they were very ready to transfer the appearance and weight which their works had in the presence of men, into the presence of God and their correspondence with him; and to presume, that he would put much the like value upon them.*

Had the divine law been given only like human laws, as a rule by which men were to judge of one another, the Pharisees undoubtedly stood fairest for being justified by it: but when we think of the divine law given as a rule to regulate, not only the correspondence of men with men, but that of every man by himself with God; a rule by which every man is answerable to, and must be tried by him, who searches the heart, and is thoroughly acquainted with all the springs of human action, the question must naturally arise in the breast of the best of men, *Who, then, can be saved? where is the character to be found that God will approve? or even, where is the person that can stand up before his Maker, and, pointing to the most infamous of his neighbours, say, I am not as this man?*

Though the Pharisees' character did in reality respect more

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\* For brevity's sake, I choose to use these two expressions for the sum of the divine law; *Godliness*, for love to God, with all the heart, strength, and soul; and *Humanity*, instead of philanthropy, or as the full import of these words, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

the praise of men than that of God, yet we must not consider them as regardless of the approbation of God and their own consciences. Their whole conduct was not directed merely by ostentation: no; they were zealous for God, while they were ambitious to distinguish themselves among men. They were concerned to have the approbation of their own consciences, as to their difference from, or excellency above, other men; so that they would not readily, even in secret, have allowed themselves in doing what was unsuitable to, or omitted what was requisite to support their difference from other men. They studied so to keep a good conscience in this respect, as that they might be able, in their addresses to God, to appeal to him for the truth and reality of that difference; as would appear from the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable.

The great mistake, then, of the Pharisees lay in this, that they presumed, that what distinguished them from other men, would recommend them to God. But the greatness of their mistake is perceived only by such as believe the gospel. And, indeed, it had never been effectually demonstrated to the conviction of any, if a righteousness exceeding their's had not appeared in the world. That such a righteousness has indeed appeared, the whole New Testament bears witness. And to say barely, that it exceeded their's as far as their's exceeded the naughtiest character upon earth, to give but a very low account of it, and infinitely short of the truth. For it exceeded their's as far as their's came short of the perfection of the divine law. And the gospel undoubtedly gives their righteousness its highest place of distinction, when it says, that the righteousness necessary for entering into the kingdom of heaven, must exceed their's.

THE righteousness I am now speaking of, is no other than the character of Jesus Christ. This character was not distinguished by those shining qualities, by which great men and promoters of the temporal happiness of society, have gained the applause of their cotemporaries, and the veneration of posterity. It was a character in low life, wherein *godliness* and *humanity* shone forth in perfection. It respected the *good of men*, and the *praise of God*. It respected the eternal good of individuals of all ranks, without regard to what class or society of men they belong to; without any view to form them into any faction or party connected by secular ties. Jesus Christ promoted no new art or science for the benefit of society. Though all means for forming the most perfect character were within his power; instead of



distinguishing himself by such acts of generosity as commonly draw the applause and attachment of mankind, he chose to appear in such a condition, as to need the alms of others for supplying him with the necessaries of life. He disputed not the secular privileges of any rank or class of men. He gave forth no new laws for the better government of states or kingdoms: nor did he urge a more vigorous execution of any penal statutes then in force, for the better suppression of irreligion and immorality. He did not set on foot any work of public reformation. He left the world in all respects just as he found it, having only made a further discovery of the evil thereof to his own few disciples, whom he left exposed to its hatred; warning them to expect no better treatment from it than he himself met with. This character, though unadorned with those things which draw the admiration of the world, and though held in the greatest contempt by all ranks of men in it, was yet found perfectly well pleasing to God, and received the highest testimonies of his approbation and delight.

The name Jesus Christ has been torn off from the character drawn for it in the New Testament, and has been applied by various classes of men to the character most admired by each of them. Some, under the name *Jesus Christ*, present to our thoughts an eminent moral philosopher; others a patriarch of monarchism; others the supreme head of a national church, in whose name all heresy and profaneness are to be rooted out of the nation, and all zealous ecclesiastics obtain preferment: yea, we may find all the same sorts of men who opposed Christ and his apostles at the first, now severally maintaining their favourite maxims under the patronage of his name.

We cannot, therefore, have a proper view of the real character of Jesus, without noticing the contrast wherein it stood to that of all other men, but more especially to that of the Pharisees, who had the fairest claim to be accounted righteous, and were really esteemed so among men.

Jesus Christ undertook to fulfil ALL righteousness; and we see by his doctrine what an extensive view he had of the perfection of the divine law, and likewise, of all the artful reasonings that take place in the hearts of men evading the force thereof. His comprehensive knowledge of the divine law, and what righteousness was necessary to honour it, as well as his unfeigned love to it, are set forth beforehand in the psalms, in the language adapted for him. In the 119th psalm, which is employed from beginning to end, in drawing the picture of his heart, and in some others, we find him

speaking in this manner: *I have seen an end of all perfection; the breadth and the length of the most perfect characters among men; but thy commandment is exceeding broad. Thy righteousness, O God, is very high.—O God, who is like unto thee?*

After the commencement of his public ministry, when his character began to be exposed to the narrow scrutiny of all sorts of men, he did not, like other pretenders to righteousness, give such a view of the law of God, as might best suit the purpose of gaining a reputation for virtue and holiness among men, and yet allow a convenient reserve for the indulging of those passions, which however much they may move within the bounds of decency, do indeed carry in them the highest disaffection to God. In the account which he gives of the divine law, in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of *Matthew*, the force of his discourse turns upon man's correspondence with God thereby. And he declares, that every thought entertained in the heart, opposite to the spirit of it, makes a man liable to hell-fire, or the wrath to come.

He fulfilled the law in the strict sense he himself gave of it. He regarded not the difference from other men, which the Pharisees made so much account of. So far was he from keeping his distance from the dissolute part of mankind, that he was said to be one of them. With such affability and kindness did he behave toward them, that he was called their friend. Toward the other part of mankind, the Pharisees, we find him wearing a more forbidding air. We seldom see him in their company without the frown in his countenance. The story of the woman taken in adultery, recorded in the 8th chapter of John's Gospel, sets before us his behaviour, in both these respects, in a very striking view. It would seem, that some Christians began very early to be ashamed of this part of Christ's character: for it is difficult to give any other reason for the authors of the Syriac version of the New Testament, their dropping or leaving out that story recorded by John in their version.

To an attentive reader of the history of Jesus Christ, this temper of mind in him will often present itself in very surprising views. And, indeed, our surprise at this cannot be abated, but by our calling to mind another, no less wonderful, part of his character; and that is, the joint appearance of human weakness and Divine Majesty. We find him subject to every human want and infirmity; yet claiming and manifesting every divine perfection, every attribute of that peerless ONE, who shares not his glory with another.

We find him regardless of the charge of blasphemy, declaring, *The Father and I are one*, and receiving divine worship accordingly. We find him weary and thirsty, sitting on a well, asking a drink of water, and at the same time showing himself to be *the fountain of living waters*. Not to multiply instances, we find him ready to expire on the cross; and yet, showing himself to be the hearer of prayer and the sovereign of Paradise, or the highest heaven.

WE must bear in mind, what for a person Jesus was, what submission he showed, what honour he paid to the divine law by his obedience, when we hear him giving his verdict of the characters of other men, and setting aside all the boasted differences among them. It was in the eyes of such a person, and it was in contrast with his righteousness, that all these differences shrunk into nothing; even as all difference among the stars is effaced when once the sun appears.

Had the wisest men of all nations laid their heads together, and consulted beforehand, what character was fit for God to wear, in becoming a man on the earth, they would, no doubt, have imagined something very grand, far outshining the character of the perfect prince drawn by the author of *Telemachus*.—Had a man of low condition, meanly born, of no education, choosing his friends and companions from amongst the basest of the people, and having no taste for the company of men of character and distinction; had such a man, I say, stood up, in the midst of the best improved nation, for the Divine personage, having no testimonies for the dignity of his person and the excellency of his character, but what were heavenly, miraculous, or out of the course of nature; how great must the disappointment be; how great the contempt? how great the indignation? What skill, what pains would not men employ to stain his character, and invalidate every argument of his dignity? Philosophy, carefully tracing the footsteps of nature, would lend her aid to overthrow every preternatural testimony in his favour. Virtue, hitherto nourished by praise, and claiming the privilege of being her own reward, would awaken the resentment of her votaries to repel the insult. Every human excellency would be in arms; devout zeal would take the alarm for the honour of God, and head the opposition; the church would apprehend her danger; and all contending parties, suspending their mutual feuds, would join in the general cry, away with such an one from the earth.

What a ferment must have been in the minds of the

wealthy citizens of Sparta, when Lycurgus dissolved all property, and made an equal partition of lands, without regard to former claims? The appearance of Jesus Christ in the world, grated upon the hearts of men in a more tender part still. For we know, by history, and daily observation, that men may be brought to embrace voluntary poverty, and to choose the greatest bodily pains, when they are thereby furnished with a ground of glorying before God over other men; yea, oftentimes for the sake of mere fame and worldly reputation. But where is the man that will fairly admit the conviction, that he has nothing about him whatsoever to recommend him to his Maker? Every man takes notice of some advantageous difference in his own favour. Even the man of pleasure, who seems to have cast off all fear of God, will, upon occasions, bestow a squint look on the devotee, and say in his heart, at worst I am no hypocrite!

Jesus Christ laid the foundation of such a revolution among mankind, as to *virtue* and *happiness*, as quite eclipses all the great changes that ever happened in the world; though it will not have its full effect, till the time when the once rude fishers of Gallilee, with the other apostles, shall publicly appear, seated on twelve thrones, next to that of the Most High. The appearance of Jesus in the world well corresponded with that grand revolution, and the lofty, prophetic images, by which it is described. The ministry of John the Baptist who came to prepare his way, is thus pointed at by Isaiah, chap. xl. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*—The earth is represented as levelled into a plain, having a highway cleared out for Jesus, to walk alone conspicuous through the midst of mankind, that all flesh might see together the glory and excellency of his character; that all might see it on an even footing, none overtopping another, none intercepting the view of his fellow. The same prophet speaking of his *day*, chap. ii. presents us, to the same purpose, with a grand assemblage of images, which are concluded with a repetition of the leading sentiment which introduces them. *The lofty locks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is*



*proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall be utterly abolished.* The Apostle Paul, while he takes a summary view of this passage, 2 Cor. x, 4, 5, at once ascertains and illustrates to us the meaning of the prophet.

The same thing was clearly intimated, by the Spirit of prophecy, at the entrance of the *Saviour* into the world: Luke i, 46; *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.—He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.* Luke ii, 34; *And Simeon said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against,—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.* To the same purpose is the saying of Jesus, oftener than once recorded in the gospels, *Many that are first shall be last, and the last first.* In fine, the whole New Testament speaks aloud, that as to the matter of acceptance with God, there is no difference betwixt one man and another; \*—no difference betwixt the best accomplished gen-

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\* For illustration of this, I shall here subjoin the following note:

Jesus was not insensible to those things which render man amiable to man, or one man more so than another; while he did not admit the consideration of them as of any weight in the kingdom of God. Here we may see his great self-denial, and at the same time the glory of the Divine sovereignty. Jesus made a very acceptable citizen in the city of Nazareth; while, residing there, he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man; yet, in his preaching the kingdom of God, he showed no peculiar attachment to them whatsoever. The like may be said of his connection with his kindred. The intimacy of private friendship subsisted betwixt him and his Apostle John; yet this did not make him more indulgent to his friend than to others, when he observed in him any disposition unsuitable to the kingdom of God. He wept over the capital city of his nation, while yet he foretold its destruction; even as he wept over his dead friend Lazarus, though he knew it would cost him but a word to raise him from the dead. Conversing one day with a certain young ruler, he was so taken with his behaviour, that beholding him, he loved him; but as the conversation proceeded upon

tleman, and the most infamous scoundrel;—no difference betwixt the most virtuous lady and the vilest prostitute;—no difference betwixt the most revered judge, and the most odious criminal standing convicted before him, and receiving the just sentence of death from his mouth:—in a word, no differ-

the title to eternal life, he sent him away sorrowful. On this occasion, his disciples were greatly astonished, and said among themselves, *Who then can be saved?* Jesus closes his discourses to them at this time, with the standing maxim of his kingdom, *Many that are first shall be last, and the last first.* He knew by the ancient prophecies, and he saw by what sort of success his gospel was already attended with, that his kingdom was to consist chiefly of the last, the basest and worst of mankind, and not of the foremost, the most creditable, wise, and prudent amongst them. And he thankfully submitted to this, for the glory of his Father, and the manifestation of his sovereignty. So we find him expressing himself, upon the return of some whom he had sent to preach the gospel: in this manner; *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for it seemeth good in thy sight.*

It is impossible to give any account of this matter, that will satisfy the pride of man; yet it is very evident, that, according to the mind of Jesus, the above-mentioned young ruler, however amiable, had no part in life eternal.

Have we not seen men remarkably amiable and useful in their neighbourhood, who were yet disaffected to the king? Now, from this disaffection, as being opposite to the general good of society, we must infer, that their social disposition is very partial and defective; seeing it requires only a proper opportunity to draw forth their hatred of their countrymen, and make it issue in the most destructive effects. With much greater propriety may we say, that all ungodliness includes inhumanity. He who has any reserve in his submission to God, on whom alone the happiness of mankind depends, must have the like reserve in his affection or good will to men; for as God stands in no need of us, so he requires no homage or submission from us, but what he judges necessary to promote our mutual happiness. Accordingly, we find the Scripture always makes our love to our neighbour, the proof and measure of our piety toward God. And in this view, it is called the fulfilling of the law. So the Apostle James, chap. ii, 8, says, *If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; ye do well.* And Paul says, Rom. xiii, 10. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* When Jesus was asked, *Which is the great commandment in the law?* Matt. xxii; his answer was, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is (ομοια αυτη) LIKE UNTO IT, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* He gave the same sum of the law to the lawyer, who stood up and tempted him, saying, *Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Luke x, 25. And when the lawyer, willing to justify himself, said, *And who is my neighbour?* Jesus agreed to rest the issue of the controversy about righteousness, upon the result of that question; for, after giving him a pattern of humanity, he says to him, *Go, and do thou likewise.*

ence betwixt the most fervent devotee, and the greatest ring-leader in profaneness and excess.

If, then, the true state of the case betwixt Jesus and the Pharisees be attended to, the conduct of these last will appear

Let us now apply what has been said, to the case of the young ruler, who certainly deserved to be considered as one of the first or best of men. It is evident, he had a very great concern about eternal life; and no less esteem for Jesus, as a proper guide to him in that respect; so that he appeared determined to do all that Jesus should enjoin him in order to obtain it. For, if we notice the whole conversation, from his most respectful address, to his most sorrowful departure, we will find, that he had as high a regard for Jesus as for life eternal; which is as much as to say, that he had indeed as high a regard for him, as he had at bottom, or in reality, for God. Jesus refuses the partial homage or worship he paid him, as being more than belonged to man, and less than was due to the one God; and for answer to his anxious question, *What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* refers him to those precepts of the law which respect the love of our neighbour. The young ruler, presuming he was blameless in this respect, answers, *Master, all these things have I observed from my youth.* Yet his conscience suggesting to him, that there must be a deficiency somewhere, made him subjoin this question, *What lack I yet?* Hereupon Jesus affirms, there was indeed a defect in his obedience; and, in order to its being perfect, enjoins him the practice of such humanity, as would manifest his entire, unreserved submission to, or dependence on God; giving him withal, by his form of expression, in making mention of THE CROSS, a hint concerning a better righteousness than he was then seeking after, and a better life than he presently enjoyed. But such was his attachment to earthly happiness, or to the things which he possessed, in the abundance of which he at bottom thought happiness lay, that he had no ear to give to the true scope of the divine law, nor any attention for the salutary hint given along with it by Jesus; which hint, had he understood it, would have at once eased his mind about righteousness, and loosed his attachment to earthly happiness. So he went away *very sorrowful, for he was very rich.*

Thus we see, however great regard he had for Jesus, for the favour of God, and eternal life; however much he was concerned about godliness and humanity: yet his wealth was dearer to him than these sacred considerations, and determined him to turn his back upon them all.

We must, all the while, keep this in our eye, that he entertained an opinion of himself, as none of the least deserving of mankind; that, however, deficient he thought himself in point of righteousness, he was far from thinking his case desperate in that respect; for, in that event, his sorrow would have pressed him chiefly there. Thus we see how, upon a proper trial, the best of men are stripped bare of all pretences to true godliness and humanity.

The gospel sets before us the character of God, which is summed up in love, as fully displayed in the way of humanity or kindness to men. And this kindness of God is the only source of true mutual kindness among men.

After man had renounced his dependence on God, the link of affection or true kindness among men was broken. Men became foolish and ig-



very suitable to the temper of the great majority of those called Christians, whether Popish or Protestant, churchmen or dissenters: and the great evil thereof will be observed only by those few who are Christians in the ancient or first sense of the word; and who, in every age and nation, always have made,

norant about happiness, each setting up for himself, and going astray after his own way. Hence endless discords behoved to arise. So Paul, speaking of himself and his fellow Christians, says, *We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceiving, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and (philanthropy, or) humanity of God our Saviour appeared—he saved us.*

The kindness of God to man is thus expressed, 1 John iv, 9, *In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* And the argument for mutual kindness arises thus, verse 11, *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.*

In the unparalleled submission of Jesus Christ, in his obedience unto death, we see displayed at once the grandeur of the Divine Majesty, and the extent of Divine kindness to men. And we cannot look upon Christ's work of love to men, without perceiving therein the perfection of godliness.

It is only by the work of Christ that men are restored to happiness, in dependence upon God, and to true friendship among themselves. They are restored to the favour of God, and of one another, by that which abolishes all differences and distinctions among them, and so every source of variance and discord.

The first Christians, who loved the saving truth, loved one another with a peculiar delight for the sake of it. And they showed good will toward all others, as knowing none but whom God might save, and bring to the knowledge of the truth.

All the ancient followers after righteousness, who, for the sake of their favourite distinctions, opposed the saving truth, received this character from the sole unerring judge of godliness and humanity, *they please not God, and are contrary to all men*; that is, they were adversaries to the eternal happiness of mankind. And we have the same authority to support us in affirming, that every kind of opposition to the gospel, is at the same time pointed against the humane spirit of the divine law, 1 Tim. i, 9. 11.

From what has been said, it will appear, that Christians must have a way of judging very different from others, about the pleasure of God, and the benefit of men. Whereas, all others infer what is agreeable to God, from their preconceived imaginations about the interest or benefit of men; Christians infer what is beneficial to men from the previous demonstration they have, by undoubted facts, of what is most agreeable to God. So that when they read the great things revealed in the gospel, they confidently affirm with Paul, *these things are good and profitable unto men.*

These reflections I have briefly put together, as a sample of what the Scripture affords, in answer to the objections men are ready to make against the revealed method of acceptance with God, as annulling all the boasted differences or distinctions in the characters of men. To which I shall only add, as a summary conclusion, that though, among those who



and always will make, but a very poor and despicable figure in the eyes both of the *wise* and of the *devout*, even as he whose name they wear did before them.

What could be more offensive to the pride of man, or, shall we say, to the delicate ears of virtue and piety, than to hear one claiming a heavenly mission, declaring that all the pains taken by one man to excel another, and to obtain the preference before God, go for nothing, or rather serve to make him more hateful in his sight? Do we not even feel some inclination to sympathize with the Pharisees in their chagrin, when they were obliged to hear such grating words as these, *That which is HIGHLY ESTEEMED among men is ABOMINATION in the sight of God*; and that men of the vilest characters went into the kingdom of God before them?

When we hear Jesus saying, *The world hateth me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil*; shall we say, that he was sent from heaven to tell the world, that murder, adultery, theft, &c., were evil actions? or did the world ever hate any man for declaiming against vice? or rather, would not any man speaking publicly in its favour, run the risk of being stoned or torn to pieces even by the most vicious of the mob? The truth is, Jesus witnessed against the world as evil, in that respect wherein they approved and valued themselves most: and accordingly the zealous Jews understood him. Would they not judge, then, that they had good ground to count him an enemy to all that they called virtuous or pious?

But how must it heighten their provocation, to hear such a man, whose character was every where hissed at, who was even thought beside himself by his near relations, declaring, in the most open manner, with unshaken confidence, that God had no delight in any character under heaven but his alone; that none of mankind could ever find favour with God, but by his virtue and piety alone? Would they not think they had the highest reason for their resentment? *Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?—He hath a devil, and is mad, why hear ye him?*

THIS controversy, we know, issued in the death of Jesus. And, if I might be allowed to adopt the vulgar use of the word

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have forfeited all title to happiness, different degrees of punishment may be inferred from different degrees of guilt; yet they are all equally destitute of any plea for justification. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery; said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.*

*victim* on this occasion, I would say he fell a victim to the resentment of every human excellency. For what is it that man glories in, that did not find itself piqued and affronted by the doctrine, joined with the extraordinary circumstances of the life of Jesus.

As matters betwixt Jesus and the world, in all the various shapes it assumes, stand always much on the same footing; what should hinder us to forget for a little the distance of time and place, to bring home the interesting scene, and hear Jonathan declaring what impression the recent circumstances made upon his mind?

“Had Jesus, when buried, like other mortals, remained in the grave. I had steadfastly adhered to the Pharisees, and gloried in being one of them, as being convinced, that the grand controversy about righteousness, which was carried on with great zeal on both sides, was now fairly decided in their favour, and that they had gained an additional honour by the opposition.

“I received a liberal and virtuous education among the Sadducees, who admit no sense of our sacred writings but what they think agreeable to sound philosophy. But happening, about the time that Jesus made his appearance, to fall acquainted with some amiable men of eminent piety among the Pharisees, I began to conceive a liking to their party. I observed, that they maintained a more strict temperance, and, in general a greater purity of life, and that they had more exalted sentiments about the power and character of God than the other party. I made it my business now to attend their lectures, and study their tenets, in hopes of being found worthy to rank with them. Meantime, the uncommon opposition, shown to them by Jesus, drew no small share of my attention, and served, on the whole, rather to increase than diminish my attachment to them. I considered their sentiments as a great improvement of my former way of thinking, and highly conducive to my advancement in virtue as well as piety. I readily judged, then, that the opposition which was chiefly pointed against what came nearest to perfection, behooved to flow from the worst of causes.

“I had a very low opinion of Jesus, as well as of the company he kept, on many accounts, which I shall not now take time to relate. In the general, I thought him a stranger to every great and noble sentiment which charms and elevates the mind of man. What disaffected me most to him was, I thought him uncharitable to the last degree. I could not

reconcile, with any degree of charity or piety, the severe censures he passed upon men of the best established characters. It gave me great disgust, to hear him addressing the men whom I myself thought worthy of the highest esteem for every thing great and good, in such uncouth language as this, *How can ye escape the damnation of hell!* I thought it intolerable to hear him at the same time declaring, with singular assurance, that he himself was the only favourite of heaven; that every character of man, but his own, was the object of the divine displeasure; yea, without stopping here, with the greatest familiarity calling God his Father, in a sense peculiar to himself; and, without leaving us at any loss to gather his meaning, affirming, the father and I are one; even while he showed rather more zeal than any of us against the least appearance of ascribing any divine attribute or name to any but the one God, or even to himself in any other view:—to hear him, in the very house sacred to the honour of the one God, against the profaning of which he himself had shown the greatest zeal, not only receiving divine praise from his attendants, but receiving it in the very words of the sacred hymns which we use to sing in our most solemn assemblies to the praise of the Most High; yet vindicating this praise as his due, by quoting those very hymns in support of it; and rebuking my zealous friends, who complained of this as an abuse.

“Let any one put himself in our place, and try how he could have borne all this, joined with many other provoking circumstances of the like nature; or, if any thing less could have satisfied him, than to have seen matters brought to the extremities to which all parties among us at last agreed to push them.

“I must own, indeed, that there was a peculiar energy in the rebukes of Jesus, which made it very difficult for one to resist the force of them. But what alarmed me most was, his performing many works that could not be done by human power; yea, such power appeared in them, that I could not help suspecting, upon occasions, that the finger of God was there, notwithstanding all the pains that were taken to account for them otherwise. However, as his conduct, on the whole, seemed to me to be so very opposite to the universally received principles of reason and religion, I made the best shift I could to efface any impressions made on my heart from that quarter, concluding, that as the character of God himself must be measured by those principles, it would be absurd

to suppose, that any revelation coming from him could ever serve to undermine them.

“By the same principles, I fortified myself against the prediction delivered by Jesus concerning his rising again from the dead; to which event he had openly appealed for proof of his doctrine; or, which is the same thing, the excellency of his person and character; and what served to give me the greater assurance was, I found my favourite party was very forward to refer the decision of the whole controversy to that same event, as being very confident that it would never happen.

“WHEN once Jesus was dead and buried, I thought the dispute as good as ended. But how great was my astonishment! when not long after, those poor illiterate men, who had been the companions of Jesus, appeared publicly, testifying with uncommon boldness, that he had risen again from the dead, according to his prediction: that they were well assured of this by many infallible tokens, and at last they saw him ascend into heaven;—when I saw no threatenings, no infamy, no punishment, could intimidate them;—when, moreover, I observed so many undeniable proofs of supernatural power, cooperating with them, and exerted in the name of Jesus, as risen from the dead. Then the late wonderful works of Jesus, before his death, recurred upon my thoughts—the former impressions I had been at so much pains to stifle, revived afresh upon me. In short, the evidence crowded so fast upon me, from every quarter, I found there was no gainsaying it.

“But still I was averse to the last degree to admit it. I was shocked at the train of consequences which behooved to follow. And thus I questioned with myself, Has reason itself deceived me? Do all our best books of divinity and morality proceed upon false principles? Must I give up with all my choicest sentiments? Is there no such thing as wisdom or righteousness in the world? Are all the world fools and enemies to God, but these rude Galileans? The reflection is confounding!—But what do these men propose? what do they aim at, by their alarming the public in this manner, with their testimony about the resurrection of Jesus?—They can have no good design, no benevolent intention toward men. They seem rather to be influenced by a most malignant disposition. They certainly intend to bring this man's blood upon us,—to prove us all to be enemies to God and objects of his wrath. They intend to make us desperate and utterly miserable.



“ With such reflections, whatever inward disquiet I should undergo, I resolved to combat whatever evidence they could produce;—till one day that I heard them charged, by some of my friends in authority, with the malevolent purpose I have just mentioned.—But such was their reply that, I think, I shall never forget it! They, indeed, not only allowed, but demonstrated all the consequences I was so adverse to admit, with such force and evidence, as quite defeated all my resolution. But, then, they at the same time, laid open such a treasure of divine good will toward men;—they drew such a character of God, no less amiable than awful:—they laid such a solid foundation of everlasting consolation and good hope, for the most desperate and miserable wretch, as did infinitely more than counterbalance the loss of all my favourite principles, all my fond reasonings, and every worldly advantage I had connected with them. And all this they showed, with the greatest simplicity and clearness, to be the plain meaning and import of the fact which they testified, even the resurrection of Jesus. And they confirmed every thing they said, by the unanimous voice of the prophets, whom I had never understood till now. Their doctrine, in respect of authority, resembled the word of a king, against whom there is no rising up; and in respect of evidence, the light of the sun; or, to use a far more adequate similitude, it resembled the fact which they testified, and whereof it was the meaning. And it well corresponded thereto in its effects; for it proved sufficient to raise the dead, and give hope to the desperate. The fact and its import, the *hand writing* and the *interpretation*, equally became the majesty of him who is the *Supreme*.

“ I saw plainly, that in the resurrection of Jesus, there behooved to be the agency of a *power* superior to the power of nature, even capable to control and reverse the course thereof: therefore I concluded, that this operating *power* was greater than the God of the Sadducees and the philosophers. I found, also, that this *power* had a *peculiar character*, manifest from the nature of the controversy, wherein it interposed its agency and gave decision. I found by the decision, that its character was more grand and perfect, as well as its agency stronger, than that of the God of the Pharisees. As to its agency, it was able to raise from deeper misery to higher blessedness than the Pharisees thought of. As to its character, it appeared with unlimited sovereignty *just* and *merciful* in perfection. Whereas the God of the Pharisees was such only partially, and by halves; incapable to execute the threatened curse against every sin, and yet show mercy and boundless

favour to the transgressors; not so just as to maintain the honour, the spirit, and extent of the perfect law, at all events: not so merciful, as to have any favour for the utterly worthless and wretched; but, halving the matter, merciful to men of good repute, and just in accepting those who are deficient in their righteousness; or, in another view, just in exacting the debt of five hundred pence, and merciful in forgiving that of fifty: or showing justice only against the utterly insolvent, and mercy only to those who can make partial payment;—in short, (like all created potentates,) incapable of appearing, at once, without limitation of either attribute, just and merciful in perfection.

“I found, then, that the *power* which operated in the resurrection of Jesus, excelled, not only in strength, but also in majesty and perfection of character, all that was called God among men. So I perceived no small propriety in the saying of Jesus, *O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee*. I concluded, then, that this *power* is the only true God: for that which is *greatest* must be *God*. Thus am I called off from every idol, however highly dignified, whether the work of men’s hands, or of their imaginations, to adore him who is *higher than the highest*.

“I frankly acknowledge, then, that my religion, or my hope toward God, is *not founded on argument*, not on the wisdom of men, but on the *power of God*;—not on any deductions from any principles I had hitherto known; but on *authority* interposed in a manner quite unexpected, baffling, confounding, and repelling all my reasonings; and, if I may be allowed the expression, *forcing* upon me a new set of principles, by the most convincing and satisfactory, as well as irresistible evidence;—not on any reasonings *a priori*, but on a plain matter of fact, established by impregnable evidence;—not on any effort exerted, or any motion felt on my breast, but on that motion of divine power, which burst the bands of death when Jesus rose;—not on any operation which men call *mystical*, to avoid saying *unintelligible*, but on the simplest and most striking operation of power that can affect the human mind, even the presenting alive again a man who was dead;—not on feeling any change on my heart to the better, or the remotest good inclination of my will, but on that fact, which, sore against my will, forced upon me the most shocking view of my guilt, and proved me to be an enemy to Heaven, in that respect wherein I thought to have approved and valued myself to my last hour;—not on a work of power assisting me to feel, will, or do any thing, in order to peace with God,

but on a work of power, proving to demonstration, that every thing needful thereto is already completely finished;—to say all in one word, not on any difference betwixt me and others, or any token for good about me whatsoever, but on the token or proof of divine good-will expressed, in the resurrection of Jesus, toward sinners of all nations, without regard to any difference by which one man can distinguish himself from another.

“This fact, firm as a rock, emboldens me to pay an equal regard to philosophical guesses and to enthusiastical fancies. If any one, then, should ask me a reason of the hope that is in me, I have only one word to say, *The resurrection of Jesus*. Take away this from me, and I am miserable indeed. Let this stand true, and nothing shall ever make me despair.

“This fact and its import, or the character of God thence arising, mutually confirm and ascertain each other. This character could never have been drawn to our view, but from some divine work. No work but this could ever evince such a character; and if this work was done, of necessity there must be such a character. This fact and its import, then, must stand or fall together. But more particularly,

“As this divine character can nowhere be published but along with the fact, I am assured, by hearing the *grandest character* thence arising, that the fact must be true. For to suppose, that the bare notion or idea of aught greater than God could ever be any where imagined, would be the wildest of all absurdities. And it is very evident, that the view of God, which the lower it abases the pride of man, raises his comfort and joy the higher; which reduces man to the most unreserved or to *extreme* dependence, while it exalts him to the *summit* of all happiness; could never be the contrivance of man, whose strongest impulse is toward the gratifying of his pride, and whose joy naturally rises or sinks according to the success thereof. Therefore, when the fact and its import are conveyed to my knowledge by the same testimony, I have no room to doubt that God, who alone can describe his own character, is the testifier and declarer of both. And surely, it would be extremely absurd to suppose, that such a divine character could arise from a contrived lie.

“Again, it is from this fact that the amiable character of the just God and the Saviour rises to my view. I could never have known there was such a God, had I not known this fact. But I know, that this fact being true, there must be such a God; because it is impossible to account for it otherwise. Yea, every attempt to account for it otherwise, not only ex-



tinguishes all my former lights, but, without furnishing me with any new ones, lands me in atheism, in chaos, and utter darkness. Whereas, the account of it given by the witnesses, while it proves all my former wisdom to be foolishness, opens to me a new, and more delightful source of knowledge, throwing light upon a thousand facts that I could never account for before; showing me a no less wonderful than satisfactory propriety in all the extraordinary circumstances attending the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the ministry of his witnesses.—It throws light upon all the ancient sacred writings, and the extraordinary facts recorded in them from the creation downward. It sets my mind at rest, as to all the difficulties about the divine character, and the condition of man, which occasionally pinched me before.—I am now reconciled to the entrance of sin and death into the world, and the whole dark side of things, on account of the marvellous light that shines forth from the greatest darkness.—I am now reconciled to the shade, on account of the magnificent picture thence arising to my view, and which could not otherwise have appeared. In a word, I thence perceive a no less amiable than grand uniformity of design, in all the works of God, from first to last. Whereas, should I shut my eyes against the light issuing thence, I am immediately lost in an unfathomable abyss of absurdities.

“ I KNOW, then, assuredly, when I hear these illiterate men, attended by supernatural power, bearing witness to the fact, declaring the import of it, and speaking (*τα μεγαλεια τῶ Θεῶ*) the grand things of God, I hear God himself speaking; I hear the voice and testimony of God. Divine wisdom and divine power, which are indeed inseparable, present themselves to my conscience at once: my pride is abashed; my reasonings are silenced, and hope arises to me from a new and unexpected source.

“ Were such a majestic personage as is described by John, in the 10th chapter of the Apocalypse, to appear publicly to our view, would not all our former ideas of human grandeur vanish at his presence? Have the wise men, of almost every succeeding age, exploded the principles maintained by their predecessors both in ethics and physics? and should it seem a thing incredible to us, that when God, no longer winking at the times of ignorance, was to commence a public speaker and writer to men, he should explode the wisdom of all the teachers who formerly taught mankind? And if we willingly hear wise men tracing to us, the order and connection of facts



and appearances in the course of nature, why should we not hear God explaining to us supernatural facts? This seems to be a province proper for the author and controller of nature. It was surely far above the fishers of Galilee.

“I am fully satisfied, then, in agreement with the witnesses, to hold the meaning they have given of the resurrection of Jesus, for the *gospel*, the *word*, and the *testimony* of God; and to call it, by way of eminence, **THE TRUTH**, in opposition to every false gloss on the Scriptures, and every false reasoning about the light or law of nature, or about any of the works or ways of God. This truth opens for me a plain path, and affords me firm ground for every step; so that I have no occasion to grope among *probabilities* with the academics, or no less uncertain *feelings* with the devotees;—no reason to envy the former the pleasure they propose in their humble, candid, and sincere inquiries after—a phantom, which has hitherto eluded their grasp; or the latter, the more refined delight they propose in their pious wrestlings and waitings for—a good conceit of themselves:—no reason to be scared by the scornful sneer of those, or the more solemn frown of these. Let this truth be my companion, and I will not be ashamed in the presence of all the sons of Socrates, though joined with those of Gamaliel.

“In company with this truth, I dare act the part proper to man. I dare give free scope to my conscience, before God, and look into his perfect law, as knowing, that, however heavy the charge turn out against me, the resurrection of Jesus affords the answer of a good conscience toward God, as it shows a righteousness to be already finished, by which God can appear just in justifying me, even in the very worst view I can have of myself, or which is more, even in the worst view I can appear in before him, who knows all things. By being thus encouraged to look into the perfect law of liberty, and continue therein, I see the extent of it to be vastly wider than I was hitherto willing to notice. And by seeing what a righteousness was requisite to honour it, and at what an expense every the least transgression of it behooved to be expiated, I am led to hold every precept of it more sacred than ever I did before. I know that I cannot disregard any precept of it, without, at the same time, disregarding the revealed righteousness. I consider the perfect law, the law that requires godliness and humanity in perfection, as the sacred and invariable rule of correspondence with God. And though, on this side the grave, I cannot come before God at any time,

and say, *I have no sin*, yet the TRUTH both binds and encourages me to aim at no less than perfection.

“ While I keep the perfect law in my view, which, like a faithful mirror, discovers all my deformity, I can find no reason to glory over the most infamous of mankind. The nearer I come to the light, which makes *manifest all things that are reprov'd*, I have the more reason to say, *Behold, I am vile*. I can have no room for glorying, then, but in the bare TRUTH: and I have good reason confidently to oppose the righteousness revealed there, to all that is admired, in its stead, among men.

“ I NOW see plainly, that all my former reasonings against Jesus and his character, were at the same time pointed against the divine law, and against the natural dictates of my own conscience. I chose to confine the exercise of my conscience to what might distinguish me from others. I took pleasure in reflecting *what I was not*, in comparison with others; but was averse to notice *what I was* before God. When any uneasy question, in this last respect, arose in my heart, I was careful to turn it aside by more agreeable reasonings. If I might, for *once*, call that which properly distinguishes man from other animals, *viz.* his conscience, by the name of REASON, I would vary the style of the received maxim, and say, *Reason pursued* is despair, and *faith*, or the knowledge of the truth, is the cure of despair. Before I knew the cure, I found nothing but pain and misery, in listening to the simple dictates of my conscience. And, sure I am, neither conscience nor argument directed me to the cure. But it came to me, unexpectedly, from heaven, by supernatural revelation; that is, when I heard God, by the mouths of the witnesses, laying open the meaning of a supernatural fact; a fact that had not only awakened fresh disturbance in my conscience, but also demolished all my arguments.

“ I was convinced, then, that the revealed truth, which not only awakened my conscience, and made me sensible of my malady, but also brought such relief as was sufficient to satisfy it when most awakened, behooved to come from the same God who formed it, and whose law is naturally impressed there. I found I had hitherto neglected and resisted the natural notices of the true God there, and framed to myself another god by reasonings;—that I had been all along as one half asleep or intoxicated; and who chooses to be so, as not finding his circumstances in so good order as to give him pleasure and satisfaction in his soberest and coolest moments.

And, indeed, who would incline to give place to such apprehensions of God and of himself, as could yield no pleasure nor satisfaction; but, on the contrary, the greatest of all pains; yea, behooved, without the knowledge of the cure, to fill his mind with the most repining hatred of God?

“ I HAVE great reason, then, to value the gospel, as it enables me to reflect, without pain, that I am a human creature; as it presents me with such an amiable view of the inflexibly just God, as that I may think of him when fully awake, and need not court the momentary quiet, or rather insensibility, which is procured by resisting the natural notices of God in the conscience, or in the more explicit declaration of his will in his written law. The gospel, while it enforces the law of God, and makes the conscience more sensible to the conviction of sin, conveys, likewise the most refreshing remedy; so answers to the majesty of the living and true God, who says, *See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand; For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.\**

“ Nor do I think I have any apology to make to men, for renouncing my former *ways* and *thoughts*, however righteous they appear to myself and others, upon my being found guilty, beyond reply, by the *one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy*; and demonstrated to be *wicked and unrighteous* in respect to both, by his irresistible work and testimony. I do not think it beneath the dignity of the wisest human creature, to be convinced of his mistake by him, whom it well becomes to say,—*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.†*

“ I used to admire it as a fine imagination, that were truth and virtue to be presented before our eyes in all their native charms, the beauteous splendour would be too transporting, too dazzling to be beheld by us, but through some veil. The experiment has been tried, and that in a manner far surpassing the reach of fancy. The unsullied perfection of both has appeared in the world, in all their native charms indeed, yet, so as not to hurt the weakest eye.—But what was the result? We saw no form nor comeliness in him; no beauty that we should desire him. We turned aside our faces from him, as

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\* Deut. xxxii, 39.

† See Is. lv, 7, 8, 9.

from a disagreeable object. The most wise and virtuous among us were the foremost to set him at nought.—Yet, however strange it may seem, true it is, that some of the most base and stupid among us were, upon this occasion, struck with such an apprehension of divine beauty, as far exceeds all the raptures of imagination. *The WORD was made flesh, (said they,) and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

“ I HAVE said, the resurrection of Jesus serves me as a new principle of knowledge or reasoning. I do not set out from conjectures to inquire after truth; but I set out with the light of undoubted truth, to observe what path it opens for me to walk in. I do not set out from human maxims and presumptions, to inquire how I shall form a god to myself; but I set out from heavenly truth, stamped with the divine character, to inquire how I shall form my heart and life suitably to it. I do not set out upon the inquiry, What I shall do to placate the Divine Majesty? or, as the phrase is, How I shall make up my peace with God? but I set out from the persuasion, that God is just in justifying the ungodly, to inquire, what service he has for me,—to prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

“ All my religious principles and practices are so many inferences from the aforementioned fact; yet I have no ground to value myself, as a reasoner, even on this new footing. For I could find no satisfactory meaning at all in that fact, till I was first taught it by the illiterate Galileans. And, what is more, I can deduce no inference from thence, till I be first taught it by one or other of the inspired witnesses. But when I hear them displaying the manifold wisdom of God from that source, I perceive a wonderful propriety and force in the whole of their reasoning. Thus God sees meet to abase my pride of understanding, by the very means he uses for conveying to me the most useful and comfortable of all knowledge. And herein, I am persuaded, he consults my real benefit. For were I left to indulge my natural itch for reasoning, even on this new footing, I am sensible I should soon act the same part with this supernatural revelation, as I formerly did with the light of nature. When I reflect, were all my own wisdom, and that of the greatest sages landed me; and that, in the height of my wisdom, I turned out the greatest fool; I am now fully satisfied, that my safest and wisest course is, simply to believe just as I am told, and sub-



missively to do just as I am bidden, without murmuring or disputing. However foolish, then, my rule of faith and practice may appear in the eyes of the WISE, and however weak in the eyes of the DEVOUT, I find myself kept in countenance by the apostolic maxim, *The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*"

Thus far JONATHAN.

LET us now take a view of the character of the Pharisees, in the light thrown upon it by the resurrection of Jesus. It is evident, then, that those who held the first rank for righteousness among men, mortally hated the righteousness which pleased God. Those who sought to be found righteous, AS IT WERE, by the works of the law, hated the real and genuine works of the law. Those who had the highest zeal for the letter of the law, showed the greatest spite against the spirit and end of it. For what else was the character of Jesus, but the spirit and perfection of the divine law, copied out in the temper of his mind and the tenor of his actions? Those who worshipped, *as it were*, the true God, hated his real character; even as Jesus said, *Now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.—They hated me without a cause.* Those who were eminently distinguished by their zeal for the God of Israel, were proven to be as much idolaters as their fathers before the captivity. Accordingly, we find Paul comparing the time of Elias with his own time. For taking notice of the answer of God to Elias, (who complained he was left alone in the general defection to idolatry,) that a remnant of seven thousand were reserved; he adds, *Even so, then, at this present time also, there is a remnant, according to the election of grace.*

It requires no long process of reasoning to show, that all idolatry lands in *self-adoration*, since it is the worshipping of a God of *our own making*; for men never yet made any image for God, or, which is the same thing, invented any idea of him, but what served greatly to deface the glory of the original, and no less to elevate their own pride. Hence it is, that God, intending to exhibit his own image and character himself, issues the severest prohibitions against all idolatry. Hence he takes to himself the title of the JEALOUS GOD. This matter is set forth in a variety of lights in Scripture. I have no occasion for more than a summary view of it at present.

Since man was subjected to misery, by the curse of the di-

vine law, whatever it be that he considers as his refuge from misery, or the ground of his hope, that is to him the standard and measure of the divine character; even as he, whose sole ground of hope is the work of Christ, draws his character of God from thence, and rejoices in God as manifested in that work.

Man was not left at first to form his own notion of God, merely by what he knew naturally, or might learn by reflecting and reasoning on the works he saw; but it was settled for him by the law of dependence, impressed on his conscience by the voice of God. That law served to fix on his mind the notion of God as the author and giver of all things, as the sovereign of life and death, that none could once disobey him and live, that none could deliver out of his hand. Being naturally the favourite of God, he was happy in this notion of him, while he did nothing to offend him. But this notion of God can yield no comfort to sinners. It could never enter into the heart of sinful man, that deliverance could come to him from this God; and far less could he retain the true notion of this God, and expect deliverance any where else. Here lies the grand impossibility with men, which the all-sufficient God hath found out a way to dissolve. He hath done that which behoved for ever to have appeared impossible in the eyes of men.

In the gospel, or the history of Jesus Christ, we find the original idea of the divine authority and opposition to sin fully preserved, yet complete deliverance wrought for men. The gospel reconciles men to the **JUST** GOD, by showing him to be the **SAVIOUR**. It reconciles them to have the same dependence on God for the support of their hearts, or for their righteousness, as man, while upright, was taught to have for his food; the justifying righteousness being no less the peculiar workmanship and gift of God than was the garden of Eden.

Aside from the gospel, nothing remained for sinful man but despair, or temporary refuge in some kind of idolatry. His conscience and his happiness behoved to stand in the strongest opposition to each other. He must, then, be averse to admit any notion of God, but by the comfortable handle, or to extend his notion of the divine character farther than is consistent with his ease and quiet. Hence arise all those fine reasonings, for which we chiefly value ourselves as rational beings. Hence it is, that all men, who know not the gospel, measure their character of God, by what is most agreeable to their own taste. Hence proceed all the differences

among men, about the divine character, from the *strict* God of the Pharisees, who must be served with suitable zeal, down to what the bold satirist calls a *Deity that's perfectly well-bred*, who is pleased with politeness.

It is much the same, whether I set up the commonest print or the finest statue of a king, when my business is to try how gracefully I can make my honours before it. The superstitious pilgrim may sometimes find his devotion as much enlivened by the meanest relic, as by the best adorned shrine. It does not signify much, by what means one brings his deity present to his eyes or his thoughts: for all men who know not the true God, of whom Jesus Christ is the perfect image, losing nothing of the living majesty of the original in the representation, have no other use for a god, but to be an *auxiliary* to their pride or favourite passion, or such an use, as, according to the forementioned satirist, Flavia has for her glass:

As *Flavia* in her glass an angel spies,  
*Pride* whispers in her ear pernicious lies;  
 Tells her, while she surveys a face so fine,  
 There's no satiety of charms divine.

When men have once settled their notion of the divine character from that wherein, if I may so speak, their *self-importance* is made to lie, it is very natural for them to have a new and additional pleasure, in reflecting upon this their god. We can be at no loss, then, to see what is the source of this pleasure, and where it terminates.

He who finds nothing that can give him any importance, but the work of Christ, rejoices in knowing that the Divine good pleasure rests there. So his happiness arises wholly from that which God hath provided, without his concurrence in any respect; and the grateful sense of his happiness always terminates in that work.

The Pharisees, who knew not the true God, being ignorant of his righteousness, sought to establish their own. The letter of the law, or that notion of it which was subservient to their purpose, of distinguishing themselves from other *ræna*, was their measure of the character of God. To this they sincerely endeavoured to conform their lives; and no doubt they thought to balance their failings by fasting and prayer, and a careful observance of the ordinances about sacrifice and washing. So we find, it gave them no small satisfaction to reflect, how agreeable they were to their God.

We must take this along with us, that while they gloried in

that character which was their shame before the true God, or an abomination in his sight, they, at the same time, had an attentive eye to their worldly interest, regarding earthly happiness more than the life lying in his favour, pursuing that species of idolatry which is called the *service of mammon*. So they answered to the character given to those of their number, who crept into the first churches, unpurged from their former leaven—*whose GOD is their BELLY, and whose GLORY is in their SHAME.*

As for us Christians, generally speaking, we seek acceptance with God *as it were* by the obedience of Christ, but in reality by our own works;—*as it were by faith*, but in reality by the actings of something called by that name. We speak of God as already well pleased in Jesus Christ, or placated by what he hath done; yet we hold it necessary, that some advance should be made on our part, and some good endeavours exerted in order to begin our friendly correspondence with him. At bottom we consider the gospel, as presenting to us a God *almost* placated, and requiring something of us to make him *fully so*; yet very ready to help us out with that something, provided we set about it in good earnest. Or, to vary the expression, we look on God as become *fully well pleased*, through the atonement, to *assist* our feeblest effort to attain the qualifications necessary to gain his favour. But, alas! what a poor use is this for the atonement? At this rate, all our concern about the gospel must turn out to—much ado about nothing. For, what great benefit do we reap from it? I think it must amount to this, that we have now an authentic divine revelation assuring us, that the divine character is such, as the pride of man, in all ages, has imagined it to be, namely, *that God is disposed to assist and favour those who are presumed to be the well-disposed.* And none of us will readily admit the thought of himself, that he is altogether ill-disposed.

At this rate, the gospel, by all it speaks of grace and atonement, only presents to us the tortoise after the elephant, and leaves us still just where we were when the pinch comes; even on the same footing with our ancient Pagan fathers, as to the great and primary question, *What shall introduce us into the Divine favour? Wherewithal shall we come before God?*

We Protestants have indeed renounced the gross idolatry of our Popish fathers, even as the Jews returned from Babylon did that of their forefathers? yet, we have closely imitated the



Jews contemporary with Christ and his Apostles, in their notions of the Divine character, and in their connecting their temporal interest with their religion, or their zeal for a worldly kingdom to the Messiah.\*

Human wisdom has been employed in all ages to shorten the distance betwixt God and man. All the various methods that have been tried, agree in one respect. They all serve more or less to lower the Divine character, and more or less to exalt that of man. And thus it has been thought the distance might be removed, and friendship restored betwixt God and man. Here the gospel differs from all the devices of human wisdom. It shows us the living and true God coming down the whole of the infinite distance himself, not to meet returning man, but to overtake and prevent him, when hastening to utter ruin; to seek and to save them that were lost. It shows us God come down to men, Immanuel, God with us. The great truth for which we are indebted to the gospel is, that *God was made manifest in the flesh*. In the person of Jesus Christ, the distance betwixt God and man is entirely removed. There appeared man in his *lowest* misery that he can either feel or fear. There appeared the just God in his *highest* majesty of character: The fulness of the Divine good pleasure rests on him, who became exceeding sorrowful even unto death. There we see Divine vengeance executed against sin to the utmost, yet the eternal God became the refuge of the guilty. There God appears, not working deliverance by halves, not co-operating with sinful man, not restoring his depraved faculties, and assisting him less or more to deliver himself; but working complete deliverance for man without his concurrence in the least. So that, *according to this time*, it may well be said, *What hath God wrought?* What spirit then shall dare to whisper, that *no comfort or benefit can be derived from the bare persuasion of this?* What—But I refrain.

When Paul gloried only in the work finished by him who died on the cross, he was not afraid of being guilty of any degree of idolatry, or of derogating in the least from the honour of the true God. He was confident, that he was well

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\* What is above said is not restrained to our churches by law established: for the same dispositions prevail equally among our dissenters; who, like disappointed courtiers, murmur at the proceedings of those in place, and long for nothing more than to enjoy those legal advantages which they judge to be at present so ill bestowed. So that, generally speaking, it may well be said, that it is none of the least of their grievances that they are **DISSENTERS**.

kept in countenance by the words of the Prophet Isaiah,\* *In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.* So he restricts the blessing to *as many as walk according to this rule*, as being the only true Israel, saying, *Peace be on them, and mercy, even upon the Israel of God.*† And to the Philippians,‡ he says, *Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision; for we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.* He was in no fear of incurring the curse, or forfeiting the blessing pronounced in these words, *Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.*—*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.* It may be noticed here, that the awful caution immediately following the curse and blessing now cited, plainly respects what is man's confidence or ground of hope. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* Jer. xvii.

WE know nothing about the work of Christ but by the Divine report about it. All the comfort and benefit arising from that work, is conveyed to men by the report of it: so that we can by no means regard them *separately*. When we rejoice in the report, we rejoice in the work reported; as must necessarily be the case with respect to all glad tidings whatever. So that, if the work reported be a beneficial work, my whole joy arises from the assurance of its being true. The effect of a true report is the same as the effect of the persuasion of it; yea, we can have no idea of a true report but by the persuasion of it. Whatever, then, we say, of the persuasion, must equally be said of the report, and of the thing reported. So we find the word FAITH is used indifferently for either of these in Scripture. Every divine *work* from the beginning, has always been attended with *speaking*, or some report, declaring the meaning of what was done. Jesus Christ came *doing* and *speaking*; he came *working* the justifying righteousness, and *declaring* his ability to save. And the progress of his gospel in the world, will always correspond with his personal appearance among men. He came preventing men, setting at nought all their pretended advances toward God; not teaching men how to work for life, but working himself for them; giving life to the guiltiest, bringing nigh the remotest by his work. In like man-

\* Chap. xlv, 25.

† Gal. vi. 16.

‡ Chap. iii, 2, 3.

ner, by the progress of the divine report among men, is, with great propriety, fulfilled the gracious promise, Isa. xlvi, 12, 13. *Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I will bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry.* By it righteousness is conveyed unto men, who were till then stout-hearted, and far from it. It comes unto men always unsent for; not meeting men inquiring after it, but overtaking them when running away; and, according to the significant phrase of the Prophet, as *a voice behind them*: or, to change the similitude, it finds men fast asleep, in the desert, in midnight darkness, among the bones of many lately devoured, and ready to be added to the number. It awakens them as by the voice of thunder, and conducts them in safety by its awful but friendly lightning. It addresses them thus: *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* Men thus relieved I have seen, who could give no other reason for their comfort but the word of the truth of the gospel. Methinks I hear one of them say, "When I first knew where I was, I found myself at an utter *impossibility* as to all hope. The *just God* and *eternal misery* appeared to me inseparable ideas. But thanks be to God for the salutary work! thanks be to God for the glad report! By this report I find, that with the all-sufficient God nothing shall be impossible. By this report I am assured, that it is highly consistent with the glory of every divine perfection to save me, one of the worst of men, who have hitherto been an enemy to all that's good. The report emboldens me to say, *This is the true God, and eternal life!* Hence every idol! Should an angel from heaven move the question, *Can this bare persuasion be any manner of advantage to our persons?* I would immediately suspect a likeness to the first question of doubt that ever was moved, *Yea, hath God said so?* But should he proceed to answer it too, and say, *No surely;* I would then confidently conclude it was the very spirit and style of him, who, after deceitfully undermining the first words that ever God spoke to man, adventured to say, *Ye shall NOT SURELY die.*"

WE Protestants have laid aside the crucifix; we reserve no fragments of the wood of the cross. But what have we got instead of these? We have got a perverted gospel. We have got some insipid sentiment about the cross of Christ, that, like the law of works, can do us no good, till it be *reduced to practice.* As for the bare work finished on the cross, or the

bare report about it, however true we think it, so far have we mistaken it, that setting aside *our active* operations about it, we do not see what comfort or benefit can be derived from it; we see no form nor comeliness about it, why we should desire it; no manner of advantage that can result from it. We consider the gospel as furnishing us with so many good and excellent materials to work upon; and our whole comfort and benefit arises from the proper performance and success of our labour.

Let us sum up at once the scope of the popular doctrine under one similitude, including the spirit of the many, by which the teachers seek to decoy us. Let us say, then, that the gospel, which they impiously teach us to call *in itself a dead letter*, is as cold, and dead as *flint and steel*; that our hearts are dark and lifeless like *tinder*. We are assured, by the trials that have been made by many before us, that the materials, if properly used, are very fit to produce a lively and comfortable *spark*: yet our hands are so benumbed, we cannot use them to good purpose. However, we must endeavour to use them the best way we can. While we are diligently employed in these endeavours, warmth and vigour are restored to our hands, and we are at last successful in producing the desired spark of consolation. As often as we find ourselves in darkness, or at a loss for comfort, we are to renew the same operation, encouraging ourselves all the while with the reflection, that we once succeeded, and therefore may more readily do so again. To instruct and encourage us about these operations, the body of the popular doctrine is adapted, and, in the careful performance of them, the most serious part of our lives must be employed. But alas! what will all our labour, or all the comfort arising from it, avail us before him, who says, *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow?*

I do not think I ought to make any apology for my irony as too keen, or my style as too severe on this subject: seeing I know none, against whom the edge of it points more directly, than it does against myself. For that it may not be thought I am animated against the popular doctrine, by any prejudices of education, I am willing to own, that I was brought up from my infancy, in the greatest veneration for the popular preachers;—that my first years of reflection and reading were spent in hearing them, and in a careful perusal of their practical treatises; and that I continued, for a considerable time, by far



too long indeed, seriously endeavouring to form my heart upon them.—But I am far from thinking I say any thing extravagant, or in the least injurious to my conscience, when I affirm, that I might have been as profitably employed, and even with as much Christian piety, in attending the levee of the lady of Loretto.

The highest decency certainly requires, that the difference betwixt what is holy and what is profane should be set forth in the strongest colours; especially when the greatest pains are taken to make that difference disappear, to confound human efforts with the divine righteousness, to confound the froth of human pride with the *most holy faith*.

The prophet Isaiah, who often speaks of the time when the divine righteousness should be brought near to men, commonly intermixes with his accounts of it, the boldest expressions of irony and contempt, against all the self-justifying labour that men would oppose to it; which he generally describes in language borrowed from the ancient idolatry.\* I shall only produce an instance or two, out of many. Ch. xli, *ult.* joined with ch. xlii, 1.—*Behold, they are all vanity, their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion. Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*—What a lively picture have we of *exercised souls*, hard at work to accomplish what they call *conversion*, in ch. xliv. ? The passage is somewhat long. I shall only cite a few words from the beginning of it, vers. 9.—*They that make a graven image, are all of them vanity, and their delectable things shall not profit.—The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms; yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth; he drinketh no water, and is faint, &c.* But in opposition to all this labour, what saith the Spirit of God? ch. lv. *Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hear, and your soul shall live.* Every one, then, who is born of the Spirit, lives merely by *what he hears*, without his performing any duty at all; unless we shall say, it was the duty of Lazarus to hear and live, upon the uttering of the call, *Come forth*. He lives, I say, by what

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\* This will readily appear to one who compares what is said Isa. lxxv. i, 5; and Deut. xxxii. 21; with the references made to these passages, in the New Testament, at the close of Rom. x.

he hears: so the sole reason he has to give for his comfort, is a substantial fact reported by irrefragable testimony. And the reason or spring of his comfort, is the influencing principle of his life and practice.—This is the sum of all that the Scripture speaks about conversion, regeneration, or the new birth.

OF all the corruptions of the gospel, that is the most dangerous, which brings the Divine gift of righteousness seemingly very near to men, yet in effect sets it as high above the reach of one whose conscience is awake, as the perfection required by the Divine law itself. By this perverted gospel, many teachers tantalize the souls of men, leading those whose conscience is most easily touched, through a course of the most gloomy kind of anxieties, while the more self-confident have their ears more open to that branch of the doctrine which facilitates the means of reaching the desired comfort; understanding the strong words by which the means and requisites are described, in a sense more suitable to human abilities and inclinations, and indeed more suitable to the spirit and scope of the doctrine, than the others do.

It matters not much, how near these teachers bring the gift of righteousness to me, if still it must cost me as much labour to come within reach of it, as to conform my heart to the law of God. This being plainly the case, what advantage have we by the gospel? We may say, it indeed brings a righteousness considerably near to us, yet, in order to come within reach of it, we must have all those good dispositions that are necessary for the fulfilling of the law. I apprehend, it would be no great difficulty to prove, that the Scripture itself will warrant any man to hope for acceptance with God, by his own righteousness, who is influenced by all those good dispositions toward the law, which Aspasio considers as requisites for coming to Christ. He who can say, *I feel an aversion to sin, and prize the holy law above all things; the prevailing bias of my affection is to the Divine law, and the habitual breathing of my soul after a conformity to its precepts; is, I think, in a fair way to fulfil the law, so far as to live by his own obedience; according to what is said, Ezek. xxxiii, 14—19. If the wicked turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right,—he shall surely live,—he shall not die; none of his sins that he hath committed, shall be mentioned unto him; he hath done that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live,—he shall live thereby.* Thus the dispositions made necessary for our obtaining life by Christ, are

sufficient to make us live without him, and to supersede the necessity of any Christ, or atonement:

While this passage of Ezekiel is before us, it may not be amiss to take a short and summary view of God's reasoning with Israel, in the 18th and 33d chapters.\* Wherein, I think, we will find due consideration paid to the most notable objections that ever were framed by the heart of man, against the revealed method of acceptance with God. I shall only premise what I think I need not take time to illustrate at present, That God had hitherto, by his visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, kept up in Israel a standing pledge and memorial of his great purpose of saving men by the transferring of guilt. The Israelites were, in Ezekiel's time, suffering the manifest tokens of the Divine displeasure, for the sins of their fathers, as well as their own. Their complaint against the *way of God*, as hard and unequal, was twofold. 1. They thought it unreasonable that a son should suffer for the sins of his parents, however well he himself should behave; for men always presume they will do better than those before them; yea, better than they themselves have formerly done. This complaint corresponds exactly with that which we make against suffering for the sin of Adam. To obviate this complaint, God proposes to take away the ground of it. He assures them he would set aside that extraordinary providence, under which they had been hitherto conducted, and whose main end and view I have already hinted at; that since they found fault with *his way*, as unequal, he would deal with them according to *their own*, namely, according to what they counted equity; that

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\* Some have thought that I have considered the reasoning with Israel in these chapters as sarcastical. For my part, I know nothing in the whole argument that can come under that notion, but the profane sarcasm of the *four grapes*, which God first repels as impious in itself, and unreasonable at first instance, by asserting his own sovereignty in these words, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine." Then he condescends to reason with them on their own notions of equity, giving the most solemn assurance to every objector, that it should fare with him according to his own future conduct. Even as Jesus solemnly declares to one, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*; and to another, *This do, and thou shalt live*. We cannot seriously maintain that death is the wages of sin, unless with equal seriousness we maintain that life is due to the righteous. Those indeed who pretend to be righteous while they are not, expose themselves to worse than ridicule. But this can by no means throw any air of levity on the divine law, nor on God's procedure with men, which, in the distribution of either justice or mercy, most solemnly and invariably establishes the law.

they should have no more occasion to say, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*; that if a wicked father should beget a righteous son, that son should surely live; and that every man should suffer only for his own fault. 2. They also thought it very hard, that if a man had once led a bad life, no encouragement should be given for his reformation, however well disposed he should be for the time to come. For all men generally propose to do better, when once it shall be more convenient for them. They thought to what purpose shall we reform, or hearken to the prophet's warning, to turn from our evil way, while our former transgressions still stand upon record against us?—Let us do ever so well for the time to come, we must be treated as criminals for what is past. God also removes the ground of this complaint. He assures every man, who shall sincerely repent, or turn from his evil way, and do that which is lawful and right, that he shall be happy, and no mention made of his former faults. All this he confirms by his oath, that there might be no remaining doubt or hesitation in the minds of men, about their acceptance with him, as soon as they reformed. The complaint and the answer stand together in these words, chap. xxxiii, 10, 11. *Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? &c.* Then follow the words in the foregoing paragraph.

But to have a proper view of this matter, one must read the whole two chapters; whence it will appear, that the Divine reasoning in them proceeds wholly on the objection, that the Lord's way was not equal: which indeed comprehends the force of all the objections that have since been made against the gospel. If nothing but equity had appeared in the Divine character, nothing but misery could have been looked for by the guilty. To men who are dissatisfied with *his way*, as unequal, God proposes to deal with them according to any rule of equity insisted upon among them. Chap. xxxiii, 20. *Ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal: O ye house of Israel, I will judge every one of you after his ways.* So likewise it appears from the New Testament, that every one who is found guilty at last, shall be condemned out of



his own mouth, or for walking unsuitably to his own maxim.

The field, then, is left fair and open for every one who wills to run. Every let or hindrance, every objection that the reasoning faculty of man can frame, is entirely removed.— Let all the well-disposed, all the friends of virtue avail themselves of the free declaration; God himself hath set his oath to it, that every one who turns from evil to do good, shall be happy. He who does this, may warrantably expect all countenance and encouragement from his Maker, whose pleasure ever lies on the side of righteousness. Many think they do so. Let them enjoy themselves. Christians have no occasion to quarrel with them. If they do well, no doubt they shall be accepted. The gospel is only a gracious provision, made, by the Supreme royal prerogative, for the guilty and the desperate. Jesus Christ came only to bring relief to the vicious and the ungodly, without infringing the privileges of the righteous in the least. So these last, who are rich, have no reason, whatsoever, to grudge at the alms provided for the starving poor, seeing it is done no way at their cost or expense.\* As for those who are sincerely well inclined, I have no doubt but they will do that which is lawful and right; even as I make no question but those who are averse to sin, will avoid it; for I have no notion, either from Scripture or experience, of any impotency in man to do good, but what arises from his aversion to it; or of any readiness in him to do evil, but what arises from his love to it. The gospel, then, or the *way of God*, which will always appear unequal, in some respect or other, in the eyes of the well-inclined, can never be acceptable to any but those who are ungodly, and without strength, even those who can have no hope according to any rule of equity.

If it be still said, that there is this difference betwixt the law and the gospel, that the latter furnishes friendly and powerful assistance to the candidate for happiness, whereas the former

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\* When we endeavour, at any time, to set forth the divine grace toward the guilty in its proper light, I see no occasion we have to stop our course, to pay a tender regard to the scrupulous objections of those guardians of virtue, who, affecting great jealousy for her interests, quite overact their part, and express no small concern, lest they should be any way injured by the grace of the gospel, and a door be opened for licentiousness; for as those objections were never made by any such as were impelled by manifest disaffection to all truth, godliness, and humanity, the short apostolic reply to the makers of them is abundantly sufficient, *Their damnation is just.*

does not; I shall only reply, that an attentive reader of the two chapters will be at no loss to prove, that he who is sincerely inclined to fulfil the law, shall be favoured with the Divine countenance, no less than he who is sincerely inclined to comply with what are called the terms or requisites of the gospel.

I have chosen rather to take notice of these passages in Ezekiel, because I find nothing more vehemently insisted upon by the popular preachers, when they would encourage their hearers in their self-justifying labour, than the above-mentioned Divine oath. And I make no doubt but the Jewish doctors made the same use of it to their pupils. And no question they reckoned a man converted, when once they found him sincerely disposed to obey the law. The variation of a few names make no material difference in this matter.

I think we may form an idea of the popular doctrine, by alluding to some of the similitudes most familiarly used by the teachers. The gospel, we shall say, is like a rope or a ladder, let down into a pit for the deliverance of some men who are in hazard of perishing at the bottom of it; let down, I say, considerably near to them; yet at such a distance as they are scarce able, by their greatest efforts and utmost stretching, to touch, by the point of their finger, the means of their escape; yet it is their duty to continue labouring to get hold of it, waiting for supernatural assistance. Now, it does not signify much, by what name we call the means of escape, whether we call it the law or the gospel; for the great concern we have with either of these, is to obtain a righteousness, or title to life. I apprehend, then, that the great difficulty is over, when once a man has fairly got hold of the rope, or his foot on the first step of the ladder; that is, when he has got his aversion to righteousness overcome, and pointed the other way, toward sin. The whole ascent after this must certainly be much easier.

I say, it does not signify much, whether we call our means of escape the law or the gospel: for, according both to the Jewish and popular doctrine, it is not the bare knowledge of the law, or the gospel, that can do us any service, but *the use we make of them*. The bare persuasion of the truth contained in either, *unless reduced to practice*, can be of no manner of advantage to our persons.\* This is likewise common

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\* I am here reminded of a fixed maxim among our popular preachers, That *an unapplied Christ is no Christ or Saviour at all*. Just so it

to both, that they convey happiness, or afford hope to the well-disposed. And the exercise of the candidates must be much the same with respect to either; that is, to endeavour to attain a due sense of former deficiencies, with a proper value and esteem for the mean of escape; or, in other words, to attain to the hatred of sin, and the love of righteousness. And we need make no question, but the Jewish teachers, who were well skilled in the business of making proselytes or converts, knew as well as our popular preachers, how to awaken concern, and to suggest comfort, by heightening and lowering the terms and requisites by turns, according to the various cases of their hearers. And it would seem, that the zealous Jews, as well as modern Christians, laid no small stress on the diligent attendance they gave in hearing sound doctrine, and the motions thereby produced in their hearts. Paul insinuates no less, when he says to the Jews, *Not the HEARERS OF THE LAW are justified before God, but the DOERS OF THE LAW shall be justified.* The more attentively we consider this matter we shall find the more reason to conclude, what has been oftener than once hinted, that it is of no great moment, what name or thing we make use of, or what materials we work upon, to excite and gratify the darling sense of self-importance; the operation and the effect being in all cases nearly the same, while we are the agents, and the comfort is to arise more or less, from our labour.

THE source of all this self-justifying labour, as grafted upon Christianity, I take to be this. The gospel, or the report concerning the work of Christ, wears the same uniform aspect toward all, considering all mankind as perfectly on a level, regarding even those whom it relieves as children of wrath, even as others. The pride of man, which must always have some distinguishing qualification to feed upon, cannot digest this. So each one reasons thus: "Seeing many shall perish, and seeing the gospel says nothing to me, but what it says to every one, what comfort can I reap from it, unless I can find about myself at least one grain of odds, casting the balance in my favour, in comparison with others, or in comparison with what I myself have hitherto been?"

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may be said of the law, that an unfulfilled law, or a law not actually applied and reduced to practice, can give no life at all. So that generally speaking, it may well be said, that we differ from the Jews more about words than things.

Here let me adopt the words of Mr. Prior, which will serve my purpose as well as his :

“That cruel something unpossesst  
Corrodes and leavens all the rest.”

Nor is it, though more soothing, less noxious when possessed. Our attention is so much engrossed in the pursuit of this *something*, that we mistake, neglect, and despise the simple report of the gospel ; so cannot find the comfort which it yields to every one who understands and holds it for true. And, indeed, a cruel something it is ; for it stings to death all who covet, and all who have it ; all who bewail the want, and all who rejoice in the possession of it. The former it leads through a tiresome and gloomy path unto utter darkness ; the latter it lulls asleep on the top of a precipice, soothes them awhile with pleasing dreams, then throws them down headlong at last. Those of the former class have no ear to give to any thing that can be said of the truth and certainty of the gospel, and the grand things of God reported there. Every thing about it appears dark, lifeless, and insipid, for want of the wished for something. And, indeed, they seldom meet with any teachers but such as sympathize with, and so encourage them in their impious complaining and murmuring against God, for want of a righteousness, as if this were the exercise of godliness. With respect to the other class, who presume they have got something that turns the balance in their favour, we may accommodate the distich thus :

That fav'rite something, when possesst,  
Spreads light and joy o'er all the rest.

So they walk in the light of this something. The whole gospel now appears to them a very lovely and joyful scheme ; because they find some reason why all its comforts should bear a peculiar direction or respect towards them, in distinction from others. So we may find them talking, in a very high strain, of the gospel, with very great satisfaction and delight, and even in raptures about it. Not that they are much concerned about the truth or certainty of it ; for as this is not the source of their joy, they scarce know what it is to have any doubt about it. They are generally satisfied to hold this as they received it, by tradition from their fathers. And who could move any doubt about this, but Infidels and Atheists ? But let their favourite distinction be once called in question, and they will immediately remonstrate against this, as *razing the foundation*. And in this respect, it must



be owned, they speak with great propriety; for this is indeed the foundation, light, and life of their whole religion. No sooner are they possessed of this, but they begin to look down, with a solemn pride, upon the rest of mankind as profane, and to complain aloud of the prevalency of infidelity and irreligion; regretting, no doubt, that that for which they value themselves, is not sufficiently esteemed by the rest of mankind. This is, indeed, the great centre of the popular doctrine, the very axis on which it turns. Here all its lines are united; all the Divine attributes, works, and words, are introduced as handmaids subservient to this favourite distinction. The power and cunning of Satan is to be guarded against, chiefly, as opposed to this. But if we turn our eyes to the Scripture, it will appear that this something is the great engine employed to blind the minds of men, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. It will appear, that if we imagine we possess or desire to attain any requisite to our acceptance with God, either aside from, or in connection with the bare work of Christ,—Christ is become of no effect unto us,—Christ shall profit us nothing.

The Jewish and Christian teachers, then, have agreed thus far, that they have both taught their disciples to become *followers after righteousness*. But what shall we say, if it should appear from the Scripture, that all who attain to righteousness, are such as were not seeking after it? The Scripture indeed asserts it; but I am not obliged to account for it. Paul himself, while he plainly asserts it as a certain matter of fact, introduces it with a question of solemn surprise. *What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith:\** But Israel, which fol-

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\* It is plain, from this passage, that that form of expression which occurs so often in Paul's epistles, *the righteousness of faith, or the righteousness which is of faith*, must denote rather the way how righteousness comes unto us, than how we came to it, seeing they who followed not after it, are said to attain to it. And indeed nothing is more frequent in common life, than the conveyance of joy or sorrow to us by unexpected news, accordingly, we find it to be the current and familiar style of the Scripture, concerning the conveyance of righteousness, salvation, or blessedness to men, or, which is the same thing, the word of God concerning it, that it comes or is sent to them. So it is compared to the rain and the snow coming down from heaven; and it as effectually produces hearing and understanding, as these produce moisture in the parched earth. The Divine report, and the hearing of faith, are so closely connected together, that the same Greek expression (*ακοη*) seems

lowed, hath not attained. And he calls Isaiah very bold for declaring the same truth:—*I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me*, Rom. ix, x. Aspasio's friend, Mr. Erskine, not choosing to deny this altogether, has fallen upon a most ingenious method to extract from it an argument, *a fortiori*, for encouraging his disciples in their labour, thus: "He is sometimes found of them that seek him not, as Paul, Zaccheus:—much more will he be found of them that seek him in the ways of his appointment."\* It is not my business to dispute the fineness of this reasoning. Let it avail with whom it may avail. Paul, in the words I have quoted, is not reasoning, but declaring a surprising matter of fact, which happened in his own time, quite contrary to his prejudice, which was strong in favour of Israel. Times and sentiments have greatly changed since. I doubt not but our modern teacher reasoned, according to the general appearance of the fact in his time; only let the difference of facts, likened to one another, be well attended to. Thus, I am ready to allow it consisted with his experience, that his hearers generally succeeded best in following the course which anciently proved unsuccessful to Israel. Moreover, his argument has this advantage, that it removes all occasion of surprise. For what can be more natural or rational than to say, If God, sometimes,

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to be used in the New Testament for both; at least our translators have thought so; for they sometimes render it by *hearing*, and sometimes by *report*. And, by either of these, it may with great propriety be said, that *faith comes to us*; for we cannot consider them separately. When one gives tokens of satisfaction at the unexpected approach of agreeable music, as I can be at no loss to perceive what gives him pleasure, I would think it impertinent to suspend his attention, by inquiries about the motion produced in the air, conveying the sound, and its action on the organs of hearing, and thence on his mind, at a time when he is much more agreeably entertained.

We can have no clearer notion of a free gift, than in the conveyance of a comfortable point of knowledge to one who knows nothing at present but what makes him unhappy; especially if the encouraging truth or report be conveyed by the voice of him who performed the generous deed reported; *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities*. And must it not be highly encouraging to one who considered the Divine justice as an unsurmountable objection to his hope, to understand how the unchangeable God can appear unexceptionably just in receiving him into favour, guilty as he stands! But what signifies all this, says the proud devotee, unless I can find some reason about myself why the Deity should distinguish me as his favourite beyond other men? and thus he treats the bare truth of the gospel with scorn and contempt.

\* See a volume of sermons published, Edinburgh, 1755, p. 129.

out of royal prerogative, issues out a pardon to a hardened criminal, how much more will he be kind and beneficent to the righteous, or those who are seriously disposed to be so.— But if we are for a scheme of religion quite equal, rational, and suitable to our own good dispositions, we may soon find as able masters of reasoning as the popular teachers, who will conduct us by a shorter and more expeditious process of reasoning than they generally do, without retarding our course by entangling us among texts of Scripture; and in that case, indeed, we had much better lay aside the gospel altogether. For even some of our best philosophers, who pretend to believe it, make a most childish figure when they begin to measure it with their scale.

On the whole, I think there is more excuse to be made for the Jewish than for the Christian teachers in this respect. The former endeavoured to lower the high demand of the divine law, so as sinful men might have some hope to come up to it; the latter labour to set at a distance the heavenly gift, which the gospel brings near or home to the most profane, in order to give full room for the pride of the devotee to avail itself in making the approach, and so as to render the matter as difficult to an awakened conscience, as it is to love righteousness and hate iniquity, or to fulfil the law. So their doctrine serves to elevate the proud, and to crush the poor and needy: and, I must say, it required no small energy of deceit to darken the clearest and most comfortable revelation that ever God made to men, to change the gospel of the glory of the blessed God into a doctrine of self-dependence.

I shall now close my remarks on the zealous Jews, by taking notice of the reason the Apostle gives why they came short of righteousness, or acceptance with God. He tells us, that while they sought it, *as it were, by the works of the law, they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.* They considered the bare report concerning Christ crucified, as too weak a bottom to stand on before God; they were disgusted at it, as one would be at the proposal to venture his life on the water in a basket. They would willingly have followed a Messiah that would have given them some employment in the matter; and they would have given a ready ear to him, teaching them how they might work the works of God; but they could not bear the thought, that all their good notions and desires should be utterly set at nought; so they could neither understand nor believe that Jesus came down from

heaven to work the work of God for men, by himself alone.

The same disgust is evidently to be seen still among those who have the greatest repute for Christian orthodoxy and piety. But if it be necessary that I should be still more plain, I am very willing to avoid all ambiguity, and freely own, I have nowhere observed the Jewish disgust at the bare truth, or, which is the same thing, the bare work of Christ, more evident than among the admirers of the doctrine of Messrs. Marshall, Boston, Erskines, Whitefield, Wesley, and such like. I am far from denying, that there are some among these, who, *not knowing the depths* of such doctrine, find all their comfort in the simple truth; even as I am far from denying, that when the Messiah was born, there were some even among the sect of the Pharisees, who waited for the consolation of Israel, and avoided the pernicious maxims of their party.

I am, &c.

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#### LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

WHEN I thought of proceeding to a more particular examination of Aspasio's sentiments, I found it needful to explain myself on some points further than I have hitherto done, to prevent my being misunderstood. I shall, therefore, occupy this letter with reflections on Mystery, on Reason, and on Spirit.

#### ON MYSTERY.

As perhaps it may be thought I have not used this scriptural expression with sufficient respect on some occasions, I am content to bestow some time in considering what use the Scripture makes of it, and how it has been used by Christian teachers.

Since Christianity has been formed into a capital science



under the name of *Theology*, as the sister of *Philosophy*, its teachers, despising the apostolic weapons, as too weak and contemptible to support their cause, and give it a creditable appearance, have borrowed all the arts of the schools to enable them to step forth in a decent figure, on a footing with their cousins the philosophers. Among other arts we may rank this as one, that they have made much the like use of the word *mystery*, as their kinsmen for a long time made of *occult quality*. After they have done their best to accommodate the Christian religion to the pride of men, whenever they come to a strait, they shelter themselves in the word *mystery*. So that *the mysteries of our holy religion*, or of revealed religion,\* has become fixed style, and been used as a solemn phrase of sacred obscurity, to hold at a distance all profane inquirers.—But instead of dwelling on the common use, or rather gross abuse of this expression, let us notice how it is used in the Scripture.

Upon a general view of all the passages where this word occurs, it will appear, that it is a relative expression, much resembling *interpretation*, or the common use of the word *antitype*, and always refers to some obscure hint that went before, either by word, thing, or action, of which it is the real intent and meaning. Every figurative or emblematical speech or action, contains some secret meaning beside what is first presented to the senses; and that secret meaning is the *mystery* of it. So that when once the *meaning* is made known to me, I find the figure, emblem, or parable, to be divested of every idea of secrecy, intricacy, or doubtfulness. When one tells me a mystery, then, he tells me a plain, clear, and intelligible truth, throwing light upon some obscure saying or action that went before. And this method of instruction, as has been often observed, is, of all others, the most satisfying and delightful to the mind, as well as the fittest to awaken attention. A parable may be fitly compared to a shell inclosing a pearl, or a box containing a jewel; when once the cover is opened, I am fully satisfied about the contents. Every one of *Æsop's* fables contains a moral; and that moral is the whole mystery of it. Many sayings, things, and facts in the Old Testament, contain a secondary or secret sense, which the New Testament clearly unfolds, and so enables us

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\* According to the common use of the word *mystery*, it is not easy to answer the question sometimes put by free thinkers, What do we mean by revealed mysteries?

to know the mystery of them. And when a mystery is once known, it is no more secret, intricate, or doubtful.

Jesus Christ delivered many parables concerning the kingdom of heaven, and he explained the meaning of them to his disciples; because, said he, it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. In like manner, the visions presented to the Apostle John, in the isle Patmos, contained *mysteries* under them. I shall content myself with producing a specimen, Rev. i, 20. *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest, are the seven churches.* In Paul's epistles, *mystery* always refers to some ancient figure. Christ's love to his church was prefigured by the first institution of marriage, so is the mystery of it. The whole redeemed company out of all nations was prefigured by, so is the mystery of *Israel after the flesh*. And accordingly, Paul affirms that all Israel shall be saved. That Christ's people, who remain alive at his second coming, shall not *sleep, but be changed*, was prefigured by the translation of Enoch and Elijah, and is accordingly called a *mystery*. *God made manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, &c.\** is the truth, spirit, or ultimate meaning, not only of the *Schechinah*, but of all the occasional appearances of God to men; so they who worship God as thus manifested, worship him in spirit and in truth. And this manifestation of God is called the great mystery of godliness. Paul often calls the plain simple gospel which he preached, *a mystery*, as being the true scope and sense of many ancient types and figures; so he calls it the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest.—Were it needful, I might easily show that the Greek fathers used the word *mystery* in the same sense with the apostles, as referring to some type, symbol, or parable; even as the Latins used in its stead *sacramentum*, in the same sense also.

From what has been said, then, it will appear, that nothing can be more foolish or absurd, than to join the epithets of *incomprehensible, obscure, or unintelligible*, to a mystery after it is declared: for the plainest facts recorded in the gospel are

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\* *Manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.* As the former of these two phrases points to the condition of Christ while under the law, and the latter to his condition as raised from the dead; when I have occasion to make a general reference to this text, I shall content myself for brevity's sake, with saying, *God manifest in manhood*, or any other general expression including the two-fold view of the Apostle.

the great mysteries manifested by it. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were prefigured by many types, and are therefore mysteries; yet no facts can be better attested than these: and had they not been formerly veiled under types, figures, and parables, they had never been called mysteries in the New Testament. The calling of the Gentiles is a mystery much accounted of in Paul's epistles; yet it was a notorious matter of fact, obvious to the eyes of friends and foes, giving cause of wonder and praise to the former, and provoking the envy of the latter.

Christians, then, have no occasion to beg the peace of reasoners, as to the clearness and certainty of the articles of their creed; far less to use any mean arts to evade their ridicule, which in the issue must only serve to provoke it the more, by giving some just handle for it. Christianity is, indeed, as it pretends to be, a supernatural scheme, so cannot be measured by the line of nature. This is the sum of all that its enemies have to say against it. Yet there is as plain, uniform, and regular a connection, in all the parts of this scheme, as in any branch of the course of nature. And in general, it is incumbered with much fewer, and far less important difficulties, than are daily found in tracing the course of nature. It is true, those who hope to be happy in following nature, find no occasion for the gospel, and therefore must always be objectors against it. And it would ill become us to grudge them this liberty, while the author of nature and of the gospel suffers them.

Men have agreed to consider that as the surest and most valuable knowledge, which is gathered from often repeated facts and experiments; yet great mistakes have often been made in drawing wrong inferences from the plainest facts. Here the Christian creed has the advantage of all other knowledge, that it rests upon the surest facts, without the hazard of the mistakes committed by inattentive or ignorant observers.

ALL Divine revelation rests on supernatural facts. The general method by which God has chosen to make himself known to men, has been that which is most suited to their frame. He hath awakened attention by some supernatural appearance, so as to produce in the mind of the observers, the question of surprise, What meaneth this? Hereupon he hath always provided, by means equally above the power of nature, a clear and satisfying account of that which occasioned surprise, so as the result should be the joint appearance of Divine wisdom and Divine power to the mind of the ob-

servers. And this result has, in the leading instances, been contrary to the general expectations and reasonings of mankind. We may add, it was necessary this should be the case, if any revelation from God was necessary to men; for if the result had been according to the previous reasonings of men, it could not have been manifest that any interposition was made by the author and controller of nature.

But the truth is, those accounted the wiser part of mankind, who lead the rest, see no necessity at bottom of any Divine revelation; and, therefore, it may well be expected they will rather choose to continue reasoning against the clearest facts, than to admit the doctrine built upon them, which displays the glory of God, and promotes the happiness of men, at the rate of abasing human pride. Some, indeed, of our modern wise men have thought it prudent to profess a regard to revelation, considering it as a confirmation of their own conjectures about virtue and happiness; or, which is the same thing, the sayings of the ancient philosophers; for whatever honour they pay to their predecessors, returns back again to themselves. But it is easy to see through the disguise of these moderns, while they thus pay their public compliments to revelation, to avoid being marked with the name of *Infidel*, which happens to be odious among the populace, and which in former times would have exposed them to great inconveniencies from the resentment of the Christian teachers. But to proceed:

Whereas, it is often difficult to state the connection or analogy of a number of facts or appearances, upon which some principle or point of knowledge is to be established; revelation has this advantage, that as the facts on which it proceeds are very numerous, so the connection of them, or the unity of design, is well established. There is one capital or central fact, which collects the evidence of all that went before, and is supported by all that follow, even the resurrection of Jesus. Here all the lines of Divine revelation are united. So the the Apostle Peter sums up to us the evidence of revelation thus: *We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God, the Father, honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. And we have the prophetic word more firm, or more confirmed, &c.*



This Apostle, in his first epistle, chap. i, 11, tells us, that the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that followed upon them, were the scope of all the prophets; even as Jesus had said before, Luke xxiv, 25, 27.

On the holy mount, Peter, and two other Apostles, beheld the glory that was to follow on the sufferings of Christ, when they were eye-witnesses of his majesty. What the prophets had spoken concerning his resurrection, could not be completely fulfilled, without his being received up into glory. The three Apostles there, had a view of him beforehand, in the condition he was to appear in after his resurrection; they saw him in his glorified state. So Matthew tells us, chap. xvii, 9, *Jesus charged them, saying, tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.* And Luke says, chap. ix, 36, *They kept it close, and told no man in those days any one of those things which they had seen.* And indeed they could not make the proper use of it, while Mark tells us, chap. ix, 10, *they questioned one with another what the resurrection from the dead should mean.*

The intent of this vision was illustrated to them, when Jesus, after his resurrection, was taken up, and a *cloud*\* received him out of their sight.—It would now appear, that on the holy mount, they had seen within the cloud that which on the day of ascension the cloud removed from their sight.

The *bright cloud*, or the *excellent glory*, from whence the three Apostles heard the Father's voice, was the well known ancient symbol of Divine presence. This cloud attended on Jesus appearing in majesty, his face shining as the sun, and his raiment white as the light. So the Apostles beheld the same *glory of the Lord* that had been so often seen by Moses and the ancient prophets; or we may rather say, they beheld the ultimate end and perfection of all the ancient appearances of the divine glory. Moses beheld the *similitude of the Lord* when he conversed with him *face to face*. And Ezekiel, in the close of his first chapter, describing to us *the likeness of the glory of the Lord*, calls it the *likeness as the appearance of a man*, having *brightness round about*. The apostles, then, saw more than all the ancient prophets, when they beheld the real man Jesus appearing in that same glory,

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\* It is said concerning the second coming of Christ, Rev. i, 7, *Behold he cometh with clouds.* This corresponds with what the angels said at the ascension of Jesus, Acts i, 11, *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

which served of old to show forth the future Divine majesty of the great Messiah, the Son of God. Thus, all the grand descriptions of the Divine majesty in the psalms, and other Scriptures, are illustrated to us; as when he is said to cover himself with light as with a garment, and to dwell in light which no man can approach unto. Hence also we may find the true reason why so often mention is made, as well of the members of the human body, as of the human passions, in the descriptions of God in the Scripture; it being the great design of the Deity to make himself fully manifest in human nature.

When the Apostles saw, appearing in *his glory*, Moses, whose body was then in the grave, and Elias, who had never undergone the separation of soul and body, they had a view of Jesus as *Lord of the dead and living*; and at the same time they had a view of the condition of saints raised from the dead, having their bodies glorified, exemplified in Elias; and of the condition of departed souls present with the Lord, while absent from the body, exemplified in Moses, who appeared in glory as well as Elias. Of this last condition Paul speaks, when he says, *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, 2 Cor. v, 1. He is in that passage plainly speaking of Christians being clothed with an *house*, when divested of the *tabernacle*.

So that, whatever philosophers have imagined, the Scripture does not furnish us with any notion of the human soul subsisting in a state altogether unbodied, or, to retain the Apostolic expression, unclothed.—But to proceed :

When they saw the lawgiver, who had so often conversed with him of old in a figure, and whose law was in a special manner pointed against every likeness of God that men could imagine; when they saw the greatest succeeding prophet, who was distinguished by his being very jealous for the honour of the one God, who shares not his glory with another: when, I say, they beheld these two eminent men attending upon Jesus in his glory, and illuminated thereby, they had an undeniable proof that he was truly God; that he was the great scope and end of the law given by the former, and of all the zeal shown by the latter.

But it was not left to the Apostles to sum up the evidence afforded by what they saw, and to draw the necessary conclusion: for the true meaning of what they saw, was intimated to them by what they heard. They were taught to know what the excellent glory meant, by the voice which

proceeded from it, **THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED**; though this instruction had not its full effect upon them till after the resurrection, to which it referred.

As the resurrection of Jesus is the capital fact referred to by all the other works of God, so the voice which came from the excellent glory, may, with great propriety, be accounted the capital or central saying, wherein the whole of Divine revelation is summed up, and set before us in one single point of view.

The subject of conversation to which this voice referred, was the death of Jesus; for Moses and Elias were talking with him of this event before the voice came.

Now, to have a proper view of the use Peter makes of what he then saw and heard, when he says, *We made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, as eye and ear witnesses; it is necessary that we reflect on the state of the controversy betwixt the apostles and the Jews concerning the coming of the Messiah.

The ancient prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah, described him often as a glorious and powerful king. Such a king the Jews expected in their own sense of glory and power: and not finding in Jesus any thing answerable to their expectations, they still affirmed that the promised Messiah was not yet come. The apostles, on the other hand maintained, that he was come, and that Jesus was he. But they could not, in any consistency with the prophecies make known the *coming* of the Messiah, or make it evident that he was really come, without at the same time, making known his *power* and *majesty*. Without this the Jewish objections were unanswerable. The apostles, then, were enabled by the vision on the mount, which coincided with what they saw on the day of ascension, to make known the power of the Messiah manifest in Jesus, as corresponding exactly with the ancient prophecies, though very different from the Jewish apprehensions of it. For whereas, the Jews expected the Messiah would be dignified with earthly power and glory, the apostles made known the power of the Lord Jesus as heavenly, and as the power of an endless life. And we may add, that what the apostles saw and heard, was a sure pledge of his second appearance, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven, according as he declared before the Jewish rulers. But Peter speaks of this by itself, in the close of his second epistle.

The great reason why the Jews stumbled or were offended at Jesus, and why they could not own him as the true Messiah, was the weakness of his appearance, and more especially his shameful death on the cross, when he was *crucified in weakness*, without any interposition of power to save him from death. On this account they held him in the greatest contempt. But on this very account; he received from God the Father honour and glory. Here is manifest the great difference betwixt the taste of God and that of men. When Peter once showed his aversion to the sufferings of his Lord, from the most plausible of all pretexts, namely, regard to his honour, he received this severe rebuke, *Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

The excellent glory which shined on the person of Jesus, as well as the voice which proceeded from it, plainly respected his death on the cross, where his righteousness was completed. When Jesus, at his baptism, undertook to fulfil all righteousness, the Divine approbation of his undertaking was expressed from heaven in the same words, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;* and the Spirit of God descended upon him in the form of the harmless dove, qualifying him for suffering, and filling him with the spirit of patience unto death: but now, when the Divine approbation of his finished work is set before us, the Spirit of God rests upon him as the spirit of glory. He appeared, then, in weakness and patience; now he appears in power and glory. We saw him then animated to endure sufferings; now we behold him as comforted and triumphing after them. Then the heaven was opened, and a prospect of glory afforded at a distance; in consequence of which, Jesus continued patient unto death for the joy that was set before him: now he is received up into glory; the glory surrounds his person, and thence the joyful sound is uttered. Now is answered his expectation, expressed in these words, Psal. xvi, 11; *Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Paul, speaking of the resurrection of Jesus, says, he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father. Here it is that the fullest view of God is to be had. All the Divine perfections are summed up in goodness, or love: for God is love. If we say, then, that he is infinitely good, we must at the same time say, that he is as opposite to all evil as he is good; even as the purest light is to the grossest darkness. So we find his wrath, which is nothing else but the opposi-



tion of perfect goodness or love to all evil or malignity, is pointed forth to us in Scripture under the notion of jealousy, the inseparable attribute of love; at least we may say, where there is no love, there can be no jealousy. But however necessary the punishment of sin be to support the dignity of the Divine character, and to show us what God is not; we could never have known what he is, unless an adequate object had been found for the fulness of his delight and complacency to rest upon: so as what Paul calls (*ευδοκία της αγαθωσυνης*) *the good pleasure of goodness*, might be manifest to men. From Jesus Christ raised from the dead, after suffering the Divine wrath for sin, the apostles bring us this message, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all; that the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. As the preternatural darkness attending the death of Christ, was a fit sign of the Divine frown against sin, which made him exceeding sorrowful unto death; so the glory into which he was received after his sufferings, was a fit sign of the Divine complacency in the righteousness which he finished in his death.

This glory, then, is the appearance of the Divine smile of approbation and delight, and the voice is the language of it. When God smiles or lifts up the light of his countenance, he says, *I am well pleased*. The testimony of the apostles, concerning God well pleased in his beloved Son, conveys to the ends of the earth the knowledge of what they saw. Every one who believes their testimony, or is persuaded that it is true, has the *knowledge* of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, even as the apostles had the *sight* of it. And this knowledge gives light, or a ray of good hope toward God in the heart, where nothing but darkness or despair took place before. So all who have this knowledge, are said to be called out of darkness into his marvellous light.

THE voice from the excellent glory shows us the real intent of all the expressions of divine satisfaction used concerning the ancient sacrifices; and that God had no regard to them, but as they prefigured the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. So Paul, speaking of them in contrast of the true sacrifice, quotes the words adapted for the Messiah in the 40th psalm, to show that God had no regard to them considered by themselves, Heb. x, 6, 7. *In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin (ουκ ευδοκησας) thou wast not well pleased: then said I, Lo, I come, &c.* And while he sets before us the offering of the body of Jesus Christ as the true

sacrifice, in opposition to the former, he says, *He taketh away the first that he may establish the second.* The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then, is distinguished from all others, by the peculiar testimony of the Divine delight therein, *I am well pleased.*

The glory which shines on Jesus Christ, is the united splendour of justice and mercy in perfection. Till he appeared, we could only see the dark side of justice and judgment pursuing sin unto death; but in him we see the fulfilment of the ancient promise, Psal. xciv, 15. *Judgment shall return unto righteousness.* It now returns from the pursuit of sin, after having abolished it in the death of Christ, with a smiling aspect to exert its utmost in rewarding unspotted righteousness. Yet, in him we behold a glory superior to that of equity and judgment. All our notions of equity must be measured by the divine law. Now, according to the law, which said, *The man which doth these things shall live by them,* and made no provision for one man's being benefited by the righteousness of another. Jesus Christ could only obtain life for himself alone by his own obedience; but, according to that sovereign grace which, acting, not contrary to law, but beyond the line of it, and high above it, placed him, who thought it no robbery to be equal with God under the law, as the substitute of the guilty, to redeem them by being made a curse for them, he receives power over all flesh, to bestow eternal life on as many as were given him to be redeemed by him.

While we thus view him as the representative of sinners, we behold him rewarded according to grace, as well as according to equity. So we find him, often in the Psalms, praying for deliverance, according to justice, and according to mercy. It is impossible to find a proper similitude for this. Yet, if a great king should send his only son to a distant country, to deliver an enslaved people, and, then, reward his successful fatigues with such abundant wealth, as should enable him to be no less conspicuous among them for his bounty in spreading the blessings of peace, than he had been for his patience and valour in sustaining the calamities of war; would it not be making a very poor and low account of this reward, should we only say, that the king, who bestowed it, had done a very just and equitable action, seeing no less was adequate to the service of his son? Would not such an action naturally extort from our hearts a higher encomium? While we approved his equity, we behoved to admire his goodness, and say, that, in bestowing the reward,

he had crowned and perfected the royal bounty, the undeserved kindness, which began to appear in the sending of his son. We behoved to say, that both the services and the reward came of mere mercy and compassion to the once unhappy people. So the fulness of the Divine grace is bestowed upon Jesus Christ; yet he may, with the greatest propriety, call it *my grace*, as being found worthy to inherit it all.

THE Divine glory, then, according to the shortest and most comprehensive description of it, is that of *grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*. Or, to join some images used to the same purpose, we may say, The throne of God is the throne of grace, and righteousness and judgment are the habitation or establishment of his throne. So when the time is spoken of, when the Divine glory should dwell among men, Psal. lxxxv, the description runs thus, *Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other*. Here are verified the ancient names given to the emblematical glory, such as, *the beauty of Jehovah*, and *the beauty of holiness*. So when they praised the beauty of holiness, they said, *Praise ye the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever*.

We may take this opportunity to observe, that the first approach of the divine grace to men, is made by presenting to their view the gift of righteousness. So, in the forementioned psalm, where the procession of the salvation of God to men is spoken of, it is said, *Righteousness shall go before him*. Our first notion of grace must arise from beholding the gift bestowed. Hence, we infer the gracious disposition of the giver. So Paul, Rom. v, speaks of these as inseparable. He first mentions the *free gift* by itself, then *the grace of God, and the gift by grace*; and *they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ*. All, then, who know the free gift, or are persuaded that the justifying righteousness is already wrought, know the grace of God in truth. To such, Peter, in the close of his epistle, says, *I have written briefly, exhorting and testifying, that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand*; plainly intimating, that they were in hazard of being deceived by counterfeits of that grace.

Therefore, when we hear men, who are pained about acceptance with God, taught to expect and pray for grace to help them to convictions, faith, repentance, or any thing else, in order to their finding relief in Christ's righteousness, we may be very sure, that this is not the true grace of God, but

the false, or a corruption of the true. And we may be as sure, that God will regard no prayer but that of faith. The popular preachers, themselves, finding some difficulty here, to reconcile the self-justifying labour to Scripture language, incline to talk to us of some preliminary faith, as necessary to introduce the principal faith, that is, a faith in God's ability to work faith in us. And thus, after their usual manner, they set the difficulty one step farther off, drawing a curtain over what is not fit to bear the light; for if the question were properly urged, instead of one preliminary act, we should find occasion for an endless series of acts of faith. But not to insist on this at present:

The Divine voice directed peculiarly to Jesus, distinguishing him from all others, was an explicit and full decision of the whole controversy betwixt him and the Jews. When he was on the cross, the Jews insulted him in this manner: *He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.* But now he, who looking down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God, returned this verdict, upon the general survey, *There is none that doth good, no not one,* declares his full satisfaction in Jesus, espouses his character as his own, and vindicates all his claims. Did Jesus lift up his eyes to heaven, and, addressing the Father, say, *I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me? &c.* The Father approves, and bestows the requested glory. Did Jesus on the cross say, *It is finished?* Now we may consider the Father as saying, in the most solemn form, *Amen.* In sum, the voice proceeding from the glory, is no less than the motto of the broad seal of heaven, stamping the person, character, works, and words of Jesus, as all truly divine, ratifying every word he spoke as infallible truth, and sustaining all his works as perfect; or, to say all in one word, we may use the expression of the Apostle John, chap. vi, 27, (*τουτου γαρ ο πατηρ εσφραγισεν, ο Θεος*) *For him the Father hath sealed, GOD.*

When we think of the voice directed to Jesus as a public person, or a representative, we must consider it as no less powerful to convey the life which lies in the Divine favour, to all supernaturally connected with him, than the ancient sanction of the law given to Adam, *Thou shalt surely die,* was to convey death to all naturally connected with him.—The angels, giving glory to God on the prospect that was opened by the birth of Jesus, conclude, or, we may say, sum



up their ascription of praise in these words, (*εν ανθρωποις ευδοκια,*) *Good pleasure in men.* So likewise it is said of the church, who borrows her name from him who loved her, and gave himself for her, that she should be called *Hephzi-bah*, Is. lxii, 4. What a grand and engaging view is here presented to us of the Divine glory, when we find it is all summed up in philanthropy, or complacence in men!

By the *speaking glory*, we find the blessing mentioned in the promise to Abraham, which comprehends all the following great and precious promises, now pronounced and bestowed on the person of Jesus. Paul, speaking of the conveyance of the blessing, takes very particular notice of the words recorded by Moses concerning it; and he carefully marks the peculiar direction it bare to Jesus Christ, Gal. iii, 16. *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* The very mention of *blessing*, in the promise to Abraham, implied, that men were, then, exposed to the curse or displeasure of God, for want of a righteousness. And we find that what Abraham believed, was imputed to him for righteousness.

But the law of Moses, which came after the promise, set forth more strongly than the natural conscience, the extent of the curse, as well as the necessary terms of acceptance with God, or the righteousness requisite to obtain the blessing. We find the scope of the law often set before us in language to this effect: Psal. xxiv, 4, 5, *He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully: he shall receive the blessing from the Lord.* The Saviour of the world came under this law, where the condemning power of sin was most strongly evinced, as well as the perfection of obedience most peremptorily insisted upon, that so his righteousness, arising forth to the view of men from the severest trial, might, like gold from the furnace, shine forth with the most unexceptionable splendour and dignity. Paul gives us his paraphrase on the promise to Abraham, while he declares its accomplishment when he says, Gal. iii, 13, 14, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the nations through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Righteousness being only found in Jesus Christ, the substitute for the guilty, to him alone the blessing has respect; in him alone God declares himself well pleased. The blessing

rests only on his righteousness, and follows it wherever it goes. To whomsoever it extends, the blessing is also conveyed.

In vain shall any sinner expect to find about himself any reason why God should be well pleased with him, or even better pleased with him than with others. In vain shall he pray to God for grace to enable him to find any such reason. In vain shall he expect to hear one syllable more from God, to encourage him to draw nigh to him, than that he is well pleased in his beloved Son; that JEHOVAH is well pleased for his righteousness sake. He who is persuaded, that Christ hath done enough to procure the Divine good pleasure for the guiltiest of mankind, loves that truth, and counts all things loss for the excellent knowledge conveyed by it. He who is not satisfied with this, is disaffected to that wherein the fulness of the Divine delight rests. He says in his heart, "I do not believe that Christ hath done enough; I do not believe that God is fully placated by what he hath done, unless I also can find some reason why the Divine favour should bear a more peculiar direction to me than to others." Thus it is that men give the lie to God, while they believe not the record that God gave of his Son. And must not the jealousy of God burning favour of his sole delight, and against all disaffection to it? *For, say the apostles, our God is a consuming fire.*

When the apostles bare witness, that the blessing contained in the promise to Abraham, which includes all the following promises, was bestowed on Jesus Christ, they could with great propriety declare, "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." All the following promises served to illustrate and show forth the extent of that capital one, in a great variety of views. So when we think of the glory which the apostles saw and heard, we may well say, What good thing can be wanting, where the Divine complacence wholly rests? Did that question, concerning God, fill our minds with the most fearful forebodings, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Did the inspired answer, "Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath," complete our despair, by assuring us, that it came nothing short of the deepest impression of fear that his power to avenge can make upon us? Was our despair ratified, by hearing these words, "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" And shall it give us no comfort to hear the apostles demonstrating, that the Divine anger hath proceeded to its utmost extent, and found a boundary, from which no

objection can be drawn against its infinite extent? Seeing we can no more measure the dignity of the sufferer, than the majesty of the avenger; shall it give us no comfort to hear, that what seemed the dark side of the character of God, even judgment against sin, now rests for a light to the nations? so as we might affirm, with the greatest certainty, that in him is no darkness at all; and at the same time be assured, that with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning: though, in order to our knowing his character, it is necessary that one part of his works appear before the other; even as it was necessary, that the earth should be first created a dark confused mass, that he might appear, by his working, the God not of darkness and confusion, but of light and order.

I do not intend at present to take a general view of the promises which follow that to Abraham;—but when we read such passages as these, Is. lvii, 15; *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, &c.* and chap. lxvi, 1, 2; *thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things hath been, saith the Lord; but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word;* does not the voice which came from the excellent glory to Jesus, readily occur to our thoughts? And must it not yield much more solid comfort to the self-condemned, to read the Scriptures in this view, than to be urged by the popular doctrine, to the hard labour of squeezing at their own hearts, in order to extract thence some one or other of the qualifications included in the promises? Many passages in the prophets big with comfort to the desperate, have been abused, to encourage men in this fruitless labour; and we may add, almost the whole book of Psalms which were originally intended to set before us the sufferings of the Messiah, and the following glory, as Jesus himself declares. If we give heed to many popular treatises, we are left to understand the far greater part of the Psalms, as taken up with descriptions of the ebbs and flowings of the pride of the devotee: we are left to the poor and insipid employment of singing these in the grandest part of divine service; the most sublime matter of song being removed far from our thoughts, while the very words pregnant with it are in our mouths.

Now that the symbols of the Divine presence are no where to be found in any grove, mountain, tabernacle, or temple on the earth, but rest on the body of Jesus Christ in heaven; we have a clear document, that the seat of worship is changed, and that where he is, there is the house of prayer for all nations. Wherever the glory resided of old, there God was said to put his name; and thither all sacrifice was to be brought, and all worship directed.

Many great things were spoken, many expressions of the divine delight uttered, with regard to the place of the divine residence; but we must say the same thing of these, as of those uttered concerning the ancient sacrifices. When we hear such words as these, Psal. cxxxii, 13, 14; *The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it*; they lose all meaning, except when referred to the body of Jesus; for the Holy Ghost emboldens us to say, as absolutely and with as little reserve, that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as that he taketh no pleasure to drink the blood of bulls and goats. In the temple of Solomon, at the height of its grandeur, there was only a shadow of what was to be found bodily or really in Christ; *for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

Accordingly, Christ tells the woman of Samaria, that the time was at hand, when there should be no occasion for disputing what was the proper worshiping-place on the earth, seeing the spirit\* and truth was now to take place of all the

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\* *John iv, 24, πνευμα ὁ Θεος.* It does not appear that Jesus here intended, as some think, to furnish the woman with a metaphysical idea of spiritual substance abstracted from matter; yea, the Scripture nowhere gives us any idea of spirit, but as acting in some place or body. Nor does it appear, as others apprehend, that he is here reasoning with her about the Deity of that Divine person called the Holy Spirit. He is evidently instructing her about the character of God, as where he delights to dwell, and manifest his presence; where he is to be approached to, and found propitious. And he gives her to understand, that the true character of God, was the Spirit of what the Jews and Samaritans contended about; and that this Spirit was soon to be fully exhibited, and had even now already begun to appear in view, *viz.* in his own person, with whom she was then conversing. Without minding, then, the niceties of those who contend about the order wherein the Greek words ought to be translated, as whether we should say, *God is Spirit*, or *The Spirit is God*; we may warrantably conclude the sense to be, that the true and full exhibition of the Divine character and presence was only to be found in the person of the Messiah. In support of this it is observable, that *spirit* and *truth* are used in this passage as words of like import,



ancient appearances of God, which at any time occasioned one place to be deemed more holy than another. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find the earthly tabernacle, service, and priesthood, set aside to give place to the truth and substance of all these ancient shadows. The destruction of Jerusalem, according to the Divine prediction, concurred with the doctrine of the apostles to abolish them. Christ, then, is the only true tabernacle, minister of the sanctuary, altar, sacrifice, priest, &c., to be acknowledged by all Christians who hear the apostles, and who maintain with them, that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. They who hear the apostles, forsake the shadows, because the substance is come. They who more or less revive the use of the shadows, so far deny that the substance is come; they in effect deny that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, while they seek to establish what he came in the flesh to abolish, and zealously adhere to those things whose very use was to declare that he was not yet come.

True Christians then agree with the Apostles in saying,

illustrating each other. For if the Spirit and ultimate scope of the Divine abode, in the temple of Jerusalem, had not been manifested, the grand things spoken concerning that temple would not have been verified. So that the Apostle John's saying, in his first epistle, may very properly, as well as agreeably to his sense, be applied here, *το πνευμα εστιν η αληθεια, The Spirit is the Truth.*

They who worship God as thus manifested, worship him in spirit and in truth. And by all the tokens that God gave of his temporary presence in the earthly temple, he was *seeking such to worship him.* To *walk in the spirit*, or *after the spirit*, and to *walk in the truth*, are expressions of the same import in the New Testament. They who *rejoice in Christ Jesus*, are said to *worship God in the spirit*, by Paul; who hereby encourage the Philippians to consider themselves as the true circumcision, while they had no confidence *in the flesh*, and did not hanker after the peculiarities wherein the Jewish nation gloried. The same Apostle, speaking of the spirit and scope veiled under the Mosaic institutions, says, *Now the Lord is that Spirit.*

To sum up what has been said, the great design of the Deity from the beginning, according to all the Scriptures, was, to make himself, his character, and attributes, fully visible to his creatures in a perfect image, losing nothing of the original in the representation. The most full and grand idea of the object of worship that ever was, or will be, presented to the thoughts of angels or men, is that of a GLORIFIED MAN EXERCISING AND DISPLAYING EVERY DIVINE PERFECTION. All who, in worshipping, have not their mind fixed on this object, may very warrantably be said to *worship they know not what.*

On this occasion can one avoid exclaiming?—How dispiriting, how debasing to human nature, is every scheme of virtue and happiness, but the Christian, which not only with *such* certainty exalts it *so* high, but also opens for the basest of the sons of Adam, the prospect of being conformed in glory and blessedness to the Son of the Highest!

*Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, &c.* The apostolic creed is summed up in this, that Jesus is the Christ; and, says John, *Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?* The great antichrist foretold by the apostles, has now appeared; yet, at no time has he refused to put these two words together, and say, *Jesus is the Christ.* But he denies the apostolic import of them, and speaks and acts in many respects as if the Messiah were not yet come: so he is a liar, and may be convicted of speaking falsehood in what he denies, by the part of the truth which he professes to hold. Thus we find antichrist professing to admit the truth of all the facts recorded in the gospel, and hold the apostolic writings as Divinely inspired, and yet zealously promoting a poor imitation of all the abolished shadows.

The national righteousness and happiness of Israel are now sought after, in opposition to Christ, the end of the law for righteousness, and the heavenly life to which he rose from the dead. We fondly apply the ancient prophecies to national churches, established by the laws of earthly states and kingdoms, (a poor imitation indeed of that national church which was established of old by the Divine law :) and it would give many of us no pleasure to hear, that the prophecies concerning the nations had their most notable accomplishment in the infancy of Christianity, (as they choose to speak,) when God at the first did visit the nations to take out of them a people for his name, even though the inspired apostles should solemnly declare, that *to this agree the words of the prophets.*—We have also got earthly altars and sacrifices, holy places made with hands, mortal priests and ministers of the sanctuary, &c: in short, every token to show that Jesus was not the Christ come in the flesh, except it be, that we still stupidly put these two words together; even as the Jews, to this day, with no less stupidity, maintain the credit of those books which prove to demonstration that Jesus is the Christ.

We Protestants have generally been ashamed of the extravagant height to which our Roman Catholic fathers carried their imitation of the Jewish worship and hierarchy. We have found it proper to Judaize more moderately in several instances;\* and for this moderation we are indebted to the

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\* In later times, the Christian leaders have shown no less address in gradually abating their pretensions as necessity urges, than formerly in

Divine Providence, and the wisdom of our rulers, who have taught and obliged us in many respects to lower our style, and to contract within narrower bounds the meaning of several words and titles which we choose still to retain. Yet it must be owned that it is with great reluctance that we learn any lesson of sobriety; for almost every the meanest preacher, in the poorest dissenting congregation, still affects to be called *The Reverend*; from the same principle which leads the first clergyman in Europe to take the title of *His Holiness*. The bulk of the Christian leaders, from the highest to the lowest, have showed an inclination to share more or less of the worship due to him whom we praise, saying, *Holy and reverend is his name*. I may seem to be sometimes nice in taking notice of these titles, which are sometimes very big with meaning, and sometimes explained away to a very subordinate sense, as occasion requires; yet I cannot appear to any reasonable man to be nicer than he who said, *Why callest thou me good?\** *there is none good but one, God*.

I have chosen to consider jointly what relates to the sanctuary, and the minister thereof; as all the grand things said of both corresponded to each other, had the closest connection in the shadows, are united in the substance, and are for the most part closely connected together in the absurd modern imitation; so that such modern ministers of the sanctuary, as acknowledge no holy places made with hands, have been obliged to strain the harder by other methods, to keep up the sacred distinction of their character and office.

As a Protestant, I cannot help blushing on this occasion,

advancing them. Accordingly, we find the art of trimming, compounding, and halving of matters, has been cultivated with great care. Hence we have seen half persecution, half temples, half sacrifices, priests, &c. But as this art does not proceed upon any fixed rules, but rather consists in a dexterous deviation from all rules, as occasion requires, it has proved the means of no small division among the leaders, and consequently of freeing the people from their dominion. If we should compare the period of the advancement of their pretensions to the building of the tower in the plain of Shinar, methinks we might call this latter period, not improperly, the confusion of tongues. Hence it is, that all schemes of *comprehension*, or attempts to restore uniformity, meet with great obstructions.—But whatever sort of religious comprehension shall at any time take place, Christians who hear the apostles, have no reason to be anxious about it; for whoever be comprehended, they are sure to be excluded.

\* Yet some, I doubt not, fond of the shell of religious homage, for the sake of its wonted contents, will be ready to insinuate, that REVEREND SIR! would have proved a more acceptable address, and less obnoxious to reprehension, than GOOD MASTER!

to find one of our serious writers applying to certain edifices, planned and built by modern artificers, the language used in Scripture concerning the temple of Solomon,\* which was built according to Divine inspiration, for a shadow of Christ's body, or the incarnate person of the Messiah; so as the grand things spoken of the former, can only be verified by the latter. These grand things belong to what is of greater dignity than Solomon's temple, yea, than the heaven of heavens; they belong to no less than the object of worship, even to him of whom the apostles said, *The Word was made flesh, and εσκηνωσεν tabernacled among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* To this the words of Solomon pointed when he said, *2 Chron. v, 18. But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee? how much less this house which I have built!* These words plainly signify his astonishment on the glimpse he had, by the type, of God's intention of dwelling in very deed with men on the earth.—All the works of creation afford but a very partial and imperfect view of God; but in Christ, we can say with the utmost propriety, dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, or in very deed. To this purpose are these words in Isaiah, chap. lxvi, 1. *Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me! and where is the place of my rest? for all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, &c.*—Nowhere but in Christ crucified could there be found a place for the just God and the Saviour to rest with men. All things or places else are rejected as unfit; for this very reason, because his hand had made them. The Divine glory could nowhere be contained or fully manifested, but in him who was truly God.

Stephen, giving the sense of the words I have just now quoted, says, *The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands,* even though built and consecrated according to his own direction. If Paul said to such Gentile Christians as had been persuaded to observe days, &c., which had been sanctified by Divine appointment, *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain;* if he said at last to the Hebrew Christians, *We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle;* what would he have said to Christians indulging a *religious dread* at the

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\* See Meditations among the tombs, near the beginning.



“gloomy aspect” of houses having nothing to sanctify them but the breath of mortal men?—to Christians looking devoutly at stone walls of modern architecture, and saying, “Having adored that eternal Majesty, who, far from being confined to [Stephen says, who dwelleth not in] temples made with hands, has heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool?” what would he have said to Christians paying adoration to the Deity, as manifesting his character or putting his name any where but in Christ Jesus, to whom it well becomes every knee to bow, and every tongue to give thanks?

Methinks we Protestants may gratify our itch for idolatry sufficiently, in forming idols by speculation, in imitation of the later Jews, though we leave entirely to our old friends in the south of Europe the business of framing idols and shrines for the Deity, by the hands of masons, carpenters and priests. Is it indeed possible, that any Christian, or even attentive reader of the Scriptures, can seriously think that the “benedictive presence” of the Deity has any connection with *St. Paul's*, more than with the meanest garret or cellar in London?—But if after all, through fondness for our stately edifices, and for the honour of our consecrating priests, we scruple to affirm roundly, with Stephen, *that the Most High DWELLETH NOT in temples made with hands*; methinks, in point of decency, we ought at least to show some uniformity in our regard to the *carnal commandment*, which appointed the shadows, and not cut and carve upon it also through mere fancy, presuming, by our own private notions of usefulness and fitness, to convert the temples of the Lord of Hosts into receptacles of rottenness and dead men's bones. What horror, what indignation, would not a devout Israelite have conceived, at the proposal to change the temple of the living God into a sepulchre for the dead!—if we still choose rather to strike out a middle path by our own wisdom, and say, The Most High is not confined to temples made with hands, we ought, for uniformity's sake, to proceed in the same manner with all the other types, and say, the communication of the Divine favour is not confined to the intercession of mortal priests: The Divine pleasure is not confined to the blood of bulls and goats, &c.: and so leave it to every man's own wisdom and discretion, to share his regard betwixt all the shadows and the substance, in every instance as to him shall seem most convenient.

ON the holy mount we see ratified and put in force, the sovereign edict or law by which the kingdom of heaven, or

New Testament church is established, and their eternal salvation secured; even that law foretold, Is. li, 4—6; "Hearken unto me, my people, and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near: my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people: the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished;" even the commandment so often made mention of by Jesus, John x, "I lay down my life for the sheep. This commandment have I received of my Father," John xii, 49, 50; "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." John xiv, 31; "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

From the law given by Moses, this commandment of grace is thus distinguished. The former ministered condemnation, this ministers righteousness; that demanded, this bestows righteousness. According to that law, which said, The man that doth these things shall live by them; no man could obtain life but by his own personal obedience. But here by the gracious and sovereign edict of him, whom it becomes to act above and beyond all law for the relief of the guilty, commandment is given to the Son of the Highest, to fulfil the law given by Moses for the transgressors, so as they might live together with him by his righteousness. Jesus Christ, in the days of his humiliation, knew that the certain issue of this commandment was life everlasting.—When we behold him glorified, we see the life-giving power thereof exerted; we see the grace that gave him to be obedient, reigning through his perfect obedience unto eternal life. This commandment, or royal grant of life through righteousness, was ratified by the blood of Christ when he died as a sacrifice for sin; so takes the notion of a covenant, in reference to the temporary and typical one formerly made with Israel.—It is also set before us under the notion of a testament, as conveying an inheritance by the death of a testator;—and as our

sense of condemnation arose from the notion of a law, it is also presented to us in that view, and is confirmed by the Divine oath, that we might have strong consolation. So Paul says, "The law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Agreeable to this, the Apostle John says, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son;" not that we should do any thing to obtain life, but that we should live by what he hath done. It is a commandment not requiring any thing of us, but bestowing life by the knowledge which it conveys; for the belief or knowledge of Christ is happiness, as Jesus says, "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." The belief or knowledge of a comfortable truth, is not work or labour, but rest and peace; and the heavenly gift is conveyed unto men, even as God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, in this manner, "Be it known unto you."

As sin reigned unto death in these words, "The soul that sinneth shall die," or somewhat equivalent to them, in the conscience of every man; so grace reigns through righteousness in these words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" with the force of an irresistible law to begin, carry forward, and complete the eternal salvation of the whole church of the living God. The church of God, established by this law, needs no other law to support it, nor can it be endangered by any other law or power whatsoever.

Jesus said before the Roman governor, "My kingdom is not of this world." But a learned prelate of the church of England hath already, upwards of thirty years ago, with the greatest perspicuity, set forth the scriptural import of these words, to the full conviction of all who have an ear to give to the Scriptures. And his doctrine, on this head, though it met with no answer, but such as was dictated by manifest disaffection to the Scriptures, has been rejected with great indignation by all zealous ecclesiastics. Had that great man understood the truth pointed at in the subsequent answer of Jesus, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice;" he would have been able to show from the Scriptures, what the kingdom of Christ is, as clear as he has shown what it is not; and consequently had become, with the apostles and first Christians, a "brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." However, his deficiency in this respect was supplied not long after, by a minister of the church of Scotland

who was ejected on that account.\* And, indeed, any one who will dare to acknowledge Christianity, as taught in the New Testament, must make but a very indifferent figure in any national church by law established, or yet in any party of dissenters, lamenting the want of such establishment; at least he will find no room to glory in his situation.

What would Paul have said to one adopting his words about "glorying only in the cross," and yet glorying in being the member or minister† of a church established by the approbation of the world, or the laws of earthly states and kingdoms? We may well suppose he would at least have applauded the prudence of such a one, in forbearing to adopt the rest of his sentence—"by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Paul once gloried in being the member of a national church established by the divine law; but when he knew Christ, he renounced all glorying but in his cross. He now understood, that the carnal church, the carnal commandment, by which it was established, the worldly sanctuary, and all the earthly blessings, were so many shadows of heavenly things. And he speaks of all who, in his time, walked after his former temper of mind, as glorying in the flesh, in opposition to the spirit: for these contrasts, letter and spirit, flesh and spirit, shadow and body, earthly and heavenly, are all used in the New Testament to the same purpose. And sometimes the contrast is signified by joining the epithet *true* to the type, as the true vine, the true bread, the true tabernacle, &c.

They who, in Paul's time, gloried in the flesh, gloried in what took its rise from Divine appointment, and had a copious fund for the most specious kind of argument on their side. But such as now imitate them without their fund, cannot even with propriety claim the honour of glorying in the flesh as they did; but must be considered as glorying in mere human forgeries, and changing the truth of God into a lie, without any other authority than their own imaginations and worldly lusts. Yet it appears by Paul's epistles, that he thought no epithet too severe, to describe those who in his time glorified in the flesh. What, then, would he have said of us modern Christians? Paul, indeed, 2 Cor. xi, shows us how he could glory in the flesh; but he desires us beforehand to bear with

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\* The doctrine he maintained, may be seen in a small treatise, called, *The testimony of the King of martyrs concerning his kingdom*, John xviii. 36, 37, explained, &c. Edinburgh, 1729, and in several other tracts of later date.

† See the preface to the dialogues.



him a little in his folly. He tells us he is going to play the fool, when he is going to act the gravest and most solemn part of his revered antagonists at Corinth; and, indeed, he far outshines them in his fund for glorying. But all this he does to introduce his own true ground of glorying, which Jesus furnished him with, in these words, "My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness."

This grace which reigns through the obedience of Jesus Christ, and so may with all propriety be called his, Paul had already known and preached, as sufficient to strengthen the weakest heart, in every case he had either experienced himself, or thought of in others. Yet it seemed good to his Lord to bring him, even after his return from the third heaven, into such a strait, as that he needed a fresh assurance of the first lesson of Christianity, even to be certified, that the grace which had relieved him at the first, was sufficient for his help in this extraordinary case. So that Paul, in the deepest of all his distresses, was relieved by that very faith which we modern Christians, in the height of our complaisance, choose only to call, "of the enfeebled and infantile kind." On this bottom, however feeble it seems to us, Paul steps forth in the height of his glorying, and discovers the greatest excellency of the Christian character. And it may be added, that, even after he came from the third heaven, in order "to finish his education," he stood in need of that lesson, which to us appears of very small weight, and at best to be but weak and childish.

WHEREAS, national churches flourish or decay by the smiles or frowns of princes, the true church is established by the smile of the Most High. And though the members thereof on the earth may be persecuted unto death; yet "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord." In this church, the greatest king can be of no more consequence than the meanest of his subjects. This church will receive no establishment on the earth, till the resurrection of the just, when the whole redeemed company shall reign with Christ a thousand years on the earth, after which they shall inherit the new heavens and the new earth forever.

The members of this church, who are yet in this mortal state, are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, having here no continuing city or establishment, as the Jews had before

the destruction of Jerusalem; but having, in opposition to those Judaizers who minded earthly things, their (πολιτευμο) establishment in heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour to change their bodies. Whatever alterations may happen in the course of the world, depressing one religious party and raising another, they expect no revolution in their favour till Christ come the second time; for they can find no encouragement from the Scriptures, to pay any regard to those old Rabbinical notions which have been revived and new modelled by modern Christians, concerning some glorious flourishing appearance of the Messiah's kingdom yet to be expected in this mortal state, by a general conversion of Jews and Gentiles.\*

Every particular society of Christians joined together, according to the order prescribed by the apostles, and meeting in one place, as at Colosse, Ephesus, or Philippi, to eat the Lord's supper, is called a church, in the same sense as the bread and wine, in that supper, are called Christ's body and blood, namely, as being a representation of the one invisible church. The members of such particular societies may be persecuted and dispersed, like those of Jerusalem; but such persecution or dispersion will always tend to the benefit,

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\* The chief, if not the only passage of Scripture that can, with any colour of reasoning, be insisted on as a foundation for expecting some such general conversion of Jews and Gentiles as is commonly thought of, is in Romans, chap. xi; where Paul, reasoning at large to check the religious pride of the believing Romans, which he foresaw would one day rise to the same height, and be attended with the same dismal consequences, as that of the Jews in his time, says to them concerning the Jews, v, 23, *And they also, if they bide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.* Jesus Christ, in like manner, in order to check the rising envy of Peter, addressed him thus, concerning John the beloved disciple, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* As, from this saying of Jesus, an opinion took place among the disciples, that John should not die; so, from the forementioned saying of Paul, an opinion has prevailed among the professors of Christianity concerning some general conversion of the Jews. But it cannot appear that Jesus Christ or Paul ever intended to give ground for either of these opinions, so long as the sayings pled as a foundation for them are prefaced with an *if*. But not to enlarge on this subject at present, I shall only observe, that the expectation of some general conversion of Jews and Gentiles, and of worldly prosperity attending the profession of Christianity, though extremely opposite to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, has taken place, instead of the ancient hope of Christ's second coming, and the reign of the saints, by which the first Christians were animated in their patience unto death, and corresponds exactly with the expectations framed by the Jews concerning his first coming.

never to the hurt of the one true church or kingdom of heaven. Paul himself, who was commissioned to carry the gospel to the nations, was often scourged, bound, and imprisoned, yea, and loaded with reproach and infamy; yet we never find him complaining, as if the gospel suffered any damage by this means, but rather taking occasion from thence to rejoice, that the word of God was not bound; and that what happened to him fell out rather under the furtherance of the gospel.

It was the will of the Captain of salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings, that all his subjects should, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. Paul, warning Timothy against the corruption of Christianity which was to take place, first sets before him his own godly life, and then lays down this general maxim, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned," &c. All national establishments of Christianity have been devised to accommodate that religion to the pride and lusts of men. Certain articles are drawn up by human wisdom to stand for a creed; no matter what they be, sound or unsound; there are worldly advantages connected with them sufficient to draw multitudes, on whom the gospel has no manner of influence, to feign an acquiescence in them. But what ancient Christian would ever have imagined, that a preacher of salvation through the cross of Christ, having one eye on the authority of certain human creed makers, and the other on a renowned poet,\* as espousing the same doctrine with their creed, would say, "This must surely give a sanction wherever our religious *establishment* is revered, or polite *literature* is held in repute;"† Will reverence for the reigning religion, and the fashionable taste in literature, indeed condescend to serve as handmaids to introduce us to the cross of Christ, and commend it to our esteem? This will be a very new and strange employment for them, to which they have been hitherto

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\* However *matchless* Milton's *poetry* may be, it would certainly be rash in any lover of the ancient gospel, to pronounce with Aspasio, in the end of the ninth dialogue, his *divinity* to be *faultless*, if he has read the first four or five pages of the third and eleventh books of *Paradise Lost*; where his doctrine savours much more of the grace magnified by popular preachers, than of the true grace of God preached by Paul.

† Preface to Theron and Aspasio.

quite unaccustomed. The apostles, low-bred mortals, knew no such lures to draw men to the cross, no such trappings to adorn it withal; and, indeed, little as they seemed in the eyes of men, they yet thought it far beneath them to hide the shame of the cross by any such gaudy veils, and they bestowed the severest rebukes on all who attempted to do so.

The matter was, they loved the cross best in its natural simplicity. Why? because there they saw the glory of God! They never made their court to the religious or polite world, nor sought to commend Christianity by the handle of their favourite sentiments or prejudices; and they well knew, that, ridiculous and shocking as the bare cross did appear unto men, no decorations could ever separate from it the ideas of mortification and shame, but might well serve to make it more ridiculous, yea, justly so, in the eyes of the more discerning part of mankind. They would not have persuaded any writer for the imputed righteousness to deprecate the censure of the public, and, courting their favour, "hope," that his "*whole* performance will not be cashiered for *one* difference in sentiment; and beg that the sentiment itself may not be hastily rejected, without a serious hearing;"\* because he can produce many human suffrages to keep him in countenance. They would not have encouraged him to apologize to the public for speaking "magnificently of the blood of Christ, and its unknown efficacy to expiate guilt;"† and, as one half ashamed, plead the concurrence of wits and great men.

Though we may flatter ourselves that such behaviour holds of a becoming modesty, it will be found, if we try ourselves by the gospel, that it proceeds from some diffidence in the truth; from our being somewhat overawed in this respect by the "formidable banter," and the "*irrefragable* smile"‡ however much we may despise those weapons when pointed against our character for devotion in other respects. The apostles loved to see men resolved to take their part with the truth at all events, and determined to sink or swim with it;—to see them boldly risking their *whole* reputation among mankind upon the *one* capital difference in sentiment, by which Christians were from the beginning distinguished from all others, and ready to scorn all reputation they might enjoy at the expense of one thing.

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\* See *Meditations*, vol. 1, p. 272.

† *Ibid*, p. 281.

‡ *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 101.



In opposition to reverence for the *religious* or *polite* world, the Scripture teaches us, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.—But, then, I am told, that “even this sanction” to the Christian doctrine which is drawn from these two sources, when “compared with the oracle of revelation, is only like a range of cyphers connected with the initial figure; which, were they *detached*, would be insignificant; but in such a *subordination* are considerable.”—Let then the oracle of revelation be represented by the figure denoting *one*, and let the other two objects of our attention, connected with it as cyphers, make a hundred; and let these three be jointly urged as motives upon the minds of men; it will be found upon the trial, that the latter two, which in certain contrasts we choose to call cyphers, but which do indeed include all that’s admired and all that’s coveted in the world, will have weight on the human mind against revelation, as ninety-nine to one: and I may add, that if we shall now and then find one in whose mind revelation bears the sway, we shall more easily find ninety-nine led by the motives of reputation, wealth and power. For what else but the ideas of wealth and power can draw our reverence to any religious *establishment*, more than to the most despicable society of dissenters? I have no pleasure in distorting any similitude aside from the sentiment it was brought to illustrate. My obvious intention is, to show the mistake in the sentiment itself, and how vain a thing it is to imagine, that those objects which naturally inflame the passions of men, can be ranged in subordination to the gospel, so as to exert their influence in its favour, or that the gospel stands in need of any such crutches.—Many methods have been devised to render the gospel acceptable unto men, but the effect of all these has been to make us lose sight of the gospel itself. Our wisest course, therefore, will be, to let it stand in the simple dress wherein it was left by the apostles, without any other recommendation than its native charms, entrusting the success thereof wholly to Heaven, from whence it came.

IF by *church* we understand *society*, what society do we mean, when we glory in being members of any church established by human laws; the church of England, for instance? Do we glory in being members of a society, where, as to the *foundation*, the grand article of the imputed righteousness “seems to be little understood, and less regarded, if not much mistaken, and almost forgotten;”—where, as to the *superstructure*, vice becomes predominant and irreligion almost

epidemical;—the sabbaths of a jealous God, are notoriously profaned;—the worship of the great Creator and preserver of mankind is banished from many of the most *conspicuous families*: and it is deemed a piece of rude impertinence, so much as to mention the Gracious Redeemer in our *genteel interviews*;—it passes for an elegant freedom of behaviour, to ridicule the mysteries of Christianity;—and many of those that wear the *professor's garb*, are destitute of the power, and content themselves with the mere form of godliness?\*"

As such reflections have an air of lamentation, the ground of our glorifying must certainly lie somewhere else. Do we glory in this, then, that we have laws making it the interest of the nation to pay some public deference to the religion which they ridicule in private? that multitudes are drawn to subscribe the articles, and submit to the forms of that religion, in like manner, and from the same principle, as importers of French wines swear they brought them from Bilboa in Spain: by which they secretly mean a place in France, which they have chosen to call by that name? How long shall we zealously cherish the roots of irreligion, and still complain of its growth? How long shall we hold forth strong drink unto men, and still bemoan their intemperance? How long shall we pray that the cause may flourish, and the natural effects decrease? We have been at great pains to sweeten and gild the Christian religion, to make it palatable; yet men still slyly lick off the sweet, and pocket the gold, and after all throw away the pill, complaining of its bitterness. Melancholy case indeed! What a pity is it that Christianity is not more fashionable, that so we zealous Christians, instead of bearing the cross after Christ, and patiently submitting to the hatred and contempt of the world, like his first followers, who knew no better, may be in the top of the fashion, and have our importance and weight duly considered among mankind! With what a lovely piety and sincere devotion might we shine forth if our "most conspicuous families," who rule the fashion would only animate us by their concurrence;† and, by the

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\* *Meditations*, vol. 2, p. 75.

† Let us observe with what a heavy heart Mr. Erskine bewails the want of worldly encouragement to Christianity, by the countenance of great men. See p. 492, of a volume of his sermons, printed at Edinburgh, 1755, in a sermon entitled, *The kingdom of God within the soul of man*. "What was it that made Parliaments and assemblies, and people of all ranks, go so clean to work about the year 1638, and the year that followed it, to advance a work of reformation, and to engage themselves by solemn covenant to maintain it? and what makes the work

weight of their character and station, check the impertinence of profane wits? And how readily would we set our affections on the things that are above, were we only disencumbered of all inconveniences in our concerns below: and what a charming sight would it be, to behold these two ideas, which appeared irreconcilable to Jesus and his apostles, now beautifully harmonizing together under the joint appellation of the **CHRISTIAN WORLD.**

But whence was it, that the apostles were so great strangers to that public spirited zeal which sits so gracefully upon us? It would seem, they wanted the proper address to recommend Christianity to people of condition; for not many of that class gave ear to them. Or they were so much occupied in teaching Christians patience in suffering, that they quite forgot to lay down any rules for reigning Christianity. We must either say this, or that they got no instructions to that end; for certain it is, they have left none upon record. Some people, indeed, after their decease, alleged, that, by second or third hand, from some of their private discourses, which they had neglected to write, they had got some hints concerning this reign, which began in that of the Christian teachers, first over one another, then over the rest of the Christian brotherhood. But as these hints are scarcely well vouched, they can never be of sufficient weight to end any dispute.

This capital defect, as it may seem, in the apostolic writings; though it cannot justly be assigned as the true cause of the many violent controversies which have arisen among latter Christians, about what is commonly called *church-government*, and about the proper limits betwixt it and the civil power, or the connection of both; may yet be considered as one reason why contending parties, otherwise agreed as to

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go on so slowly now? Why, if folk, especially men of influence and power, had the kingdom of God within them, (which, alas! is much wanting now-a-days, otherwise there would not be so much daubing with untempered mortar as there is.) O Sirs, if ever ye would see the Lord's work thrive again in the land, pray that the same spirit may be poured out from on high, that he may lay the foundation of the work, by setting up his kingdom in the hearts of kings, nobles, gentry, ministers, elders, and all ranks of people in the land; and then the hearts of the children will be turned to their fathers; and we may expect to see the church of Christ in this land looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners, *Song vi, 10.*" Terrible, indeed, would be the situation of Britain, especially in the way of vengeance against the friends of the ancient gospel, could such men obtain their wishes!

the articles of their creed, have had so little success in convincing one another in these matters. And, indeed, the more moderate on either side are now ready to own, that the New Testament is silent in this respect.

Yet seeing the law which constituted the national church of Israel, settled, in so clear and particular a manner, every thing relating to the subordination and privileges of those who presided in holy things, and the influence they were to have in the state; one is apt, at first view, to be surprised to find the New Testament so deficient on this head, seeing order and peace is no less necessary in Christian churches, than it was in the nation of Israel;—till he considers that the first churches, intended as patterns of all that should follow, were formed by the influence of the gospel operating on the minds of individuals of every class of men, and not on corporations or bodies politic; that the apostles taught them by love to *serve* one another, as the proper expression of the great article of their creed, that Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to *serve*;—that every such society was, by the truth which joined them together, placed in such circumstances, as that nothing but the hand of God could maintain their union;—that as no common worldly interest could be promoted by their union, they had no motives, no encouragements to make them fond of it, but what came from heaven, and the prospects of the life to come;—that in every church the apostles appointed the men who were best skilled in the motives to serve, had greatest courage to utter them, and were most influenced by them, to lead the rest in the joint purpose of counting all things loss, that they might have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, being made conformable to his death; and thus distinguishing them into younger and elder brethren, left them with this standing rule, “Ye younger, (*νεωτεροι*), submit yourselves unto the elder, (*πρεσβυτεροις*); yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

It is obvious, then, that in a Christian church the progress of preferment went downward; even as he who leads a company down hill, by being foremost is lowest. Accordingly, we find, that the leader in chief of Christians, who himself took the lowest and most ignominious place in service, lays it down as a fundamental law in his kingdom, that the course of preferment should be just the reverse of what takes place in all bodies politic, Matt. xx, 25—28. And to this the matter of fact corresponded at the beginning; for the higher a



man rose in the kingdom of God, the lower and more despicable a figure he made in the world. This will readily appear to any one who considers the history of the disciples, the deacons, the elders, the apostles, and Jesus Christ. In those days there was no temptation for any man to covet the place of a leader among Christians, nothing to animate him to acquit himself with diligence therein, but the hope of a crown of glory, when the chief Shepherd should appear. In this view of the matter, it will appear that the New Testament was a book well calculated for all the exigencies of those to whom it was written; that it was abundantly full and explicit as to the whole concerns of their union together, so as there was no room to complain of any deficiency therein whatsoever.

WHEN, by the corruption of the gospel, which took place very early, yea, began to work before the death of the apostles, a correspondent change happened in the members composing the Christian assemblies, as well as their numbers, and their union became subservient to some secular purposes, then they began to look out with the appearance of a worldly faction, even long before they got possession of the power and wealth of the Roman empire. So that their minds were fully ripened and prepared for that remarkable change in their circumstances, by the time that it happened. When Christians began to appear as a worldly faction; though they still laboured under the disadvantages attending dissenters from the established religion, yet there were motives sufficient, beside the hope of being great after death, to prompt men to aspire after pre-eminence among them. Many questions now arose concerning subordination, the exercise and extent of authority, and various other matters, necessary to be considered by those who would make a decent and creditable appearance in the world as a religious party. It was in vain to consult the New Testament. A new book of discipline was necessary. Revered fathers gravely told lies, to help on the pious designs. Learned questions also, concerning the Christian faith, were moved, in such a manner, as the apostolic writings, which had been composed for the vulgar, could by no means decide them. The form of sound words, which the first Christians were commanded to hold fast, as the best preservative against heresy, behooed now to be laid aside, and give place to the wisdom of words, the wisdom of the scribes and disputers of this world. However, to make the apostles some amends for this neglect, they knighted them, and called them *saints*; even as in latter ages, when

the contempt of their doctrine increased, they deified them under that title.

If matters went on thus among Christians while yet the dissenting party, what shall we say of them when their earthly reign began; when their ambition, which had hitherto been confined in lording over one another, began now to extend itself over the Roman empire? Now comes to be revealed the mystery of iniquity, in its proper opposition to the mystery of godliness. Now takes place spiritual pride, reigning through worldly splendour, wealth, and power, to the deceiving and destroying of mankind. This reign came to its height, when the ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire was broken, having (*μιαν γρομμην*) one opinion or creed, agreed to give their power and strength to the Christian leaders, now "the lords of the Gentiles," united under one head.

The places most noted in Scripture for impiety, uncleanness, and idolatry, are only the figures or shadows of this grand and religious establishment, which is the mystery of them; so "spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified," namely, Jerusalem. In opposition to the true church, whose children are begotten by the power of Christ's word, it is set forth under the notion of an unchaste woman, pretending to be the spouse of Christ, yet committing fornication with the kings of the earth, and having, by their concurrence, multitudes of children, not begotten by his power. We are left at no loss to know what state of things is pointed forth by this woman; for the angel says to John, Rev. xvii, 7, "I will tell thee the mystery of the woman," Ver. 18, "The woman which thou sawest, is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth." She was prefigured by that great nursery of idolatry, Babylon, the lady of kingdoms; so has this name written on her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth."

Against this establishment, the vials of the wrath of God are directed. Some people have imagined, that Antichrist is to be destroyed by armies raised by Protestant princes for that purpose. The New Testament, pointing both to his decay and utter ruin, speaks thus, 2 Thess. ii, 8; "Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." And what we have already seen of the fact, corresponds best with this: for if, by the spirit of his mouth, we understand his *word*, we shall find that the Scriptures, which some ages ago began to be pub-

lished in the vulgar tongues of Europe, have been the chief means of *consuming* or weakening that monstrous power, after which the world has so long wondered. By these writings, some, in several countries of Europe, were taught to *fear God, and give glory to him*; to reclaim the many prostituted sacred names back to the sacred things to which they belonged; to renounce all reverence for the religious establishment, yea, boldly, at the peril of their lives, pronounce all the holy things thereof to be profane; to assert the rights of sovereign princes and states; and to maintain, that subjection from every soul, ecclesiastics as well as others, was due to the *higher* powers.

Some, I say, were thus taught; and much greater numbers who could not take in the former part of this lesson, readily embraced more or less of the rest. So that whole kingdoms revolted. In these religious factions, quickly arose, headed by such as had tasted the sweets of the grand establishment, and made their court to the prince. Only one could succeed in each kingdom or state, so as to obtain an establishment in its favour. These favourite factions were no sooner in quiet possession of their kingdom, than, like genuine daughters, they imitated all the practices of their great mother, as far as the several princes in whose keeping they were, would permit. They had, indeed, withdrawn abruptly from their mother's house, and found it necessary in many respects to expose her shame, in order to secure paramours for themselves. But when once they were settled as mistresses in their several houses, they began to repent of having carried their invectives to too great a height against her. They found, that most of her maxims were necessary for their own support; and that it was not prudent to be always throwing out reproaches that might easily be retorted.

HOWEVER, by the daughters revolting, and setting up for themselves, the power and influence of the great maternal house was considerably weakened. We must likewise bear in mind, that the light which had shone forth from the Scriptures, at the time of the rupture, could not be smothered; but still continued to operate on the minds of many, in almost every region of the *Christian* empire; (for long before this time the word *Christian* had acquired a very extensive signification.) Some feared God, and suffered accordingly, not a few unto death, even by the hands of the daughters who still pretended to lead more reformed lives than their mother. More reformed,

I say, because even the mother, who seemed to have quite lost the sense of shame, found it necessary to reform a little in some points of decorum. So that, in our time, the difference betwixt her and them is far from being so remarkable as one would have expected at first, from the violence of the rupture. Many more, who saw not the glory of God in the gospel, so as to embolden them to run all risks for the sake of it, found yet, by means of it, so much light as enabled them to see, and, as far as their timidity for their worldly interest would allow, openly expose the shameful maxims and practices, both of the parent and the offspring. The more speculative men of this sort, finding themselves on the one hand, by the authority of the book, then referred to as the last resort by all disputants, entirely freed from all reverence for religious establishments, and not finding themselves bound on the other, by that peculiar evidence of the Christian truth, which binds the few who believe it, turned out what we may call *freethinkers*, or *academics*.\* These became leaders, in their way, to numbers of others who read little, and think less; but yet, are capable of shining in company, by means of some smart and free sayings which they have picked up in conversation. From this source of freethinking, arises a strong balance against the reverence claimed by spiritual pride, as it works, either among those who are *in place*, or those who long to be so.

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\* It may, then, with great justice, be affirmed, that to the Scriptures we are indebted for the principles of liberty from ecclesiastical influence; in declaiming on which, many writers have sought to distinguish themselves as men of genius, and which are now pretty generally understood. I find that no less is acknowledged by a noted freethinker, in a late *History of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 332, where describing a certain religious class of people, who about the middle of the last century fell indeed into the same mistake, as all those do who connect the Christian religion with politics; but who, notwithstanding, retained so much of that humanity, which they had learned from the Scriptures, as to maintain and promote toleration, or liberty of conscience; he says, "Of all Christian sects, this was the first which, during its prosperity, as well as adversity, always adopted the principle of toleration. And it is remarkable that so reasonable a doctrine owed its origin, not to reasoning, but to the height of extravagance and enthusiasm." I need not tell any one acquainted with this author's style, that these words, *the height of extravagance and enthusiasm*, stand chiefly for *the height of attention to the Scriptures, and reverence for the Deity*, whose character is drawn there. But it may be proper to observe, that when this author calls the doctrine of toleration *reasonable*, he means, that, according to reason, toleration ought to be extended towards all, except those who fear the Deity more than men, or regard his precepts more than their own temporal interest. This is abundantly manifest from his historical remarks.



To reconcile our minds to this, and many other mortifying strokes daily concurring therewith, it must be considered, that, according to the prophecies of the New Testament, the time is now come wherein God purposed, in the course of his providence, to pour contempt upon that reverence which had so long taken the place of his fear in the hearts of men : and this grand work of judgment God accomplishes by means of that very book, which the sons of pride thought they might trifle with at pleasure, and wantonly accommodate to all the purposes of their avarice and ambition. By arguments originally drawn from this book, not a few of the princes and great men of the earth have been emboldened to jest with freedom, at that which formerly made them tremble. By the influence of this book, some have from time to time appeared fearing God, and boldly declaring his judgment against those who presumed to share among them more or less of the fear due to him, withal patiently bearing the effects of the resentment of their enemies ; an evident token of salvation to the former, and of perdition to the latter. By means of hints thrown out from this book, the nations begin to see that they have a right to be what they were before the Christian leaders usurped dominion over them : all the authority and weight of these leaders notwithstanding ; and, no doubt, the freethinkers and their followers have as good right as their patriarch Socrates, to laugh in private at the establishment which they pusillanimously truckle to in public for the sake of their interest.

It is meet, in the righteous judgment of God, that those who have drawn over the nations a form of godliness, in opposition to the power thereof, should now be recompensed with a mock-worship, and be revered in hypocrisy. It is a meet and proper sight, to behold those who have consecrated temples made with hands, in opposition to the true tabernacle where God dwells in very deed, polluting them with their own hands, and stowing them with the carcasses of the dead. It is meet that we should see those who imagined, that the purity of the Christian doctrine might be better preserved, and insincerity better guarded against, by creeds of human composition, than by the ancient form of sound words, daily employing those very creeds as the engines of the grossest dissimulation and perjury.

The time is now come for the kings of the earth to hate her whom they have so long aggrandized, and to make her desolate and naked. So that we may hear something like the complaint of "widowhood and loss of children" already be-

gun. We have had for some time past in Britain, a succession of the best of kings, who have laid hold on every opportunity consistent with the public tranquillity, for shortning the horns of ecclesiastical power. This, together with the wit of freethinkers, the graver opposition of dissenting factions, and to crown all, the free declarations that have been made of the scriptural doctrine concerning the kingdom of heaven, has served greatly to harass the ministers of that power, and to fill their kingdom with darkness. What a dreadful shock was given to the whole fabric of ecclesiastical power in England, by one branch of that doctrine, setting forth the plain import of these words of Jesus, *My kingdom is not of this world?* It proved like the shock of an earthquake, loosing the foundations, and rending the walls of the building so as that it can never be repaired. In consequence of this, many gnawed their tongues for pain, and (by reproaching the doctrine concerning his heavenly kingdom) blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. The bitter exclamations of impotent chagrin, which are to this day conveyed to our ears by the press, are sufficient indications, that the smart of this stroke is still very sensibly felt. And who shall sympathize with them? Christians dare not: for thus runs the inspired proclamation; *Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*

Nor will the apostles encourage us to join in the lamenting outcry against freethinkers, whom the clergy have thought proper to brand with the name of *infidels*, as a mark of infamy on such as renounce allegiance to them, and reject the book which they have made the charter for national Christianity. For if, turning our eyes to the ancient gospel, and distinguishing the faithful by professed attachment to it, by infidels we should mean all, who, with open mouth, oppose the gospel which Paul preached, we may find them as numerous among those who reverence, as among those who scoff at our religious establishments; yea, we shall find the clergy themselves to be the chief promoters of infidelity; though, at the same time, many of them show as great aversion at being seen in company with a professed *unbeliever*, as if they thought their sacred persons would be defiled by conversing with him.

And why should it grieve a Christian, to see freethinking prevailing, instead of what is fully as opposite to the fear of God, yea, of more efficacious and extensive influence to the deceiving and destroying of mankind? But perhaps it will be said, that every nation must have some public leading in

religion to supply the defects of civil government. Be it so ; yet it is well known, that other religions have answered this purpose as well as Christian.\* The Christian, said I ! it is absurd to imagine, that the religion taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles, ever was or can be established in the earth till the resurrection of the just ; however it may in various shapes be corrupted, and accommodated to the inclinations of the people, so as to serve every worldly purpose, as well as any other religion. Agreeably to what is now said, we find it fashionable with gentlemen, who openly count it ridiculous to worship Jesus Christ as God, to declare seriously, that though one may have difficulties about the evidence of Christianity, “ yet surely such a person, if he had any regard for the good of mankind, would be careful not to weaken the credit of a religion so excellently calculated to promote public and private happiness, unless he had power and authority to establish a better in its stead.”† The reason here given, is undoubtedly sufficient to make this way of speaking always reputable, and to remove all fear that it will become popular to reproach Christianity, name and thing, however much the pride of speculation may overrule every other consideration in the minds of a few. We find now that the freest thinkers have fallen upon a method to profess themselves very zealous Christians. A late writer of memoirs,‡ describing some Christians of his own stamp, says, “ They hearken to the great Immanuel within, the word and voice of everlasting reason, and are as blessed and happy as creatures can be by the redeeming power of the holy Jesus.”——Christianity is now become so very pliable a thing, that it is not worth any man’s while to be an apostate from it. We have already got avowed Christian Deists, and we may as conveniently have Christian Atheists ; for as every man claims the privilege of using words, especially those of fixed repute, in his own sense, one has no more to do but understand by Immanuel the eternal fitness of things, the soul of the world, or even, if he pleases, everlasting reason.

THE apostles were strangers to the modern advantages of

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\* I presume that no man will take upon him to affirm, that the obligation of an oath, for instance, has presently more weight on the minds of either clergy or laity of any established church in Europe, than it had on the Roman soldiers before the Christian æra began.

\* See Monthly Review for February 1755, p. 99.

† See Memoirs of several ladies of Great Britain, p. 345.

Christianity; they neither taught nor found them;\*—they left the care of kingdoms and states in the hands of the powers ordained of God for that purpose;—they preached remission of sins to all sorts of men, so considered all men as sinners; but they concerned themselves as little about the voice of great men, as about those of slaves;—they formed no party to make head against the religious establishment of any country; they only declared, as they still do by their writings, that all not hearkening to them, shall perish in the next world.

The effect of this was, some moved with the fear of evils not seen as yet, gave ear to them, and followed them; others laughed at them; and many, being provoked, persecuted them. The apostles were no way disconcerted upon this; they knew it was the genuine effect of their testimony, and would be so, to the end of the world. We never find them murmuring at the prevalence of infidelity, or the small success the gospel had in the world. It gave them no disturbance, to see unbelievers neglecting the Lord's supper, the Lord's day, and the rest of the Christian institutions; nor did they call upon any such to observe them. These institutions were then sacred to the honour of Christ, and not, as now, to that of the Christian teachers. So the apostles desired to see none pretending regard to these institutions, but such as depended on Christ for the remission of sins, and the hope of eternal life. It gave them no concern what sort of men *wore the professor's garb*. They were so overjoyed with the company of the little societies, which they gathered in different places, chiefly out of the dregs of mankind, that they neither sought after men of quality, priests, or philosophers, nor regretted the want of their company; and I may add, neither did they court the favour of the mob; and though it was with difficulty they could escape from one city to another with whole bones; yet we find them rejoicing in the success of the gospel as universal, 2 Cor. ii. 14. "Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph, in Christ, and maketh manifest the favour of his knowledge by us in every place.

They openly evinced the falsehood of the religion established in every country where they came; yet they had nei-

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\* If we attend to many eminent Christian writers, describing to us the persecuted rise and subsequent flourishing progress of Christianity, we shall be led to consider the sufferings of the apostles and first Christians, in much the same light with the hardiness of the more early Romans, namely, as laying a foundation for that worldly ease and grandeur to their posterity or successors, which difficult times and circumstances denied to themselves.



ther the will nor the power to establish any other in its stead. All religions, except theirs, were political; all political religions except the Jewish, were human contrivances for the temporal benefit of particular states and kingdoms, and had no other object in view but worldly happiness. The apostles, in propagating their religion, had no other object in view but happiness on the other side of death to men of all nations.— And this object they steadily pursued in every state or kingdom where they came, without giving any other cause of umbrage to those of the established religion, than the impression made on the minds of individuals of different classes by the simple force of the truth of their doctrine; which was destitute of all allurements to the passions of men, and had no tendency to spirit up any worldly faction against either the established church or the state. They preached and practised that scheme of the most universal benevolence, which drew upon them, and will always draw upon their followers, the contempt and hatred of all sorts of men. And why should their followers be greatly disturbed, whatever party prevail or rule the fashion in this world? Is it not enough for them if they shall reign in the next?

They proposed no worldly happiness, public or private, to their followers; they displayed none of those ingredients which compose the delicious philter which reigning Christianity holds forth in her golden cup, and which the Apocalypse calls *the wine of her fornication with the kings of the earth*; whereby she so allures and intoxicates the nations, that it is almost to as little purpose to mention the ancient doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, even in the hearing of our most orthodox Christians, as it would be to deliver a lecture concerning sobriety in the midst of a company inflamed with wine. The principles of the connection betwixt church and state, having a very natural hold of every avenue to their hearts, are far dearer to them than any thing the kingdom of heaven contains. They can be in raptures with dreams about national reformation; they can even indulge a melancholy kind of pleasure, in bewailing a sinful land and degenerate age, because it gratifies their religious pride to appear in the character of mediators and intercessors for people whom they imagine to be much worse than themselves. But as for the ancient doctrine of the connection between Christianity and the cross, it might do very well in the infancy of the church, when times were bad;—they know better things. And, indeed, were I not writing to one who holds the sacred text for the initial figure

in all his computations, I might have spared myself the trouble of touching upon this subject.

It may be noted here as a proof of what is above said, that it has been imagined, in opposition to all history and daily observation, that the world has been much improved in goodness by means of Christianity;—that the spirit of that religion has been nationally diffused into the lives and manners of the people in the countries where it has been established. The state of the world when Christ came, has been considered, and the epidemical vices displayed: and it has been imagined, that Jesus Christ, by condemning those vices, abolished the practice of them; and by recommending the opposite virtues, infused the spirit of them into nations. There had been no great marvel in one's dreaming so, nor yet in his telling his dream in the most open manner, even from the pulpit;\* but that such a dream should not only be gravely received by the public for truth, but even admired, I dare say you will readily agree with me, cannot be accounted for on any other principles than those already mentioned.

BUT, perhaps, when we value ourselves on our religious establishment, the stress of our glorying does not lie so much in our legal advantages, nor in the society formed upon them, as in the soundness of our creed, composed by our venerable ancestors, and daily receiving additional weight from the many eminent personages who have supported it with distinguished learning and abilities. If this be the case, methinks the ground of our glorying would be still more solid, should we return again into the bosom of the Roman church, which we are sure was once founded on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; whereas the utmost that can be said of the other establishment now in being, is, that it was founded on a creed extracted from them by fallible men, whose skill and fidelity are liable to be questioned. Moreover, we have still extant a true and faithful copy of the articles of the Roman church's creed in Paul's epistle to them, which was once cordially believed and obeyed, and it is to this day acknowledged for a divine-inspired wri-

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\* See a sermon, entitled, *The situation of the world at the time of Christ's appearance, and its connection with the success of his religion, considered*; reviewed with applause, both at London, and at Edinburgh, where it was preached, January 6, 1755. At the last mentioned place it was publicly upheld, perhaps justly enough, as a proper specimen, showing how much the art of preaching has of late been improved in Scotland.

ing by them: and though the true import thereof be now *much mistaken and almost forgotten* among them; yet such of us as loved Paul's doctrine best, might still value ourselves on being the truest members of the best founded church in the world, as cleaving closest to its original fundamental articles.

Methinks, if we judge it an amiable thing in others, we ought also ourselves, when writing on Christianity, to refrain from the "low singularities of a party,"\* and confine ourselves to the public authentic maxims of the kingdom of heaven. For, to turn our eyes again toward Rome, were there only two men there holding by the genuine sense of Paul's epistle, these, in the eyes of the apostles would be considered as the only representatives of the ancient Roman church, as the only confessors of the Catholic faith; and all the rest, as taken up with low singularities, unprofitable, and vain, however firmly established and highly dignified on the earth.

Moreover, it ought to be remembered, that very many of the admirers of the doctrine of Mess. Boston and Erskine, are highly offended at the English hierarchy and worship, and not a few of them sworn enemies thereto; and, therefore, no unnecessary stumbling-block should be laid in their way, to scare them at the doctrine we would commend to their attention; especially when we ourselves are persuaded, that "faith and love inspire the breast, and regulate the progress of each *private Christian*. These unite the *whole congregation* of the faithful to God and one another,"† whereas, all other bonds of union, however judiciously framed by men, have always served to divide and alienate them from one another.

It ought also to be considered, that, on account of these singularities, which are indeed extremely low, even as earth is in respect of heaven, the way of truth has been much evil spoken of, and its native evidence greatly obscured. The Apostle Peter, after setting before us the evidence of the truth we have been considering, plainly prophesies, that a handle would be given for this evil speaking by self-seeking Christian teachers, and the multitudes following them. The great majority of our champions against infidelity, have undertaken the defence of national Christianity, and have magnified the gospel as a scheme, nobly adapted for promoting national happiness; by which means they have had both the apostles and the freethinkers for their antagonists at once, an opposition by

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\* Meditations, vol. 1, p. 148.

† Meditations, vol. 2, p. 232.

far too formidable for any set of men to cope with, now that the magistrate suffers no means of deciding such disputes but by the pen. Many standing in awe of the philosophers, have been ashamed of every thing in the gospel offensive to them, and so have endeavoured to recommend Christianity to them, as the completest system, or an improvement of their maxims. They have studied to soften, or dissemble every thing about it, that they imagined could have given the least disgust to the *divine Plato*: yet some philosophers are so fancy as to refuse it after all. In short, our Christian leaders have taken pains to remove from the gospel every thing that anciently proved a stumbling-block to the Jew, or foolishness to the Greek: and still they complain of the decay of true Christianity. However, both they who speak evil of the way of truth, and they who furnish the occasion, are, though far from intending so, jointly conspiring to fulfil the prophecies of the New Testament, and to strengthen the evidence of the truth in the minds of them who believe it, even as all parties amongst the Jews, in their joint opposition to Jesus, conspired to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning him, and to assure his disciples that he was the Christ.

I might now proceed to consider, how on the holy mount, or in Jesus Christ glorified, appeared the meaning of the institution of the ancient oracle, the anointing of kings, priests, and prophets, with oil, which made the face to shine, &c., whence many useful observations might arise to us in confirmation of the more ancient Scriptures, and serving to illustrate the difference betwixt primitive and modern Christianity: but to take in all the views which are concentrated in this grand event, would require general survey of the whole Scriptures. the great and leading design of which is, to set before us the sufferings of Christ issuing in his glory.

If we take our station on the holy mount, we have a prospect backward to the beginning of time, and forward to the end thereof, when the mystery of God shall be finished, and all old things give place to the new heavens and the new earth, containing the new Jerusalem, which shall be illuminated by the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ; when the whole company of them who were redeemed from among men, and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, shall fully experience what meaneth *grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

METHINKS it is time for us to acknowledge, that, with great propriety, and on the solidest grounds, the Apostle Pe-



ter on this occasion asserts, that the prophetic word, or all that the prophets had written, had now received additional confirmation. For thus I presume a young scholar behooved to give the literal version of his words :

Και εχομεν βιβκιωτερον τον προφητικον λογον.  
*And we have more firm the prophetic word.\**

It was no small recommendation of the truth of the apostolic testimony, concerning Jesus being the Christ, that it confirmed and established the writings of the ancient prophets. The prophetic word, after all the evidence it formerly had of coming from God, was to be verified, and so to receive additional confirmation by its accomplishment. Aside from its accomplishment in Jesus, we cannot find therein any fixed sense or unity of design; but when we see all its lines meeting in Jesus, like the rays of the sun collected in a focus, there arises thence the brightest and strongest evidence of the truth of what the apostles witnessed, concerning the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the old and new revelation tallying exactly together in such a number and variety of circumstances, as utterly exclude all suspicion of human contrivance, serve mutually to support and strengthen each other, and to establish beyond all doubt that great truth, which alone can support the heart of man in his last agonies.

The apostles were traduced as forsaking Moses and the prophets; but they could with a good grace assert, that they held their writings by a firmer handle, and so had a greater reverence for them than any of their adversaries. Accordingly Peter commends, and enforces the attention Christians were then giving to the prophetic word, and so furnishes the true key of interpretation to all Christians to the end of the world, when he says, *they did well giving heed to it, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day should dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake, moved by the Holy Ghost. But there were false prophets also among the people, even as*

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\* Is it not surprising to reflect how much has been written by learned disputants on this text, laboriously contending with each other, in what sense the prophetic word might be said to be more sure than the most solemn and august revelation that ever was delivered from God to men, namely, that on the holy mount! But there are few who incline to observe the import of this grand revelation.

*there shall be false teachers among you, &c.* They gave heed to it as to a fainter and more confined light, referring to a clearer and more extensive one that was to come, and which they found exhibited to them in the testimony of the apostles concerning Jesus. They considered it as a *light shining in a dark place, until the day should dawn*; as giving a fainter view, like a lamp in the night, of the same things that were to be more clearly seen by the new revelation, which is compared to the dawning day and day-star; even as Peter, near the close of this epistle, calls the state of things after Christ's second coming, the *day of God*, when that glory which now only dawns to men in the report concerning it, shall shine forth in broad day, and so supersede the use of the clearest revelation or testimony that can be given of it.

But, then, the prophetic word referred not only to a clearer revelation, but also to the effect it was to have on believers, which Peter calls the day-star arising in their hearts: and to the same purpose he says to Christians in his first epistle, *The prophets prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, when they testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.* They who believed the gospel, so beheld the Divine glory therein, and were led by the power and evidence thereof, to obey it from the heart, and patiently suffer for its sake, received, according to Christ's promise, the Comforter, the Spirit of God bearing witness with their spirits, that they were the children of God; and as the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, so did their consolation also abound by him. While they were thus influenced by the love of the truth, and had their joy enlarged in the midst of those circumstances which naturally make the hearts of men to die within them, they had in their hearts a begun experience, or sensible proof of the glory following the sufferings of Christ, so enjoyed the utmost confirmation of the prophetic word, that can take place in this mortal state. They had the foretaste of life from the dead, the earnest of the heavenly inheritance, ascertaining their entrance into the joy of their Lord, even as the day-star ushers in the day. Thus, by means of the gospel-revelation, as the day-star arising in their hearts, they knew in themselves the accomplishment of the prophetic word; they had an inward proof of the power and coming of Christ; very different indeed from what the Jews thought of, but perfectly agreeable to the true sense of the prophecies.

It remains that we take some notice of the rule, which Pe-

ter lays down as a first principle, to be carefully attended to in all the use we make of the prophetic word, either for understanding the doctrine of the Messiah, or enjoying the comforts thereof in our hearts. We must proceed, **KNOWING THIS FIRST**, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation: for, &c. Now, the Apostle leaves us at no loss to know what he means by *private interpretation*, while he plainly states an opposition betwixt the will of man and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The Apostle's argument, then, must run thus: Whereas, prophecy came not by the will of man, it is not to be understood according to the fancy or pleasure of men, but according to the interpretation given of it by God himself, from whom it came. And this interpretation God himself gave, when that notable voice, *This is my beloved Son, &c.*, bearing a manifest reference to many passages in the prophets, more especially *Is. xlii, 1*, came from Heaven to Jesus at his baptism; was uttered again from the glory surrounding his person, in the presence of Moses, Elias, and three apostles; and was illustrated at large by the testimony of the apostles, inspired for that purpose by the same Spirit which breathed in the prophets.

In this saying is set forth the great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord Jesus. So we find him making constant reference to it, saying, *I have told you the truth, which I have heard of God.*—*I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him*: and praying for his disciples,—*I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me*. The same thing is confirmed to us by them who heard him, God bearing them witness according to his own will. In their testimony is displayed the full proof, with the whole import and use of what he began to speak. And in the foresight of false teachers, who would interpret the word of prophecy according to their own will, the apostles committed the things they testified to writing, that Christians might be able, after their decease, to have these things always in remembrance, and so be fortified against every private interpretation of the prophetic writings.

We are, then, to look on the New Testament as the only public and authentic commentary on the Old: and every gloss on the Old not agreeable to the New, must be thrown aside among Jewish traditions, or more modern legends. If the whole Jewish sanhedrim had agreed on the sense of a prophecy, in opposition to the inspired apostles, it behooved to pass for a private interpretation among Christians, and accordingly be rejected. And should an œcumenical council of Christian

teachers unanimously agree to accommodate the prophecies of the Old Testament to any other things than those revealed in the New, we ought to regard their decision as at best but a private interpretation, and despise it as a low singularity.—For Peter does not here oppose private interpretation to any sense of the prophecies that might be authorized by Christian teachers, and approved by the multitudes following them; but he opposes it to the public interpretation given of those writings by the Holy Ghost in the New Testament; yea, in the warning he here gives against private interpretation, he seems plainly, by the context, to have his eye on Christian teachers followed by many, who would corrupt the Christian procession, by interpreting the Old Testament according to their own will, in opposition to the will of God declared in the New.

And thus, indeed, the corruption of Christianity was privately introduced, under the colour of Divine authority, produced from the Old Testament; and when any corruption of the Christian doctrine was once introduced, and found agreeable to the passions of men, it was easy, by the help of tradition, and a little punning on words and phrases, to accommodate the New Testament thereto; or, if that could not readily be done, to set it aside as deficient in that respect. Accordingly, we find there have been, and still are, many Christian teachers much followed, confidently applying the prophecies of the Old Testament to a sort of worldly power and coming of Christ, very different from what the apostles made known to their hearers and followers. Their interpretation of these writings, however agreeable to our notions of national and worldly happiness, is very unsuitable to that conformity to Christ in suffering here, and glory hereafter, unto which his whole church is predestinated, and which the apostles made known as the true sense and scope of the prophetic word: yet, many zealous professors of Christianity and their teachers are so fond and confident of such interpretations, that they will be ready to charge any one who rejects them with denying the authority of the Old Testament. But the reason is, they find their account in them, and they have their reward.

On how many things, foreign to the religion of Jesus, has the zeal of later Christians been spent, through their neglecting the warning here given by Peter? Hence, the English priesthood, uninterrupted succession, &c. Hence, the Scots' covenanted work of extirpation, for the decayed state of which many devout people still groan, repining against God and



the king, because they are deprived of the pious exercise of power to murder their fellow-creatures. Hence, some sanguine critics on the Hebrew Scriptures, who would seem to be far better skilled in the sense of them than ever the apostles were, after grossly perverting the sacred doctrine concerning the person of Christ, the character of God, and the ground of our acceptance with him, go about to persuade us to deal with one another, on pretence of heresy, as Joshua did with the idolatrous Canaanites: whereas, where these critics to be judged according to their own impious law, they behoved to suffer capital punishment, for seeking to seduce men from the true faith, not to mention their malicious design against the lives of their fellow-creatures. Hence, the many very learned and very trifling disputes about church government, or who should be greatest among Christians, Hence, much presumptuous evil speaking of the powers ordained of God, under pretence of zeal for the headship and sovereignty of Christ. But it would be tedious to touch on all the topics which present themselves here, and which have afforded a copious fund of reproach against Christianity to its more open enemies. I would only say in the general, that the zeal of our leaders in orthodoxy to establish a kingdom for the Messiah, in imitation of God's ancient kingdom in Canaan, can be equalled in absurdity by nothing but the attempts of our more fashionable clergy to accommodate the New Testament to the Greek philosophy, or something equivalent.

Yet if, holding every other source of knowledge suspected, we can, by the light of the apostolic writings, illustrating to us the ancient Scriptures, distinguish the way of truth from every false way, we shall find every handle of reproach given to its avowed enemies, from any quarter in the world called *Christian*, serving to confirm and establish our minds in the truth, as we shall perceive every source of error operating exactly as the apostles foretold. And far from having occasion to join in the common, indolent, and fruitless complaint, of the badness and darkness of the times, as if we expected better in this mortal state; we shall find reason to adore the Divine Providence, overruling the course of this present evil world, and making light to arise to us on all sides; we shall find no change of affairs worth the waiting for, but the appearance of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now, to the general reflections on the evidence of the truth, which introduced the consideration of the above passage in Peter, it may be added, that as all the sacred doctrines arise

from divine works, we can know no more of the things of God, than he is pleased to show us by his own explanation of his own works. They who would push their inquiries further, intruding into those things which they have not seen, must be left to enjoy all the pleasure that the pride of reasoning, and their boasted liberty of doubting, can afford them. But such as pretend to admit the divine works, and yet are dissatisfied with the doctrine given along with them, so go about to frame some other, more suitable to their taste, act both an absurd and disingenuous part; absurd, while, by reasonings drawn from what they see in nature, they go about to explain facts, which manifestly reverse the course, and surpass the sphere thereof altogether; disingenuous, because they are obliged to use every artifice to disguise or dissemble the plain and simple doctrine connected with those facts in the Scripture. Let us just point an instance or two.

THE Scripture, while it manifests one God, in opposition to all idols, and infinitely eminent above all creatures, at the same time discovers, in the one Divine nature or Godhead, such a distinction as is betwixt the sender and the sent among men, such a distinction as admits of the reciprocal use of the personal pronouns *I, thou, and he*; and such phrases as these, *Let us make—One of us—We are one, &c.*; and so, for brevity's sake, has been called personal. Now, we, who are not capable of knowing what it is that constitutes different persons among the creatures, cannot expect the Scripture should teach us what lies at the bottom of this distinction of divine persons. We can only learn from thence, how they appear to be different by their several offices, relations, &c. And this is all we can know of the difference of persons, who cannot be distinguished by the common properties of their nature. We can find no likeness to the personal distinction in the Deity among angels or men: and this is the force of all the objections against the account given of it in Scripture. We cannot find two or more persons, who are one angel, or one man. And there was no necessity for this, seeing another angel or man might be made to answer all the purposes for which such a distinction could be supposed needful. But without such a distinction in the Deity, there could never have appeared such all-sufficiency and perfection of character, as the Scripture sets before us for the object of our worship, nor could there ever have been any ground of hope for the guilty. And, indeed, it is only those whose comfort depends entirely on it, who will heartily approve the revealed account of the Deity. While the Scripture

clearly distinguishes those works wherein the Deity appears acting alone, it also points forth **THREE**, who are often declared to be **ONE**, as acting each his part in the same work, even in all the works by which the one true God is distinguished from all idols and creatures. And particular care is taken to ascribe every Divine work and perfection to him who humbled himself unto death, that the evidence might be very clear, where the objection might seem strongest; and this not in a few more obscure passages, but in the most open manner throughout the Scripture; and far more suitable to strike the conscience, than any artful cautious form of words framed by the wisdom of men.

Yet, though this doctrine does by no means rest upon the skill of the critic; and though the most crafty reasoner, however much he might divert himself by playing on his own words, was never able to fix the least inconsistency upon it; we may find many, who pretend no small regard to the Scripture, ready to urge the same question with the Jews on the like occasion, *How long dost thou make us to doubt?—Tell us plainly.* They can show us how it ought to have been expressed, in order to have been worthy of their belief; and appear ready to credit it, had it been so expressed. But shall we believe them? May we not rather judge they would exclaim against it as blasphemy, as the Jewish rulers did, when Jesus, in the most explicit manner, so as to supersede all occasion for any more questions, declared who he was in their presence?

But what I had chiefly in view, in touching on this subject, was to note the strange use such men make of the Scripture. If we hearken to them, we are at a loss to see God at all in the book, which, at first sight, seemed to glow with a discovery of his peculiar glory, from beginning to end. We lose sight of the infinite eminence of the Deity above all creatures, by seeing a creature set up before us, who is almost God, and who must receive worship almost equal to what is due to the Most High. Yea, we cannot see God alone appearing to us in any work. So we are left at the mercy of these gentlemen, to tell us what God is, what is his character, and what peculiar homage we must pay him; for, according to them, we shall find little else in the Scripture, but something like the creed of our eastern neighbours, “The great God, and Mahomet his prophet.” Yet we shall find the Christian piety of such men respected by those who profess to hold the revealed distinction in the Deity. But not every contender for the Athanasian creed loves the foremen-

tioned doctrine, as held forth in the Scriptures. I shall only add here, that it is no small commendation of this doctrine to the conscience of man, that whereas Polytheism infinitely debases every divine perfection, this opens to view an unexpected grandeur and all-sufficiency in the Deity, far surpassing all the most exalted thoughts of the wisest men, yea, drawing the utmost admiration of angels.

I SHALL only mention another instance. The Scripture clearly asserts the Sovereignty of God, as having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he will; and repels the strongest objection that ever was made against it, *Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?* It is well known, that in point of reasoning, aside from the authority of revelation, the opposite doctrine is pressed with difficulties at least equal to those which affect this.— Yet many who profess to reverence the Scriptures as a divine revelation, reject this doctrine with scorn, though it be revealed there as clear as words can make it; and that not in one or two passages, but interwoven with the whole style of the Scriptures, and supported by a variety of facts recorded there. They reject it, why? Because they know not what it is to be God, and to have understanding and power like him.— They can entertain no notion of human freedom, unless it be altogether independent of God. They cannot raise their thoughts of God so high, as to admit that he can make creatures, having a will of their own, or freedom of choice, so as to be praise or blame worthy in the exercise thereof; yet all the while living, moving, and having their being and dependence on him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, and overrules the motions of his creatures, in a manner far beyond what they are conscious of, and such as no way enters into their consideration, among the thoughts or motives which immediately influence their conduct.\*—

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\* It may warrantably be said, that man has a will or freedom of choice of his own, distinct from that of the Deity. But he who imagines he has any will, liberty, or power of action, altogether independent of the Deity, may, to borrow an expression from a late writer, justly be said to have a very *deceitful* sense or feeling thereof; for both the works and words of God concur with the natural conscience of man, to show the vanity of any such imagination. Yet it cannot be denied, that human nature is, in its present state, affected with a twofold deceitful sense of liberty and power. Man, not apprehending any compulsory restraint upon his choice of right or wrong, or, to speak more properly, depriving him of choice, presumes he may take the liberty to disobey the dictates of his conscience, or the known will of God, with hopes of impunity;



Why, Because whatever machines they can make, they can not imitate God in this ; and because they cannot see among the creatures any subordination resembling this. But we have instances in Scripture, both of repentance and despair in men, who, after they sinned, knew that their sin was infallibly foretold ; yet neither he who repented, nor he who despaired, drew the least alleviation of his guilt (but the contrary) from the divine predilection ; as well knowing, that it no way entered into his thoughts as a motive to sin. And, indeed, the conscience of every man must first and last bear witness to this, that when he sins, he is not tempted of God, but drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

The objectors are not willing to allow any superiority to God, but such as one creature may be supposed to have over others. They incline still to think of God as resembling the first magistrate in a free state, who is bound himself to observe the laws he enforces upon others. Hence the many idle

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for this presumptuous imagination is the spring of all his disobedience. And he likewise readily imagines, he has power to compass his own designs, independently of the secret purpose and predetermination of the Deity, and his sovereign direction of all events. Both these imaginations are closely connected together, and took place in human nature at the same time, from the same source. They were instilled into it by the first deceiver, who, by artful reasoning, corrupted man's nature or original sense of dignity, by filling him with the thought of being as God. This sense of dignity, when corrupted, came justly to be called *pride*. These imaginations then arise from pride. As pride is founded in deceit, all its feelings are deceitful. And they may justly be considered as *counter-feelings* to the natural ones, namely, the dictates of conscience, implanted in man's original frame by the Deity. All mankind are conducted by these counter-feelings, except those in whom they are overruled by the evidence of the truth of the gospel, which alone can teach men, how unreserved submission to the Deity can be consistent with their happiness. Since man thought of being as God, and in consequence of this, disappointment and misery have attended all his schemes of happiness, it has proved matter of endless disputes among mankind, to reconcile the remaining traces of the dignity of human nature, once framed for better circumstances, with the various continued tokens and notices of the majesty and sovereignty of the Supreme Being, which the unwearied efforts of the pride of men, in all ages, have never yet been able to efface. Some, exalting man, lose sight of the Deity ; others, admitting the existence of the Deity, lose sight of human nature. The former, while they would have man be as God, knowing good and evil, can find no place for the Divine sovereignty. The latter, admitting some notion of the Divine sovereignty, are at a loss to see how man is capable of doing good or evil, or of being praise or blame worthy in his actions. The reasonings of the former lead to speculative, those of the latter to practical Atheism. The former lead us to think there is no God, the latter to act as if there was none.

reasonings we have heard about the ends of government, which men with great assurance apply to God; not reflecting, that of every earthly potentate it must be said, that his very being as a prince, his dignity, wealth, and power, consist in his having subjects. Yet mortals, as once was said of the haughty prince of Tyre, set their hearts as the heart of God, and think of circumscribing them by the same laws by which they themselves are bound. But how shall that law which commands devotion to what is above us, and our regard to our equals be applied to the Deity? For thus runs the sum of the divine law to man, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,—and thy neighbour as thyself.* Can we find a superior to whom the Deity owes reverence; or an equal to whom he owes affection?

The objectors are not satisfied, how God can say, as he does to Cyprus, (*Is. xlv, 7.*) in opposition to the two principles of the Persians, *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these.* They are not satisfied how he creates the latter, in order to show his glory, and proper delight in opposing, defeating, and making them give place to the former, so as to appear the author\* of

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\* *Author*, when applied to the Deity, is an expression borrowed from the works of men, referring to the appearance they have of genius, contrivance, and design, and denotes the contriver. For we do not inquire who is the author of a heap of rubbish, or any disorderly assemblage of things, wherein no design appears. Moses's description of the first condition of the earth, is variously rendered by the several Greek translators; but it is manifest they all intend to point out darkness and confusion, or a chaos. Of this we are informed, God was the cause or creator. Yet he does not appear to us causing, creating, or giving it being, under any notion we have, either by nature or revelation of the operation of power, or of the connection betwixt cause and effect. All that we can know of the matter then is, that he was cause or creator of it, in a manner known only to himself, and which the minds of creatures were never framed to understand. The highest notion given us in Scripture of the Deity's operation as a cause is, that *he spake, and it was*; which some way corresponds with our highest idea of the exertion of power among men: *Where the word of a king is, there is power.* Hence the centurion, in the gospel, raised his idea of the divine power of Jesus. But, then, the Deity is not exhibited to us as speaking, till he commands the light to shine out of darkness. Here God first presents himself to our apprehension as an *author*. His manner of causing, and the effect, are set before us in their connection. The power of the Divine Spirit is represented as in readiness to execute what was spoken; and the Divine approbation is signified, in beholding with complacence as good the work done, according to the word spoken.

God never appeared to men, but in operating what is good, and in opposing what is evil. It is true, the state of darkness and confusion is first related to us. But man never had occasion to be puzzled with

light and peace. They cannot look with attentive delight on the great architect proceeding in his work, and rearing up to view his beautiful fabric, out of a confused heap of unshapely materials, till once they be satisfied how he procured these materials, and where he found them so unshapely. And to tell many reasoners he created them, sounds only in their ears like saying, he found them where they were not. Yet, thus the first scene of the grand drama of the universe is opened. As soon as the curtain is drawn, or any object offered to our thoughts, or rather when our minds are carried back from the present beauty of the universe, to the remotest point of view, a dark confused mass is presented. And we are informed, by a short prologue, that God was the cause or beginner of the whole, to guard us against imagining any other eternal principle. And this is all we can learn of the matter. To pry farther back is utterly in vain. But we shall receive all reasonable satisfaction, if we will have patience to attend on God, proceeding in what is more properly called his work, which he carries forward in so gradual a manner, and so inviting to our attention, as plainly to show, he wants

the contemplation of this state of things; nor could he be informed of it, till after he was acquainted with light and order. The information, then, while it carried back his thoughts to chaos, as the remotest point of view, or the boundary of his imagination, behooved to heighten his idea of the beautiful workmanship, he was already acquainted with.

Our apprehension of, or delight in what is good, is always heightened in proportion as we perceive it contrasted with the opposite evil, or as our view of the contrast is enlarged. We have a higher, as well as clearer idea of wisdom and power, in the production of light and order out of opposite principles, than we could have had without such opposition.

It is easy to apply what is now said to the entrance of sin into the world. In the third chapter of Genesis, we have the author particularly described to us, as introducing it into the world by deceitful words and actions. At the same time, the Deity appears opposing it, in the most explicit manner. Besides, what else is sin but disaffection to the Deity, in the mind of a creature bound by the highest obligations to obedience? In the very nature of the thing, then, we cannot think of the Deity on the one hand, and sin on the other, without perceiving the greatest opposition betwixt them.

It may, with great confidence, be said, that never was any word or work of God heard or seen by men, that did not carry in it proofs of his good intention and opposition to evil. In the New Testament, we see God as an *author* by what he is said to be the God of; as, *God is not of confusion, but of peace*. To give this expression a familiar turn in English, our translators have said, *God is not the author of confusion, &c.* Accordingly, he often takes the titles of *God of peace, consolation, all grace*; &c.; and in opposing evil, *the God of vengeance*.

to be more especially known to us thereby. We shall perceive him in every part of his work speaking, acting, and beholding what is made with delight, or seeing it good, in opposition to the state wherein it was before; and this, day after day, till he rests with man on the seventh, from all his works, which he *created*\* TO MAKE, *Gen. ii, 3.*

I scarcely need to add, that the case is the same with respect to the entrance of sin and misery into the world, and the grand design which God is carrying forward, of making thence to arise the brightest discovery of righteousness and salvation together;† as is plainly intimated in the words immediately following the last quotation from Isaiah. As the sinful state of mankind is often compared to the first condition of the earth, and salvation from sin, to the producing of

\* Here *creating* is plainly used in its distinguished sense, hinted at in the foregoing note; for it is often used for making, and sometimes includes both senses, to wit, the formation of all things, as well as the finding matter to work upon, or the making room for the divine working to appear. Perhaps it includes both these senses, in the summary view given us of the production of all things, in the first verse of the Bible. The Hebrew word for *creating*, is sometimes applied to the actions of men, as Josh. xvii, 15, 18, where it seems to be used for clearing out among forests, or making room for beginning a settlement. The Greek translators, not finding any fitter expression for denoting the distinguished sense of this word, in the passage of Moses above referred to, have said, *Which God BEGAN to make.* There is no action among men that affords an idea in any respect similar to the distinguished sense of this word. We must rest satisfied, then, with the information given us, that God is the beginner of all things, in a manner peculiar to, and known only to himself; even as the progress and issue of all things is in his hands. Accordingly, he distinguishes himself from all idols and creatures, both in understanding and in power, by taking to himself the title of *THE FIRST AND THE LAST.*

This is not the only instance of a distinguished sense of words in the first chapter of Genesis: for surely we must understand the words, *earth, darkness, deep, and waters*, v. 2, in a sense distinguished from what they signify after the earth is fully formed. And it is evident, that such distinction was unavoidable, in describing to men the first origin and formation of all things.

† The province of man is to imitate God, and concur with him in his work of bringing good out of evil, in doing the works of righteousness, mercy, and kindness. For in these God manifests his character to us; in these he exhibits his working to our view, laying open all his designs, so as we might behold and consider his work on every side. But how God creates evil, was never intended for the contemplation of creatures; nor were their understandings ever framed for such an inquiry. This may be justly considered as that part of the divine agency which is hid behind the curtain, which can only be understood by the mind of him who has power to create, and the particular knowledge of which must be as far from being of any benefit to creatures, or all who have not power to create, as it is from being suited to their understandings.



light and order at the first, I shall only mention one passage, Is. lx, 2,—*Darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the people: but the Lord shall rise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.* Thus, we see, that the entrance of sin and misery into the world, was as fixed a part in the scheme of God as the great salvation; yet we cannot see God in the former, as we do in the latter. We cannot see him by keeping our eye only on the shade; but if we love the grand picture, we will not put the murmuring question, Why or how did the shade take place? The Apostle Paul, speaking of the happiness of those who are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, as not only saved, but saved glorying in God, adds, *Rom. v. 12.* (*δία τουτο.*) *For this, namely, that this brightest discovery of the divine glory, this highest perfection of human happiness might take place, sin entered into the world.* But, not to enlarge, methinks we may easily be convinced, that Christians are not very numerous in the world, while we find so few who are fond of this doctrine which fixes the dependance of man upon God exclusive of all reserve;\* yet this very doctrine is the sure refuge of the wretched and the destitute, yea, of all who enter into the kingdom of heaven. Though this be indeed the case according to the Scripture, we may find some who profess to acknowledge it, holding it so very cheap, as to think those who reject it may yet be very good Christians; whereas, if one should

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\* How far the Deity, exhibited in the Scriptures, is above what is worshiped by a great part of those who bear the Christian name, may appear from such passages as these: Gen. 1, 20; Joseph says to his brethren, *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.* Exod. ix, 16, it is said to Pharaoh, *And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.* Isa. x, 5—16, *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge. —Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither does his heart think so. —For he saith, —Shall I not, as I have to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, that —I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom: for I am prudent. —Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? &c.* Acts ii, 23; *Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.* Chap. iii, 13, *Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.* Chap. xv, 18, *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

treat the writings of Cicero as the Christian enemies of this doctrine do the Scriptures, he would be universally hissed at by all the lovers of classical learning. But numbers rule the fashion, and can keep one another in countenance as to any thing. And we must expect no other, while it is the interest of multitudes to honour Christianity in pretence, and to hate it in reality. However, we may frankly say, that such a one as Lord Bolingbroke, who hates this doctrine, and therefore rejects the Scripture which clearly supports it, acts a far more uniform and consistent part.

BEFORE I conclude these miscellaneous reflections on *mystery*, which have introduced several views of the mystery of godliness, and that of iniquity; we may take some particular notice of the popular preachers; and the rather, as it was with men of this sort that the apostles had always the warmest controversy.

As they generally consider their hearers as already persuaded of the truth of the gospel, they have no great occasion to dwell much on the evidence thereof. Their great business is, to animate their people who are already *believers*; nay, but who are supposed to hold the gospel for true, as having never had any question or doubt about it; to animate them, I say, and carry them forward to the grand work of the *believing application*; to conduct them through the process of what they call *regeneration*, or the *new birth*. Here it is that a cabinet full of mysteries is presented, of which the popular preachers keep the key. Here it is they show their great dexterity in opening and shutting at their pleasure; now raising blind amazement, then familiarly reasoning; now setting forth, as rational or natural, a scheme\* of justifi-

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\* Mr. Boston, as if he had learned to apply mathematics to the Christian doctrine, is ready to show us by what *ratio* or rule of proportion we are to expect the favours of the divine grace or pardoning mercy to be distributed among men, who are yet acknowledged to be equally destitute of any claim upon that grace, in a sermon on *Luke* xxiii, 42; entitled, *The extraordinary case of the thief upon the cross, &c.* He says, "It is unreasonable to think, that it should fare at last with those who have had means of grace all their days, and despised them, as it may do with those who never have such means till they come to die." In like manner, we must say, it is unreasonable to think, that he who owes five hundred pence should be forgiven as frankly as he who owes only fifty. If we hearken to this eminent preacher, and others of his class, we must entertain a *rational* notion of divine grace, and say, Happy are they who have little to be forgiven, but wo to the worthless. And, indeed, it is very common with them, when they emerge a

cation as any philosopher could wish, then again wrapping up all in the clouds. But to avoid any ambiguous play on words, as unsuitable to the gravity of the subject, instead of *mysteries* in the sense used by them, I would choose to borrow an expression from some ancient professors of Christianity, censured by the Apostle John, and substitute the word *depths*. Now, it may be observed of these preachers, that while, on the one hand, they endeavoured to regulate by natural principles, suitable to the pride of any reasoner, that procedure of the divine grace to men, which, according to the apostles, moved without the sphere of nature altogether, and always showed itself in surprising events, contrary to human expectation: on the other hand, in the place where the Scripture holds forth a clear and solid truth for relief to the guilty, they present to our thoughts an unfathomable depth. If we hearken to them, the great point about which our faith is principally concerned, is a matter which turns out to be true, no book nor man can tell how. It does not present itself to us as a truth, but as a matter of no small doubtfulness and anxiety. We must toss it in our hearts for some time, by way of a problem, and then hammer it into a truth, as an eager logician squeezes out a conclusion from betwixt a pair of premises, of which the one happens to be a fond and bold conjecture. Yet, sometimes they condescend to exert themselves to make this depth as fordable as possible, and that in a manner which in some sort may be called mysterious, as being so closely wrapped up in figures and similitudes, as that if these were removed, little or no meaning would remain behind. I shall give a short specimen.—In the gospel-offer, we are told, is presented to the poor bankrupt a bond or bill endorsed to him, to relieve him from his poverty. It is not his as yet; however, with much ado he at last lays hold upon it, echoing back to the offer, and saying, *Even so I take it*: upon which he takes instruments, and places counsel to make payment forthcoming for his relief; so it becomes his to all intents and purposes.—He that is made wiser by this reasoning, may rejoice therein!—But as I may have opportunities of observing further the arts of these gentlemen in the sequel, I shall not enlarge on them at present.

I shall conclude these reflections with observing, that in the very entrance to the Christian religion, the first step we make

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little out of their depths to address their hearers thus:—"But we must deal with you as with rational creatures, and work upon you by rational arguments."

carries us beyond the line of nature altogether; that is, when we believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Here the course of nature is reversed; here a new order of things quite above it opens to our view. He who admits this fact as circumstanced in the gospel-history, will find as regular and uniform a connection in all the parts of the Christian religion, or in all the things that concern the kingdom of heaven, as is to be found in the course of nature; yea, and more so; seeing the course of nature has been often thwarted by the manifest interposition of its author, not to mention the interruptions of its ordinary course by uncommon events; whereas, that kingdom cannot be moved. Seeing, then, the whole religion of Jesus stands or falls with his resurrection, no man can with a good grace appear in quality of a reasoner against any of its doctrines, but he who disputes that fact. Accordingly, some of our boldest enemies to these doctrines have been sensible of this, and, scorning to involve themselves in a continued train of absurdity and self-contradiction, have judged it the shortest and most rational course, to point their battery against the fact which supports them; whereas, all who pretend to admit the resurrection of Jesus, and yet go about to undermine any of the doctrines delivered by the inspired witnesses thereof, give manifest proof of gross inattention or disingenuity, or rather both.

#### ON REASON.

REASON being often contrasted with mystery and faith, it may be proper to inquire what deserves the name of right reason. I say right reason, because nothing is more obvious, than that men are often influenced in their practice by reasons of which they are ashamed both before and after action; and, accordingly, are at pains to pretend plausible reasons to cover those which they can neither avow to others, nor approve of themselves.

Not to be tedious, I think we may freely say, that the proper excellency of man above other animals, lies in his conscience, or what he knows without reasoning. It may likewise be said that man has, in common with other animals, a reasoning faculty, by which he is capable of recollecting, comparing, and observing the connection, agreement, or difference of the things which he knows. His reasoning faculty, then, having, beyond what he knows in common with other animals, a peculiar and higher province of knowledge where-



in to exercise itself, acquires thereby an excellency above the same faculty in them. The like may be said of human passions and organs of sensation. The conscience of man, not only affords a peculiar province for the exercise of his animal faculties, but is likewise the authentic director and governor of them all. Thus the conscience of man spreads a dignity and excellency over all the powers of mind and body which he has in common with other animals.

To illustrate what has been said, it may be observed, that some domestic animals bear much the like respect toward man, as man does toward his Creator. They are happy in being caressed by man, and grieved at the tokens of his displeasure; and discover a consciousness of what will please and displease him. In this respect some are said to be unruly and vicious, and others tractable and obsequious. Thus their conduct appears to be influenced by reasons, though of a lower order than those which serve to direct the conduct of man. The spirit of a beast goeth downward, being conversant only about terrestrial objects; whereas, the spirit of man goeth upward, corresponding with his Maker by the dictates of his conscience. But, besides the indelible dictates of conscience, the mind of man has somehow been furnished with other notions on which he reasons; and so much the more fondly, as he finds them necessary to his present quiet: notions of a more dubious and disputable nature than these dictates, and serving to abate their force, which, therefore, may be called presumptuous.

Philosophy, which proposes to teach us from nature such knowledge of the Deity and of ourselves as may lead us to happiness, accounts every sentiment, or conclusion drawn from our sentiments, that serves to make us miserable, to be foolish and absurd; and every sentiment or conclusion which it finds necessary to our happiness, to be just and true.

That God is not perfectly and invariably just; that he may suffer sins, at least some of them, to pass unpunished; that man has found some liberty or power independent of the Deity; and several other notions of the like nature are fondly adopted by many as first principles in all their reasonings; and they go about to prove them, by pointing out the absurd or unhappy consequences that would follow on denying them. Yet they may be easily distinguished from the invariable and universal dictates of conscience, by their being somewhat doubtful and disputable, and assuming occasionally various forms to evade objections; for many able reasoners have opposed them with as great confidence, and with as strong arguments, as were

ever used in support of them ; whereas, no man can with a good grace dispute against the dictates of conscience, and persuade us, for instance, to approve ingratitude, breach of trust, or false swearing.

How these presumptions came to take place in the mind of man, to take root and grow up so readily there, as to be mistaken by many for original plants in his nature, cannot be accounted for any other way so well as by the Scripture. If, in allusion to the parable, it should be asked, seeing good seed was sown in this field, from whence then hath it tares ? the answer I think must be, An enemy hath done this.

However, it is manifest, that men generally delight to exercise their reasoning faculty in support of these presumptions, because the simple dictates of conscience afford them no agreeable fund for reasoning. Yet these dictates are the only original standard measures or reasons for the conduct of men. The fair use of these, or the just application of them to particular cases in word or action, is right reasoning, or acting a reasonable part. And he who goes about to shorten or lengthen these measures, to use them deceitfully, or substitute others in their places, is guilty of unfair measuring, or reasoning wrong ; so acts an unreasonable part.

The just reasons for our conduct are impressed on our hearts by him who made us, and not invented by men, and to use them aright, is the proper exercise of our reasoning faculty, yea, of all our powers both of mind and body. Yet that which men generally glory in, as their distinguishing excellency above other animals, is that exercise of their reasoning faculty which proceeds upon the presumptions of pride, and is employed in supporting them, and drawing soothing inferences from them. And thus men glory in their shame.

When the truth of the gospel takes place in the heart of a man, it does by no means set aside the use of his reasoning faculty ; but rather, by enlarging the bounds of his knowledge, provides it with a new province, wherein it may exercise itself with greater certainty and delight. It affirms in the strongest manner all the notices of God, all the reasons of duty naturally imprinted in his conscience ; and adds to them what was entirely wanting before, namely, a *Divine reason of hope*. And thus it disentangles him from the necessity wherewith he found himself pressed, of debasing his own nature, and defacing the Divine character, by reasoning on mere presumptions, in order to invent some ground of hope for his temporary support. The strictest reasoner, then, can have no objection against the gospel, unless he will quarrel

with it, because it provides guilty man with a source of comfort without the aid of his reasoning faculty, or where all his natural funds for reasoning proved utterly deficient.

Agreeably to this, we may understand how the apostles are said to address themselves, on the part of God, to man. They did not make their court to his reasoning faculty by philosophical arguments, nor to his passions by the insinuating arts of human rhetoric; but, as man is not distinguished from the other animals by either of these, they considered him in his proper point of excellency; and, *by manifestation of the truth,\* commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* They considered the heart of man as strongly fortified, with presumptuous reasonings, against the knowledge of God, and the doctrine of Christ; and they did not make their address to these; but they compare their testimony to *weapons, mighty through God for the demolishing (συχνοματων) of fortifications, casting down (λογισμος) reasonings, and every (υψωμα) eminence exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity (παινωμα) every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

As they exhibit no allurements to the passions of man; so neither do they enter into any parley of capitulation with his presumptuous reasonings; but storming and demolishing these they press forward to his conscience, charge him before God, and converse with him there. They clear up and present, in a striking view, before him, the half-defaced reasons of duty, naturally imprinted in his heart, and show him at once, how unsuitable to them his thoughts and actions have been. They unshackle his conscience and make it speak out, and with the highest demonstration, enforce every thing it speaks.

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\* These words refer to the ancient oracle of Urim and Thummim, by which the inquirer was assured that the answer came from God when he saw the miraculous ray of light shining on the breast-plate of the priest who pronounced the answer. To support this reference, it is observable, that the common Greek translation of Urim and Thummim is by two words signifying *manifestation* and *truth*; which indeed served well to distinguish the Divine from all pretended oracles, which were both obscure and fallacious. So the evidence of the apostolic testimony, which is the true oracle of Urim and Thummim, is fitted to strike the conscience with the simplicity and force of a ray of light; and not like the conclusion of a philosophic argument, by which we are often silenced, merely to shun an inconsistency, or the shame of self-contradiction; and which, at any rate, is too weak to support the mind when outward calamities, or the near approach of death give an edge to remorse. The truth of the gospel is ratified in the heart of man, by the same hand which planted there his original notions of right and wrong, which prevent all his reasonings.

And while they shut up all his imagined sources of light and hope, they furnish him with a supernatural reason of hope, stamped with the Divine character.

Now, it must be remembered, that all reasons of duty uncomplained with, turn out to be reasons of condemnation, reasons of misery and despair. But, then, who will choose to exercise his reasoning faculty to make himself miserable, by fixing his own condemnation? All men will rather incline to judge every chain of reasoning that would issue in their own misery, by leading them to despair, to be very inconclusive, and most disagreeably absurd. Therefore, men in all ages have found it convenient to have recourse to another fund of reasoning than the natural conscience, and to invent other notions than the natural ones. This can only be done by vitiating these last, and accommodating them to the present circumstances of man, so as he may support himself for a while in this mortal life with some ease and quiet. And though these invented notions do not appear at first view to be so clearly and indisputably true, as the natural ones; yet as men fondly wish them to be true, and in many respects find them necessary, they are ready to show how many sad and absurd consequences would follow on denying them. And by being accustomed thus to reason backward, from these absurd and unhappy consequences, many come to something like a settled persuasion that they are true; and are fortified in this persuasion, by observing, that the far greater part of learned and judicious men find it necessary to reason in the same way.

Every man who understands the gospel as a reason of hope, hears the voice of God therein. And the voice of God has an evidence and authority attending it, altogether peculiar to itself. Man's sense of duty, or sinful man's sense of misery, flows from the voice of God in his conscience. And therefore no voice, argument, or reason, of inferior weight, can bring him effectual relief. That authority which formed the conscience of man, can alone speak peace to it when troubled with the conviction of sin. Now, if we could for a moment suppose the revealed reason of hope to be divested of its peculiar evidence and authority, and to be coolly referred, on a footing with a philosophic problem or argument, to be examined and discussed by the reasoning faculty of man: the question immediately arises, what notion is man already possessed of, with which he may compare this new revelation, so as to judge of its fitness or unfitness to be admitted? If, indeed, it contradicted, or served to overthrow any of his natural notions;



for instance, it represented God as less severe against sin than he appears in the natural conscience, he would then have just cause to reject it immediately and to conclude that it came not from the same God who made him and formed his conscience. Yet the question still remains, what notions has man with which he may compare the revealed reason of hope? All his natural notions of duty, if he is a sinner, are so many reasons of despair. They all join in forbidding him to entertain any hope of acceptance with God. On the other hand, the gospel pays no regard to his invented notions, from which he labours to extract hope. It discards them as spurious; it repels them as foolish and groundless imaginations.

Thus it appears, that man has no natural notions with which he may compare the revealed reason of hope; yea, none but reasons of despair, imprinted in his heart by the hand of the Almighty. Therefore, a solid reason of hope cannot be conveyed into the heart of man from an inferior hand. It must affect his conscience with that peculiar evidence and authority which attends the voice of the Almighty. And this is, indeed, the case with the gospel. It affirms all his reasons of duty; it enforces all his reasons of despair; and, removing all impediments and extenuations, shows them in their greatest weight; and yet at the same time provides a divine reason of hope, that fairly outweighs them. Yet the invented notions, or spurious reasons of hope, are found so necessary to support our corrupted sense of dignity, and to encourage our propensity toward the forfeited earthly happiness, that it cannot be expected that any man will yield them up, or be willing to see them in their proper light, till his thoughts be overruled by the peculiar evidence and authority attending the divine reason of hope.

THE conveyance of the reason of hope to men, may receive some illustration, by being compared with the conveyance of such reasons of duty as God hath occasionally superadded to those original ones which are common to all men. I shall only take notice of two instances, *viz.* the command given to the parents of mankind, concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son. The former carried in it a restraint of man's liberty, in using what he had a natural appetite for. His natural notions could never lead him to make any difference among trees appearing to him equally good; and the prohibited tree appeared every way as fit for his use as any other. His reason for abstaining, then, behooved to arise wholly from

the authority attending the giving of the command, or the evidence he had of its coming from the author of his life, and who had power to take it away if he transgressed. When once this impression was made on his heart, or this new dictate took place in his conscience, he behoved, even respecting his own happiness, to judge it more reasonable to comply with a limitation of his freedom, than to forfeit his life and happiness altogether by transgression. In like manner, as to the case of Abraham, we may be very sure his natural notions could never lead him to put to death his own beloved son, in the prospect of whose issue all his hopes of happiness centred. Yea, if he had not had a higher idea of God than most reasoners have, he behoved to have rejected the command at first hearing. But he knew, that the command came from that same God who had given him Isaac, after he and Sarah his wife, were incapable, according to nature, of having children, and who was able to restore him to life again after he should be slain, and so make good the promise he had formerly made concerning him. And thus his obedience was, in every respect, highly reasonable, and issued in a notable confirmation of his hope. Will the word of a great and liberal prince, prove a powerful reason with a man of spirit to animate him to the most hazardous enterprises, and disentangle him at once from many little schemes and projects wherein he formerly found it both reasonable and necessary to interest himself? How much more must the word of the Most High prove a prevailing reason with one who knows he hears his voice? And who can deny, that he who formed the conscience of man, may so speak as to make the hearer fully sensible who is the speaker?

In this view only, we see reason in the conduct of the apostles, which otherwise behoved to appear, in many respects unaccountable. Thus, their doctrine is fitly called (*λογικον γαλα*) the only rational nourishment for the mind of man, and the tenor of life which they enjoined, (*λογικη λατρεια*) a reasonable service. If any one inclines rather to render the Greek epithet, in the two places referred to, by the English one, *scriptural* or *evangelical*, I am far from being disposed to contend with him; for *scriptural* and *rational* are words of the same import in the ears of a Christian, or rather, the former ascertains and enlarges the import of the latter. The apostles found all who employed their reasoning faculty against their gospel, to be no less (*ατοποι*) unreasonable than wicked. The Scriptures open a new fund of reasoning to Christians; and the apostles serve as an authentic pattern for the fair use of

it, and as a check upon all who would handle the word of God deceitfully.

The utmost length our natural notions can carry us, with regard to the supernatural agency of the Deity, when intimated to us with evidence worthy of our serious attention, is to judge, that what is *impossible with men*, or as to which men cannot conceive how it is possible, is yet *possible with God*. Accordingly, the gospel introduces itself to the consciences of men with this question, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? We have no natural notions helping us to conceive how God can raise one who has suffered death for sin, to an endless life of pleasure, absolutely free from all pain. Neither have we any notions helping us to conceive how God can justify an unjust person, without his doing anything to make himself just; or how he can impart righteousness to such a one, so as he may be sustained as a righteous person in all respects, in his presence, and accordingly entitled to eternal happiness. Yet if it appear by undeniable evidence, that God hath raised one from death to eternal happiness, and the justification of the unjust be declared as the genuine import of this fact, and the same power that was manifest in raising the dead, appear attending this declaration; then, upon my conviction of the truth of the resurrection, I may conceive how God can also justify the ungodly; especially if I find it impossible to account for what has actually happened any other way.

If it appear, by the circumstances, that he who died and rose, was not only a righteous, but also a divine person; if it appear impossible that such a person should lead a life of painful service, and at last become exceedingly sorrowful unto death, unless to expatiate the sins of others, and furnish them with a righteousness; and if it also appear impossible, that one suffering death for sin, should be raised again to a happy life, unless the Divine displeasure against sin had been fully manifested in his suffering; or that one undertaking to fulfil all righteousness, should be honoured with a resurrection if he had failed in his undertaking; if, at the same, my conscience condemn me as an unrighteous person, and exclude all hope of relief from any natural source; if, I say, my thoughts come thus to be straitened on every other side, I must find a very sensible relief to my mind, in admitting the declaration issued in the bosom of the evidence of the resurrection, viz. that he who died and rose again, *was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*. He who has been thus straitened, will find this apostolic de-

claration to be the only satisfactory, the only rational account that can be given of the forementioned circumstances. He will find such an agreement betwixt the doctrine and the fact, as was intimated in the question, "Whether it is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee? or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk."

THOUGH I am not fond of claiming any kindred to philosophers; yet, I shall here quote a passage from the well-known *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*; and the rather, as in Scotland they have lately obtained a considerable share of the public attention. In the following passage, the words *reason* and *reasoning* are obviously both used in the same sense wherein I have been using the last of them. "To substitute feeling in place of reason and demonstration, may seem to put the evidence of the Deity upon too low a footing. But human reason is not so mighty an affair as philosophers vainly pretend. It affords very little aid in making original discoveries. The comparing of things together, and directing our inferences from feeling and experience, are its proper province. It enlarges our views of final causes, and of the prevalence of wisdom and goodness. But the application of the argument, from final causes, to prove the existence of a Deity, and the force of our conclusion, from the beautiful and orderly effects to a designing cause, are not from reason but from an internal light, which shows things in their relation of cause and effect. These conclusions rest entirely upon sense and feeling. And it is surprising, that writers should overlook what is so natural and obvious. But the pride of man's heart makes him desire to extend his discoveries by dint of reasoning: for reasoning is our own work.—There is merit, and acuteness, and penetration; and we are better pleased to assume merit to ourselves, than humbly to acknowledge, that, to the most important discoveries, we are directly led by the hand of the Almighty."

Philosophy could not teach this writer what the Scripture readily teaches the most illiterate, that is, to follow out the distinction betwixt conscience and pride, which he has in part discovered. Therefore, he may be said to have pushed his inquiries either too far or too short a length; too far to please some philosophers, and too short to please those who learn their religion simply from the Bible. Accordingly, in his reasoning about liberty and necessity, in order to adjust certain contradictory sentiments or feelings which he observed in human nature, he has found himself obliged to make use of



some obnoxious terms, which even he himself adopts at first with some air of diffidence, and which have exposed him to the charge of heresy in the eyes of many, no better friends to the ancient gospel, and perhaps, less attentive to the subject whereof he treats, than himself. No question relating to actions, as worthy of praise or blame, reward or punishment, can justly be carried higher than, Have we done what we ought, or what we ought not, according to his own will, inclination, or choice? If we go further, we transgress the limits prescribed to man, and step into the peculiar province of the Deity; and, then, as we reason without any rule of reasoning, we can neither speak what is true, nor indeed what is clearly intelligible. All those sentiments or feelings acknowledged to be deceitful, are at the same time disloyal; they belong to the presumptions of that pride which leads us both to extenuate our blame, by throwing it partly on the circumstances wherein the Deity placed us, and to glory in what is praiseworthy about us, as if we held it independently of the Deity. But the Apostle James has fully handled this plea, and to Christians decided it, marking with strong and pertinently significant expressions of blame,\* all those sentiments which stand opposed to that meekness with which the truth of the gospel is admitted by them who understand it.

IT may prove no wide digression, to take this occasion of making some comparison betwixt philosophy, as far as it respects religion, and the popular doctrine, in order to show that the former has in the main no room for glorying over the latter. And I choose the rather to take this occasion, as I have not seen any scheme of philosophic religion preferable to that contained in those essays, or wherein human nature has been considered with greater attention.

It is the business of philosophy to act the same part toward the natural, as the popular doctrine does toward the revealed truth. The ablest popular preacher is he who can most profoundly, or mysteriously accommodate the gospel to the religious pride of the devotee. And he is the ablest philosopher who and most ingeniously accommodate the law of nature, or the operations of conscience, to the common corruption of human nature; or who can most commodiously adjust the contradictions evidently observable in the nature of man for promoting his quiet and self-satisfaction. In this respect I have not seen our author excelled by any.

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\* *Ῥυκαρία καὶ ὠςπισσεία κακίας*, James i, 21.

He sets out from this principle, [p. 39.,] That "the common nature of every class of beings is felt by us as perfect; and, therefore, if in any instance a particular being swerve from the common nature of its kind, the action upon that account is accompanied by a sense of disorder and wrong. Thus, as we have a sense of right from every action which is conformable to this common nature, the laws which ought to govern every animal, are to be derived from no other source than the common nature of the species."

In surveying the common nature of mankind, he observes two sources of notions, feelings, or sentiments; those proceeding from the one, very contradictory to those proceeding from the other, yea, no less opposite than truth and falsehood. One would have thought, that this peculiarity which he observed in human nature, might have stopt him short in his course of reasoning, by way of analogy, from the common nature of any other species of animals, or class of beings, which he perceived as perfect, or wherein he observed nothing contradictory; for when we see things contradictory blended together, the idea of disorder and imperfection readily arises in our minds. One would have thought, I say, that this might have led him, though no credit were given to ancient books, to suspect that human nature had undergone some change to the worse, since the time when, according to his own assertion, the Deity beheld it, as well as all his other works, to be very good. But instead of suspecting any thing like this, he goes about to adjust our true and our false sentiments in subserviency to each other, and finds so grand purposes promoted by his adjustment, that he at last works himself up into what he calls a noble enthusiasm, in admiration of such wisdom and goodness appearing to him therein, as he scruples not to call divine. Yet while he is straitened in answering objections against the Divine benevolence, drawn from the appearances of moral evil, he is at pains to reconcile man to the thought of his being an imperfect creature. In some parts of his essays he seems likewise to allow, that our deceitful or false sentiments are rather secondary or after thoughts, than primary ones.

To avoid ambiguity in speaking of liberty, we may call that sense or feeling of it which stands opposed to the dependence which all events have on the first cause, the sense of independency; and that which is opposed to compulsion or constraint, the consciousness of inclination or spontaneous choice. To do this, we are abundantly warranted, both by the sense and words of our author. We are likewise al-

lowed to say, that as man knows not the secret intentions of the first cause till they are made manifest by events, his choice is thereby no way hindered from being spontaneous. Moreover, it is not only allowed, but clearly evinced by our author, that a law is given to man for regulating in many respects his spontaneous choice; and this law is acknowledged to be the voice of the Deity; whence it follows, that if man shall choose to disobey this law, he must necessarily be exposed to the displeasure of the Deity, or real misery.

Keeping, then, these things as fixed points in our eye, we may freely say, that while man retains a just sense of his dependence on the Deity, he can never do what is wrong: for he cannot deliberately choose misery. But, as our author justly observes, when we come to action, or to do what is wrong, the feeling begins to vary. "One fact is certain, that in acting we have a feeling of liberty and independency." Here it must be owned our author has hit on the spring of all disobedience, the true source of all the corruption of human nature, of all the natural and moral evil which prevails in this world, and all the miseries of the world to come. But philosophy could not teach him to consider it in this light; it rather leads him to see some marvellous beauty about it. But, with the good leave of philosophers, methinks one may venture to affirm, that the mind of man is so made, as to approve truth and disapprove falsehood, to see beauty and perfection in the former, deformity and imperfection in the latter, and not only so, but that he has a sense of obligation on the side of truth, teaching him, that he ought to think and act according to it, and that he does wrong when he thinks, or acts otherwise: yea, our author himself says in his forecited first principle, "that the laws which ought to govern every animal, are to be derived from no other source than the common nature of the species."

Now, if it appears that there are some feelings, or sentiments common to man, disapproving of certain others also common to him, and readily entertained by him; if the former bear the stamp of true and right, and the latter of false and wrong; and the former show him, that he ought not to entertain the latter, nor be influenced by them; then it is manifest, even from the common nature of man, that he is not as he ought to be. No wonder, then, that our author is so greatly embarrassed in persuading us to be pleased with ourselves, and to think that man is presently such as he should be; insinuating, that to think otherwise would be to reflect on God for making such a creature as man, or as making

him what in reality, as far as the notion of wrong or blame can take place, he is conscious he makes himself to be by his own choice, in opposition to the known will of God. If our author's apology for the corruption of human nature has any distinct meaning, it lands in the old question, *Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?* But it is not to be supposed that one can always think distinctly, while he is labouring to make truth and falsehood harmonize together in the same breast.

If, then, the conduct of man is to be judged of according to truth, the case must stand thus. His conscience suggests to him his duty, and his dependence on the Deity; but so soon as he inclines or chooses to do wrong, we must say, that the sense of his dependence is weakened and set aside by a deceitful sense of dependency arising in its stead. Thus he is led to hope that he may gratify his bad inclination with impunity. But as soon as the short lived gratification is past, he finds himself disappointed; and remorse, or the sense of merited punishment, takes hold of him. Now, remorse does not arise from any deceitful source, nor rest upon any illusive foundation; but it is the punishment which the Deity has made the necessary consequence of the forementioned sense of independency, and every action proceeding from that deceitful disloyal sense. It is true, that when man is galled with remorse, or with a sense of fear and shame for having spontaneously done what he ought not, he is apt to have recourse to some deceitful sentiments, in order to throw the blame off from himself, as much as he can; and this is what an Apostle, with great propriety, and according to the strictest truth, calls the redundance or superfluity of wickedness. Besides, according to our author himself, to make remorse to proceed upon any other notion of liberty, than what is implied in our having spontaneously done what we ought not, would be making it proceed on the conviction that man is a whimsical, ridiculous, and unaccountable being, a mere absurdity in nature, whose existence could serve no end.

But it is now time to make our proposed comparison.—Our author, speaking of the authority of conscience, (p. 63,) says, "It proceeds from a direct feeling, which we have upon presenting the object, without the intervention of any sort of reflection. And the authority lies in this circumstance, that we feel and perceive the action to be our duty, and what we are indispensably bound to perform. It is in this manner, that the moral sense, with regard to some actions, plainly bears upon it the marks of authority over all our appetites and



affections. It is the voice of God within us, which commands our strictest obedience, just as much as when his will is declared by express revelation." Thus far our author speaks according to truth. But, in p. 70, he affirms, that "the moral sense, both in the direct feeling, and in the act of reflection, plainly supposes and implies liberty of action." It is scarce needful to observe, that here he does not mean that liberty which consists in spontaneous choice: for no body ever doubted, if all actions, praise or blame worthy, were spontaneously done.—He evidently means, that deceitful sense of liberty, which coincides with the sense of independency. For a few lines before, in this same page, he uses these two words as of like signification: "One fact is certain, that in acting we have a feeling of liberty and independency;"\* or, in other words, we conceive ourselves to be above the rank of creatures or dependent beings. This conceit of ourselves, though acknowledged to be deceitful and false, he makes to be the hinge on which the operations of conscience turn.

His scheme, then, stands in short thus: The authority of conscience lies in our having a direct feeling of our duty and dependence, without the intervention of any sort of reflection; yet conscience, both in the direct feeling, and in the act of reflection, supposes and implies a sense of our independency: Or, we are taught our duty by the voice of truth within us; and the authority of this truth proceeds upon the opposite falsehood. By this extraordinary machinery, he erects his throne for virtue, and throws an effulgence of glory around her. In like manner, the popular doctrine in some sort admits the truth of the gospel; but if we examine the description it gives us of acts of faith, and its directions for exerting

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\* Here it would seem, that *independency* is a much fitter word to give our author a distinct meaning than *liberty*: for as to any liberty or power beyond what lies in doing whatever we please, our author honestly acknowledges we have no idea of it; "—which power, besides that no man was ever conscious of it, seems to be an absurdity altogether inconsistent with a rational nature." But the propriety of *independency* is evident, if we consider that law is the hinge on which all choice turns, as far as the notion of right or wrong takes place; for without a law there would be no choice of right or wrong. Now, if a law be admitted as coming from an Almighty Lawgiver, it is impossible to think that any man will choose to transgress it till once the force of it be set aside in his mind by the deceitful sense of independency.

But perhaps this is the place where our author intended to shift hands, and make an artful transition from one idea to another, while he was laying the foundation of his deceitful sense. And where can deceitful artifice be more properly employed than in laying down deceitful principles?

them, we shall find, that both the direct and the reflex acts suppose and imply a deceitful sense of our own worth, or a fund of self-dependence. And by this machinery a throne is erected for the popular holiness.

Now, though the holiness chiefly promoted by the popular doctrine, and most applauded by the people, gets the name of hypocrisy in the New Testament; yet we have no reason to despise it in comparison with philosophic virtue, which being still more superficial, as taking less hold of the heart, amounts only to what we may easily understand by *decorum*; a word often used by its votaries in describing it. By keeping this in our eye, we shall have a full view of our author's doctrine, and perceive a propriety in many of his reasonings, which would otherwise be lost; for it is easy to see how high and deceitful thoughts of ourselves may, by skilful management, serve greatly to the promoting of decorum. And if his reader, on hearing how advantageously virtue is seated on her throne, should expect to see her reign accordingly, and be curious to know where her subjects are, he needs only to look into the polite assemblies, or genteel interviews, which abound among civilized nations, where he will find the most scrupulous reference paid to decorum by many who are separately engaged in such artful and malicious schemes of undermining and overreaching each other, as that the relation of them would greatly astonish savages, who show their friendships and their enmities in a less artificial manner; consequently more confidence must take place in the former, and the danger arising from the latter, be more easily guarded against.

It is the business of philosophy, to remove the fear of God from religion as much as possible. Our author's address this way may be seen in his reflections on our dread of supernatural powers in the dark, on the famous Lucretian maxim about the origin of religion, on the dread which savages have of invisible adverse powers, and on the benevolence of the Deity, among whose perfections he does not incline to place justice. Nothing can be more natural to guilty men, than to dread some invisible adverse power; yet nothing is more unsuitable to philosophy; yea, we can think of nothing more unphilosophical than the sacred maxim about the beginning of wisdom. Accordingly we find, that philosophers, who differ widely from each other about many other things, generally agree in discarding that maxim. On this occasion it may be proper to observe, that the philosophic moral sense, though it agrees in many things with the natural conscience

does notwithstanding differ considerably from it. The natural conscience approves of that law which requires godliness and humanity in perfection, or without reserve, and affixes the sense of blame to every deviation from it. Our author's moral sense considers some trespasses as venial, or some as more venial than others; and finds the highest beauty and delight in certain actions, which are not attended with the sense of obligation and duty, nor the neglect of them followed by remorse. Thus it opens a large field for works of supererogation; whereas, he who attends to the dictates of his conscience, though he should come up to them in his practice, can never enjoy the philosophic enthusiasm of soaring above his duty. We have then a just and adequate notion of the philosophic moral sense, when we consider it as the prompter or prime counsellor to decorum, and, in conjunction with deceit, the supporter of its throne. Its ultimate object is the temporal prosperity of society, without regard to the real interest of mankind, as depending on the pleasure of the Deity, and conformity to his will.

Had our author wrote for the populace, he had no doubt said, *mysterious* instead of *deceitful feelings*; but as he wrote for the entertainment of men of enlarged sentiments, who will not readily take umbrage at any ingenious attempt to persuade them, that the operations of conscience, especially the most inconvenient of them, remorse, proceed upon an illusive foundation; he chose to express himself with freedom. In order to persuade with success, it was necessary to remove our disapprobation of deceit, and make it wear a comely aspect, as being natural to us; and who can refuse to own, that what is natural is also beautiful? Moreover, the sense of independency, however candidly owned to be deceitful, besides its being natural, is presented to us with other very ample recommendations. It is a noble and elevating sentiment; it makes man appear to be in all respects his own master; it gives him the air of Deity on earth; and is at the same time highly conducive to promote virtue or decorum; yea, to animate generous minds to great and heroic actions, far beyond the sphere of obligation and duty, ready withal to recompense them with the most sublime self-satisfaction.

Thus far we have seen, not only how meet and proper, but also how advantageous it is, to support the credit of the sense of independency, and to act upon it as to all the purposes of life, as if it were just and true. Now, considering the charming advantages attending the maintaining its credit, it may seem at first view, a great excess of candour and generosity

in a philosopher, to draw aside the curtain, and fairly show us, that this darling sense is nothing else but a mere illusion ; till we reflect, that he is abundantly recompensed for this concession when looking forward into futurity, where this illusion can be no more of any service to him, he perceives the whole dark side of things introduced by remorse, vanish together with it in the light of philosophic truth. And surely, it must give no small comfort to many great men when leaving the stage of the world, to consider the various blemishes of their lives as many parts in a dramatic performance, from which it would be as unreasonable to infer their misery in a future state, as to punish a common player for having acted the part of an impostor or a traitor, after he has, along with his mask, thrown off his obnoxious character.

Now, our author sufficiently intimates, that the curtain drawn over the moral world, must not be meddled with on ordinary occasions, nor turned aside, except to serve the most valuable purposes, and chiefly when man has occasion to think of the Deity, in order to give him some agreeable forebodings about a future state. Behind this curtain is the most sacred recess of philosophic mysteries, therefore, it does not become unhallowed persons on common occasions to approach it, far less to turn it aside, in order to look in. Philosophers themselves, the mystagogues in the temple of decorum, must approach it with reverence, and after all are allowed only to turn it aside a very little. As our author's words on this head are remarkable, I shall here quote a few of them, p. 218. "A veil is thrown over nature, where it is not useful for him [man] to behold it ; and yet, sometimes, by turning aside that veil a very little, he is admitted to a fuller view, that his admiration of nature, and the God of nature, may be increased ; that his curiosity and love of truth may be fed ; and, perhaps, that some *augurium*, some intimation may be given of his being designed for a future more exalted period of being, when attaining the full maturity of his nature, he shall no longer stand in need of artificial impressions, but shall feel and act according to the strictest truth of things." No wonder that the author's enthusiasm was kindled, when he was thus privileged.

That the charming illusion, which, while it appears and remains in force, brings us many advantages, and when it vanishes, abolishes all fear of future evils, might not be exposed to the objection of singularity, as having nothing in nature analogous to it ; our author maintains, that our senses deceive us about the sensible or secondary qualities of bodies, making



us believe that they exist without us, till philosophy undeceive us, by showing that they exist only within us. Here it must be observed, that there is a kind of jargon\* on this head, gravely upheld among philosophers, which will always appear as absurd and ridiculous† to men of plain common sense, as

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\* For instance, we cannot, according to the truth of things, say, that honey is sweet, ice cold, or chalk white: for why, honey hath no mouth for tasting, ice no fingers for feeling, nor chalk eyes for seeing. Philosophy, the faithful guardian of truth, will have us rather to say, that these bodies are composed of particles of such a form and size, and so arranged, as to be fit for conveying to the mind, by means of the respective organs, the sensations of sweetness, coldness, and whiteness. Thus we are assured, that when honey is eaten, the eater has all the pleasure, and it none at all in being eaten. Had not philosophers made us this important discovery we might have remained, like our forefathers, grossly deceived about every object around us.—This may be considered as a true and genuine specimen of that wisdom which elevates the philosopher above the vulgar, and which in the New Testament is fitly called *The wisdom of words*, to distinguish it from the knowledge of things.

† No less ridiculous is their reasoning about liberty. For though no man could ever conceive a notion of liberty higher than what lies in doing what we please; yet the whole dispute turns upon such unintelligible liberty. They might as well pretend to inform us what sort of beings are situated beyond the sphere of all imaginable space, and then lead us into disputes about the condition of those inhabitants of Utopia. Despising what is plain and intelligible, as being common to them and the vulgar, they delight to frame words to stand for so many no-ideas, and then to dispute about these no-ideas. Our author acknowledges it absurd to think of any liberty beyond the power of doing what we will; yet he says, we have the idea of a power *over* our will, or a power of regulating our will; and that this idea is essential to the moral feeling. Now, if this transcendent regulating power can do either right or wrong, it must have a will over it again to direct it. And thus we are led to talk of power and will alternately over each other without end: to talk, I say; for we are beyond the sphere of thinking altogether.

But as I am averse to suppose our author used words conveying no ideas, his deceitful sense may, I think, have an obvious meaning when we understand it to be the sense of independency. Thus, likewise, we understand how he makes a man to be an accountable creature, when he tells us, that from this deceitful sense, “the idea of his being an accountable creature arises. Reward seems due to merit, punishment to crimes.” That is, he thus becomes self-accountable; or he has a deceitful spring in his nature, which sets him at variance with himself, and gives him inward disquiet when he disturbs the order of society: but when he has served his time in society, the deceitful spring, being now useless, is set aside; so that, having fully accounted to himself for all his good and bad actions, by the pleasure he took in the former, and the pain he felt for the latter, he enters into the next world upon a fair new footing, as if nothing at all had happened in this. For if he seemed to be virtuous, reward seemed due to his merit; and if he seemed to be criminal, punishment seemed due to his crimes. Thus, in our present abode in Fairyland, every shadow seems to correspond with another. That philosopher, who endeavoured to show, that our senses deceive

any part of the popular doctrine can do to philosophers. I am far from thinking, that our author acted below the dignity of a philosopher in adopting it; but he appears sometimes so sensible of the vanity of philosophers, that I am persuaded he would have scorned to make use of it, had it not been to serve the most valuable and most momentous purpose; and surely, there is not a more important concern that can affect the mind of man, than how he may be relieved from remorse.

I have just now mentioned the chief circumstance that gives importance to the dispute about liberty and necessity, or, indeed, any other dispute, so far as religion is concerned: for we can easily fall upon means of finding ourselves praiseworthy upon any scheme of principles whatever; but the great difficulty is, how to preserve the sense of blame in due force to answer the ends of society, and yet get conveniently quit of it when we look beyond society, or are ready to step out of it; for then men are generally disposed to think there is no more occasion for it. Now, for address in managing this delicate affair, our author is perhaps excelled by none. What advantage he has over any less artful writer on this subject, may be seen by the following comparison: In the Scots' Magazine, for April, 1751, we find a letter on human liberty, subscribed D. W., which is, perhaps, as clear and as distinct a paper as any philosopher ever wrote on the subject. This writer maintains both liberty and necessity in the highest sense wherein these words were ever understood by any man, and yet reconciles them in the most simple manner, without the least artifice or embarrassment; showing withal, that "the *common ideas* of accountableness are not founded on a delusive feeling, but on a *clear perception* of that liberty which we *really* possess." But, then, through want of artifice, he has left us destitute of any proper fuel for feeding the sacred flame of devotion, which he would kindle at the close of his reasoning. His letter ends thus: "But though the knowledge of universal necessity, considered by itself, cannot justly prompt a man either to act or suspend action, it cannot

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us as to the existence of matter, was but a mere trifle when compared with our author.

One, methinks, would be apt to conclude, that mankind stand in great need of some Divine revelation, from the strange propensity of wise men to draw aside the curtain of appearances, and from the no less strange discoveries which they make, after they suppose they have drawn it aside.

be called an useless discovery, since it naturally leads the mind to the most joyful of all truths. That all events, through the past and future periods of immense duration, concur together in forming a *perfectly* beautiful and happy system, such as it becomes *original* and eternal goodness to contrive and execute; and that thus, *whatever is, is best*. How much these transporting ideas tend to feed the sacred flame of devotion in the philosophic breast, may be seen in the writings of all those who have thoroughly imbibed them, particularly in the conclusion of the above mentioned *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*."

It is easy to see, that all the purposes and operations of infinite goodness must give joy and delight to one who is not conscious of any evil disposition about himself; because he knows, that though infinite goodness must eternally appear infinitely opposite to all evil, yet it can never appear in opposition to him, but, on the contrary for his comfort, yea, making all the crimes and miseries of the guilty serve for the increase of his happiness; but if one finds himself guilty, and consequently that infinite goodness stands opposed to him, I do not see what joy it can give him to understand, that a perfectly beautiful and happy system is to be formed at last, and remain forever; and that his guilt and eternal misery are to be subservient to the beauty and happiness thereof. It would seem, then, that this writer, when he concluded his letter, imagined himself fortified with that brazen wall,\* which even heathens thought a necessary security against misery.

A conscience clear, by no remorse dismay'd.

But as it is difficult for a man, soberly thinking, to find himself thus fortified, our author has certainly acted a much more wise and philosophical part, in contriving matters so as that the weight of remorse should rest upon a convenient slipboard, which in a case of urgent necessity may be withdrawn, and of course all that was erected upon it at once overturned. Though the letter-writer clearly shows, that remorse proceeds upon a just and true sense of liberty; yet he seems not to have thought so much on the weight of remorse, and how the mind is affected under it, as our author. Near the middle of his letter he gives indeed a general description of it, which he sums up in the word *self-aversion*: but this expression is not easy to be understood. It is difficult to think

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\* —————*murus aheneus esto.*  
*Nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa.*

how a man can hate himself. It is more natural to think that he will be averse to every thing that gives him pain and makes him unhappy. As remorse seizes a man against his will, and after he has done his best to secure himself against it by reasonings, we must consider it as the punishment which the Deity has annexed to guilt, or as the previous intimation of deserved punishment, carrying the reason along with it; so it may be said to consist in a sense of shame at being found blame-worthy, or for having done what we ought not,\* and

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\* Our author maintains, that remorse proceeds on the reflection that we *might have* acted a better part; and who doubts but we might, *if we had pleased*? But this is the real point on which remorse proceeds, that we pleased or willed to act as we did. For what occasion has one for remorse if the action did not flow from his will? Remorse, then, proceeds upon a solid truth; yea, upon what we find to be but too true to our shame: the guilty person finds that it was his leading principle, his supreme faculty, his own self that did the wrong. But, then, the conviction of his guilt no sooner seizes him, than he sets himself in the way of opposition and reluctance to what gives him pain. And this reluctance has various success during life, according to the various circumstances wherein the guilty person is placed; sometimes it finds expedients for his temporary quiet, and sometimes it serves only to heighten his agony and hasten his death.

It was infallibly foretold, that Judas should betray his master; yet, very consistently with this, it may be said, that Judas might have acted a better part if he had pleased. Paul, in his voyage to Rome, was assured that no lives would be lost; yet, he was likewise assured, that if the sailors left the ship, the passengers would be lost. Though I were infallibly assured, that a certain chain of a thousand links was to support a certain weight for twenty years, I may, consistently with this assurance, say, that if any one of the links break the first or second year, the whole weight will then fall to the ground.

The embarrassment in the dispute about liberty, wholly arises from the difficulty which men find in conceiving how there can be a Deity so great as to be able to make a man; and the only reason for this difficulty is, that no artist has yet appeared among men able to make a clock capable of going right or wrong of its own will and choice, and accordingly, conscious of pleasure or pain, and yet, so as no vibration of its will, or consequence of such vibration, should take place otherwise than as the artist originally intended when he framed it.

Some, to make room for a Deity, degrade man to the rank of beasts; others, seeking to raise the dignity of man, can find no place for a Deity; or at least they find a Deity without a character, neither loving righteousness, nor hating iniquity.

The contradictions observed, by all writers in human nature, cannot be accounted for, without admitting the Scripture testimony, that man was corrupted by the presumptuous thought of being as God. This presumptuous thought still bewilders men in their reasonings.

Yet, as man was made to be the image of God, his nature is still subservient to that great purpose. For whether man be righteous or wicked, his nature still serves, either in the way of concord or contrast, for an index to the character of his maker.



fear of the just consequence, resembling an indictment with the sentence of condemnation annexed. But no sooner does this painful sense affect the mind of man, than his aversion to it rises, and he struggles hard to throw it off. He cannot be eased of his fear till he get his sense of shame abated: so he labours to extenuate his guilt, and to cover it even from his own sight. He presumes that he had, at bottom, some better disposition of heart than what appeared in the guilty action; that had he been placed in better circumstances, or even had he known what he now knows, he would have acted a better part. And though repeated experience clearly evinces the vanity of all such presumptions, yet he still resumes them as oft as his disquiet recurs. So much against nature is it for a man to admit the sense of blame, or consent to his own condemnation. And till a man can find a covering for his shame, or a sense of worth to support him, elsewhere than in the disposition of his own heart, he can never freely admit the sense of blame, and approve the justice of the Divine law, nor see the Divine goodness unexceptionable in its greatest opposition to evil.

When such a sense of worth takes place, it gives birth to a new principle or disposition in the mind toward it, and produces, as it were, a change or transition of one's self to the new and supernatural ground of confidence, so that the *person* is capable of being averse to what he finds himself naturally, or to his own character and natural disposition; because he perceives a new resource of enjoyment opened to him; not by his own agency or concurrence in any respect, but merely and wholly by Divine grace. In this view we understand what the gospel speaks of one's *hating and losing his life, and yet finding it*. Thus, I say, and only thus, is a person capable of being averse to his own character and natural disposition, or, to use the expression of the letter-writer, of *self-aversion*.\* For we must still say, that it is impossible for a person to act but with some view to his own happiness, or in the way of reluctance to what he counts the greatest misery.

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\* But, perhaps, by *self-aversion* the letter writer intended to denote one of the operations of a mind that is only self-accountable, and is furnished with this inward spring or check, only for the sake of the temporal benefit of society. In that case, it does not signify much whether remorse be made to rest on a true or a false foundation, while we consider it as of no use or consequence beyond this life; or while we consider it only as an incitement to make men dance gracefully for three or four score years, around the May-pole of decorum, without affecting their condition with regard to their maker.

Paschal, whom I mention as a person respected by philosophers for his uncommon abilities, could observe the original dignity of human nature, like that of a decayed palace, from the greatness of its ruins. But our author is charmed with the beauty and order of the ruins themselves. By reading Voltaire's remarks on Paschal's thoughts, one may see how differently men think, or affect to think on this subject; and may likewise have a good opportunity of trying by his own thoughts, in the contrast of sentiments, which side bears the greatest weight or appearance of truth. Paschal closes some reflections on the blindness and misery of man with these words; "Hence I wonder that mankind are not seized with despair every time they reflect on the wretchedness of their condition." Voltaire rejoins, "With regard to myself, when I take a view of London or Paris, I see no cause to plunge into the despair mentioned by Paschal. I see a city which does not resemble, in any manner, a desert island, but, on the contrary, a populous, rich, and well-governed place, where mankind are as happy as it is consistent with nature to be."

With the same charming prospect is the mind of our author relieved from all difficulties arising from the dark side of things. He forms to himself a high notion of the difference betwixt the appearance of human nature in its savage, which he calls its original state, and its appearance when refined by education in civilized nations. From the excellency of the latter, the dignity and glory of human nature arises to his view. There he beholds the conceptions of the human mind *admirably ordered to exalt virtue to the highest pitch.* There he beholds *virtue enthroned, and a peculiar glory thrown around her.* There the moral sense *acquires its full authority, is openly recognized, and cheerfully submitted to.* There "the social affections gain the ascendant, and the morality of actions gets firm possession of the mind. In this improved state, the beauty of the creation makes a strong impression; and we can never cease admiring the excellency of that cause, who is the author of so many beautiful effects. And thus to society we owe all the blessings of life, and particularly the knowledge of the Deity, that most inestimable branch of human knowledge," p. 322. And where can we have a more full view of all this beautiful scene than in London and Paris, the capitals of the two most civilized nations? and in these where to better advantage, than among people of refined taste and manners, or those who compose the politest assemblies?

Now, if any credit may be given to the history of the great-

est cities, when at the height of their refinement in the arts of life, from Nineveh down to those of our own times, we shall find that all manner of wickedness has then reigned most extensively in them, and that even under the wing of decorum. In France, adultery, though known, if practised with sufficient caution or decency, is considered among polite people as no blemish in the character of a gentleman: and in Britain we daily think more lightly of it, and devise more genteel terms for it according as our taste refines, the most impious perjury, in solemnly declaring or subscribing adherence to religious creeds, privately laughed at, if done to procure interest in church or state, does no hurt to one's reputation among people of enlarged sentiments. If the various tribes of mankind are to confront each other in another world after this, the American savages will be able to bear witness how far the civilized Europeans excelled them in a cheerful submission to the moral sense.\* As our taste refines, we learn to distinguish nicely, and to sin grossly. Among half a dozen of words, signifying nearly the same thing, we can perhaps mark out so many degrees of decency in the use of them; and to trespass against any established rule of decorum, will hurt the character of a gentleman more than the transgression of any Divine law, decently committed.

Yet our author is delighted in reflecting, that "society teaches mankind self-denial," or to become each others' most humble servants. It would lead us into a long detail, to observe how the gratification of malice, revenge, avarice, and every other criminal appetite, may be pursued, in a consistency of a character for politeness. But instead of enlarging on this, I shall content myself with quoting a few words from Voltaire, who cannot, I think, be justly accused of entertaining splenetic views of human nature. In his 19th letter concerning the English nation, giving the character of Mr. Congreve as a writer, he says, "The late Mr. Congreve raised the glory of comedy to a greater height than any English writer before or since his time. He wrote only a few plays, but they were

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\* To go no farther than the Indians situated in the neighbourhood of our own colonies, we are credibly informed, that both British and French captives, who have been detained a few years among them, when, upon a treaty of peace, liberty is granted them to return home, are extremely averse, even though earnestly solicited by their relations, to make use of that liberty, and choose rather to remain among these savages, so much noted for scalping their enemies: a manifest proof, that they find among them no less humanity than among their own civilized countrymen. See Colden's History of the Five Nations.

all excellent in their kind. The laws of the drama are strictly observed in them: they abound with characters, all which are shadowed with the utmost delicacy, and we do not meet with as much as one low or coarse jest. The language is every where that of men of honour, but their actions are those of knaves; a proof that he was perfectly well acquainted with human nature, and frequented what we call polite company."

But the fullest view of our author's scheme is to be had in his last essay, which treats of our knowledge of the Deity, more especially the latter part, concerning his benevolence. Here our author unravels his mystery. Here we see the use of all the complicated machinery he had before contrived. He proceeds upon this principle, 'That if natural and moral evil prevailed as much in reality, as they do in appearance, the objections against the Divine goodness would stand unanswered. He cannot conceive how the Divine goodness can stand unimpeached, if it appear invariably opposite to all evil, or, in other words, if the Divine displeasure be pointed against every transgression of that law which requires goodness or love, or if misery be the consequence of every sin. He judges, that if what we call sin, were really so in every view, and misery the certain consequence of it, this would argue malevolence and bad intention in the being who established the connection, and would represent to us such invisible power, as he says is dreaded by savages. "And," says he, "I am persuaded, that nothing has been more hurtful to religion than the irregular propensity in our nature to dread such powers." It had been worth his while to have considered whence proceeded this propensity in our nature, with the irregularity of which he is so much dissatisfied.—Perhaps he might have found, that it corresponded exactly with another irregularity. And, then, why might he not have perceived the common nature of the human species to be as perfect, with two irregularities exactly corresponding to each other, as with some strange single one, to which he can find no counterpart? But he is now more disposed than formerly to admit some imperfection in human nature.

However, this irregularity is corrected by education in civilized society. As men get their taste and manners refined, and the rules of decorum by degrees imprinted on their hearts, they arrive at last to the knowledge of a benevolent, that is, of a perfectly complaisant and well-bred Deity. "And thus to society we owe all the blessings of life, and particularly the knowledge of the Deity, that most inestimable branch of human knowledge." Whereas, with respect to



savages, the case stands thus. "Being conscious of nothing but disorder and sensual impulse within, they cannot be conscious of anything better without them." What are they conscious of from without? Why, they are afraid of some invisible adverse power: "For it is evident, that fear can never be the cause of our belief of a benevolent (or *complaisant*) Deity." Now, that which savages dread from without, must be some invisible power that is averse to the disorder they are conscious of within: for were it like themselves, or what they are conscious of, agreeable to it, they would have no cause of fear.

Thus we have, as it were, by accident, hit upon the very truth of the case. And as often as either philosophers or preachers speak according to nature, they must always say, that our apprehensions of invisible power without us, must always correspond with what we are conscious of within. Yea, the law given to Israel, which confirms the voice of nature, and ascertains it by express words, exhibits the language of the Deity thus: *If ye walk contrary to me, then will I also walk contrary unto you.* I am ready, then, to agree with our author, in maintaining, that he who is conscious of no wrong, no disorder within, has no reason to entertain uneasy apprehensions about any power without him. On the contrary, "having confidence in the good government of the Deity, he is persuaded, that every thing happens for the best; and, therefore, that it is his duty to submit to whatever happens.—This unfolds a scene so enlivening, and so productive of cheerfulness and good humour, that we cannot readily think, if there is a benevolent Deity, that he will withhold from his creatures so invaluable a blessing." On this occasion, we may observe, that all sorts of men, from the most subtle philosophers down to the rudest savages, are on some occasions sensible of the necessity of a righteousness, to make their apprehensions of invisible power agreeable and comfortable.\*

But our author is more prudent than to rest our happiness wholly on this bottom. He is sensible, that it must be diffi-

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\* This observation is confirmed to us by the author of a late *Natural History of Religion*, p. 109; "After the commission of crimes, there arise remorse, and secret horrors, which gave no rest to the mind, but make it have recourse to religious rites and ceremonies as expiations of its offences. Whatever weakens or disorders the internal frame, promotes the interests of superstition; and nothing is more destructive to them than a manly steady virtue——" But wo, to that pilot who loses hold of the helm in the time of a storm, when shelves are near. And who can keep long at sea, without being exposed to a storm?

cult, even for civilized people, to free themselves altogether from the irregular propensity in their nature, to dread some invisible adverse power; because notwithstanding their great improvements, they are liable, on some occasions, to be pained with the consciousness of some wrong, some disorder, after all, remaining with them. On some occasions, I say: for “while the guilty person is in prosperity, he makes a shift to blunt the stings of conscience; but no sooner does he fall into distress, or into any depression of mind, than his conscience lays fast hold of him, his crime stares him in the face, and every accidental misfortune is converted into a real punishment.” Therefore, though we have had the advantage of being educated amongst civilized people, we often stand in need, after all, of the most sublime discoveries that philosophy can make, to complete the composure of our minds.

Education, in civilized nations, as we have already noted, contributes greatly to correct our irregular propensity to fear. By occupying our attention with the care of our external appearance, it steals away our thoughts from the disquieting perception of inward disorder. And while it refines our taste and manners, it furnishes us with the agreeable rising prospect of something so very like righteousness, as to be often mistaken for it. Thus far matters go on pleasantly enough. But, then, as even the politest people are liable to fall into distress and depression of mind, their thoughts in that case are very apt to recoil inward upon them; and if there be any remaining disorder within, to take fast hold of that, and consequently fill their breast with the most troublesome apprehensions.\* Thus, in the minds of the most polite,

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\* Especially if it be true, that these apprehensions are natural to the human race, as is affirmed in the forementioned *Natural History of Religion*, p. 110; “While we abandon ourselves to the natural, undisciplined suggestions of our timid and anxious hearts, every kind of barbarity is ascribed to the Supreme Being from the terrors with which we are agitated; and every kind of caprice, from the methods which we embrace in order to appease him.—It may be allowed, that the artifices of men aggravate our natural infirmities and follies of this kind, but never originally beget them. Their root strikes deeper into the mind, and springs from the essential and universal properties of human nature.” Here philosophy lends her friendly aid to repel the force of nature. But ancient sages have observed that (*Naturam expellas, &c.*) though you drive nature out at the door, it will come in at the window. Philosophers themselves at certain serious moments, especially, when one is taking his last leave of his friends, are apt to complain of the impertinent recurring of nature, and to chide each other for suffering their philosophy to fail them, at the time they have most need of it.

As the *Natural History* contains some remarkable reflections, I shall

a most formidable objection is often formed, against their having any interest in the Divine favour. Here it is that the great excellency of philosophy shines forth, while it generously presents an answer to this objection, of all others the most disquieting. And this it does, by sagaciously discover-

here take notice of some of them, pp. 49, 50; "Were there a religion (and we may suspect Mahometanism of this inconsistency,) which sometimes painted the Deity in the most sublime colours, as the Creator of heaven and earth; sometimes degraded him nearly to a level with human creatures, in his powers and faculties; while at the same time it ascribed to him suitable infirmities, passions, and partialities of the moral kind; that religion, after it was extinct, would also be cited as an instance of those gross contradictions, which arise from the gross vulgar natural conceptions of mankind, opposed to their continual propensity towards flattery and exaggeration. Nothing indeed would prove more strongly the Divine origin of any religion, than to find (and happily this is the case with Christianity) that it is free from a contradiction so incident to human nature." Not to mind the low wit in the two parenthesis, which shows, at the same time, a fear and contempt of the friends of the established religion, we have no cause to be ashamed of the apostolic testimony concerning the Divine Majesty and character, manifested in a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and who prayed for his own people, not for the world. The author justly observes, that this religion, in some future age after it is extinct, will then deserve to be laughed at. For, indeed, the followers of the apostles have nothing else to support them against the laugh, but an appeal to futurity. All that we can say at present is, that the apostolic testimony has now, for more than a thousand years, withstood the wit of the philosophers on the one hand, and the more pernicious artifices of the clergy on the other, and still remains to this day as a considerable eyesore to them both.

Pages 35, 36, "And thus, however strong men's propensity to believe invisible power in nature, their propensity is equally strong to rest their attention on sensible visible objects; and in order to reconcile these opposite inclinations, they are led to unite the invisible power with some visible object." How admirably, then, is the Christian religion fitted to relieve human nature, where it is embarrassed with contradictions? It assures us of an invisible power, far superior to the power of nature; and yet, exhibits all the perfections of this power in a visible object, even in a man.

Page 95, "Here, therefore, is a kind of contradiction betwixt the different principles of human nature, which enter into religion. Our natural terrors present the notion of an *adverse* Deity;" [I have here substituted one epithet, instead of two very coarse ones;] "our propensity to praise leads us to acknowledge an excellent and divine. And the influence of these opposite principles is various, according to the different situation of the human understanding." Setting aside somewhat of this author's colouring, nothing can be more justly observed, than that human nature has a strong propensity to dread some invisible adverse power, and at the same time a propensity, no less strong, to approve of that same power. And the opposition or combination of these two in the human breast, is the very source of man's disquiet. Here again the gospel proves the only reconciler of contradictions. It preserves the majesty of the invisible power, which we naturally dread, and at the



ing, "that the feeling we have of liberty does not correspond to the truth of things; and that our peculiar manner of conceiving human actions as right or wrong, and as praise or blame worthy, is wholly founded on this deceitful feeling." To the same purpose we read in a former essay, "On the system of universal necessity, abstracted from this feeling, though certain affections and actions might excite our approbation, and others our dislike, there could be no place for blame or remorse. All the ideas would entirely vanish, which at present are suggested by the words *ought* and *should*, when applied to moral conduct." Let us now observe, with how great satisfaction our author contemplates this important discovery. "This discovery affords a solid answer to an objection, which, so far as I know, has not hitherto received any good answer. And it is that the objection rests entirely upon a false supposition, as if human actions were seen in the same light by the Deity, in which they are seen by men. A feeling which is not agreeable to the truth of things, though wisely ordered to correct an imperfect constitution in man, cannot be ascribed to a perfect being. The Deity perceiving all things as they are, without disguise, knows that what is termed moral evil in the language of

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same time exhibits that same power full of benignity toward the basest and most obnoxious of mankind. Thus we see, that the God whose character is drawn by the apostles, is not partial, has no respect of persons, like the pure intelligence, or the *το παν*, of the philosophers, which only reveals itself to a few speculative men, and abandons the remaining millions of mankind, who have neither capacity nor opportunity for refined speculation, as a prey to the natural undisciplined suggestions of their own timid and anxious hearts, and as so many wretched dupes to the artifices of their priests.

On this occasion, we might propose the following problem for the consideration of philosophers. Seeing it is a fixed point that the present state of things is the only rule by which we can judge about the future; that in this state all our ideas of what is good are enlarged, in proportion as we see it contrasted with the opposite evil; that even the standard of taste is approached to, by nicely contrasting beauties with blemishes; and seeing that, in order to raise the dignity of the philosopher to its proper point of elevation, large portions of the earth are inhabited by savages, and even civilized nations for the most part deluded by their priests; this being the case at present, I say, who knows but, in the next world, when the expected perfect system takes place, the perfection of that system may appear by a more decisive contrast betwixt good and evil, than in this? And as no contrast is more evident at present, than that betwixt the God worshiped by the apostles, and the pure intelligence of the philosophers; may it not be expected, that the contest betwixt these two powers and their votaries, will be decided in the next state, that it may at last incontestably appear to friends and foes, what that being is that framed and governs the universe?



man is, as well as moral good, the result of general laws, and of a necessary connection betwixt causes and their effects. Every thing possesses its proper place in his plan.—All our actions contribute equally to carry on the great and good designs of Providence; and, therefore, there is nothing which in his sight is evil, at least nothing which is evil upon the whole. Considering the objection in the above light, it loses its force.” Thus the righteous and the wicked, when their disguise is set aside, perceive the benevolence of the Deity wearing an equally smiling aspect toward them both. They have both been equally serving him in their several ways, and are accordingly both equally entitled to his favour and protection.

Thus our author, in a manner truly philosophical, opens for men the prospect of happiness in a future state; and thus he clears from all difficulties, the principle of joyful expectation, which he had laid down a little before. For a page or two before, at the close of his answer to the objection against our confidence in the Divine favour or benevolence, arising from natural evil, which is inseparably connected with the other objection, arising from moral evil, he expresses himself thus: “It will be observed, that, in answering the above objection, to the benevolence of the Deity, I have avoided urging any argument from our future existence, though it affords a fruitful field of comfort, greatly overbalancing the transitory evils of this life. But I should scarce think it fair reasoning, to urge such topics upon this subject, which would be arguing in a circle; because the benevolence of the Deity is the only solid principle from whence we can infer a future existence.” It is here very honestly acknowledged by our author, that it would be unfair reasoning, and arguing in circle, to bring arguments from a future state, whereof we know nothing, in order to clear up difficulties in the present state: for surely we can at present know nothing about the character of the Deity, further than it has already been manifested to us by some appearance or work. Our author, then, from a survey of the various tokens of Divine benevolence to men, which yet all issue in the destroying that life which, for a short period, they cherish and support, establishes a firm foundation, a solid principle, to support the most joyful expectation of happiness in a future state. And this, it must be confessed, is the utmost length that philosophy can go for our encouragement in this matter. But should a generous prince, after having for a course of years heaped many favours on one of his servants, think fit to throw him into a loathsome dungeon,

for his ungrateful breach of trust; I would be at a great loss to infer from the whole of the prince's conduct towards his servant, that he entertained the most benevolent designs concerning him, and intended his future promotion. I would be afraid least the principles on which I proceeded were not very solid. But methinks there is still more reason, for being afraid in the other case, where the punishment is capital, and where every other consideration is of the widest extent.

We have seen, then, what philosophy can do for us, and what its adepts standing upon each others' shoulders, and profiting by the assistance of their predecessors, have been able to discover for our relief, as far down as the year 1751, when these essays were published. I can easily see that the discoveries our author has made, must have cost him no small labour, and expense of thought; but I am at a loss to see how he finds this expense repaid, or how he finds such refreshment and enjoyment in looking back on them, as he expresses in the first paragraph of the conclusion; "We have thus gone through a variety of subjects, not without labour, and expense of thought: and now, like a traveller, who, after examining the different parts of a country, ascend to some eminence to review the whole, let us refresh ourselves, by looking back, and enjoying the discoveries we have made." And till better authority be produced, I am no less at a loss to find what animates his devotion at the close of all, unless I should suppose that his noble enthusiasm\* is kindled by reflecting on the

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\* The author of the forementioned natural history, modestly declining to soar aloft on the wings of enthusiasm, contents himself with seeking out a shady retreat in the lower regions. The concluding period of his natural history runs thus:

"The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our inquiry concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarce be upheld, did we not enlarge our view, and, opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling, while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily making our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy." We can easily understand how these regions are obscured; but it is not so obvious how they are calm; especially if it be true, as we are told in a subsequent dissertation on the passions, that "uncertainty has the same effect as opposition. The agitation of the thought, the quick turns which it makes from one view to another, the variety of passions which succeed each other according to the different views; all these produce an agitation in the mind, and this agitation transfuses itself into the predominant passion."

But perhaps the matter may be solved thus, by comparing the two quotations together. The philosopher keeps all quiet at home, by sending his thoughts abroad. He amuses himself by throwing squibs among

wisdom, the ingenious contrivance, and the complicated machinery appearing in the essays themselves. Till better authority be produced, I say, for I acknowledge I have nowhere seen a more ingenious philosophical dream: and for my own part, were I deprived of the New Testament, I would rather choose to dream pleasantly and be deceived agreeably, with our author, than torment myself by an obstinate adherence to disquieting truth: yea, I would fear nothing more than lest I should be unseasonably awakened. Our author might likewise have provided a remedy against this fear. He had hinted a very just maxim, That the appearance of the Deity towards us in this state, is the only solid principle from whence we can infer his conduct toward us in the next. Now, if we are conducted by a wise delusion here, why might we not be conducted by a still more wise one hereafter, when we attain the full maturity of our nature? For our author supposes, that when man grows old, decays, dies, and rots, he is advancing toward the maturity of his nature.

But our author prudently inclines to restrain the use of the above mentioned maxim, so as no more may be inferred from it but what we fondly wish; because, otherwise, there would be a manifest hazard of its introducing into the next world, all the disagreeable ideas which, on some occasions, even in spite of philosophy, serve to disturb our pleasant dreams in the present state. After all, it must be acknowledged, that there is some difficulty in judging how far it is prudent to admit this maxim; or if it be admitted, how far it ought to be used. And this difficulty may be left as a problem proper for exercising the reasoning faculty of succeeding philosophers, even as it has done that of all who have gone before.

On the whole, I know no philosopher who has devised a more ingenious scheme for cutting the sinews of remorse

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the various classes of religionists; and while he sets them a quarrelling, his mind is kept in play by the quick turns which it makes from one view to another. Now, it will readily be granted, that one can more easily preserve himself in an easy neutrality and agreeable suspense, in beholding the squabbles of others, than when his own thoughts are inwardly at war. But there is a serious hour awaiting philosophers as well as other men, when the quarrels of others can give us no more entertainment. Yet what cannot philosophy do? It taught the Emperor M. Antonius, that a wise man ought to die composedly, sedately, perfectly indifferent what became of him after death, and whether he should have any future existence or not; and to glory in this composed indifference, as more fit to persuade others, than the obstinate confidence which Christians showed in suffering death for their religion.

than our author has done. He has got several opponents. Some of them avail themselves of the common plausible cry of jealousy for the interests of morality; a cry warmly espoused by many who are no way remarkable for excelling others in their practice. It is, perhaps, easy to find men of tolerably decent characters on both sides of almost any dispute whatever; but the great concern of all men is, how to find a proper expedient for abating or removing the pain of remorse. Many find fault with our author's expedient, as confessedly deceitful, while they themselves either furnish us with none at all, or exhibit to us one that is no less deceitful. It were to be wished that his opponents would attend more seriously to the cardinal point, where the great stress lies.

Though I am far from joining issue with those who would censure our author as a heretic, it appearing to me no less ridiculous to charge a philosopher with heresy, than to accuse a eunuch of incest; yet I think he deserves a gentle reprimand from the readers of ancient books for two manifest breaches of decorum, in endeavouring to support his own sentiments by referring us to two passages of Scripture, without regarding the scope of those passages, which, if duly attended to, serves to oppose and overthrow his whole scheme. He adopts the words of Paul concerning the law of nature, *written in the heart*, without regard to Paul's sense, either as to the extent of that law, or as it operates in like manner in the consciences of the Gentiles,\* as the law of Moses did in those of the Jews, and is no less infallibly attended with its correspondent effects and consequences. He also adopts, for the last words of his book, that sentence wherein Moses describes the Deity's approbation of all his works at the close of the six days, as equally applicable to the state of the world now as then. Now, it is impossible to learn from Moses what our author seems to have discovered, that man in his original state was savage, and conscious of nothing but disorder and sensual impulse within; and, accordingly, having no idea of anything better without him. Moses indeed informs us, that in the course of ten generations, when the arts of life were greatly advanced, the world was filled with much

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\* Paul's sense, Rom. ii, runs plainly thus: *For when the Gentiles which have not the law [of Moses,] φησὶ τὰ τοῦ νομοῦ ποιῆ, by nature act the part of the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, while their conscience bears joint witness, and their mutual reasonings alternately accuse and apologize.* Thus the Apostle appeals for proof of what he says, to what may be observed every day, in the altercations of the meanest of the vulgar.



disorder, and was accordingly destroyed by the special appointment of the Deity. But at the same time he sufficiently intimates, that there was a great difference betwixt this and the original state of man. When man was in his original state, *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* Again, when man, in midst of all his ingenious improvements in the arts of life, became greatly corrupted, *God saw that the wickedness of man was great; and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart; and the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created.* If our author was disposed to give us his sense of either of these two passages, he ought to have done it in consistency with the other. I know not how it may be with others, but it is no less grating to my ear, to hear philosophers quote Scripture, than to hear popular preachers describing philosophically who are the fittest objects of the Divine mercy, or to hear a certain class of zealots quoting authorities from the New Testament, and the example of the first patient believers of the gospel, in support of the solemn league and covenant. Our author durst not, for his own credit, have quoted any Greek or Roman writer as he has done the Bible.

I have already shown, in the general, how fitly philosophy and the popular doctrine may be compared together. It were easy to extend the comparison in a variety of views. The distinction made by the former betwixt savages and civilized nations, or rather that betwixt philosophers and the vulgar, answers to the distinction made by the latter betwixt those said to be converted and the mere hearers of the gospel, or that more extensive one betwixt the devout and the profane. Philosophers see no dignity in simple human nature: mere man appears to them a very despicable creature in every respect but this one, that he is endued with a certain docility, or turn for imitation, which by the assistance of certain preceptors and mechanics, conspiring together to form his mind, his gesture and dress, may render him at last a very handsome, sagacious, and high-mettled animal. Popular preachers, while they seem to agree with the Scripture account of human nature, find at last by diligent search, in a remote corner of man's heart, certain live embers, which, when powerfully blown upon by a fervent preacher, may produce a very bright and vigorous flame.

Philosophy leads its adepts to the knowledge of a very complaisant Deity. The popular doctrine teaches its votaries, that on their performing a certain act, never yet clearly de-

scribed, the Deity distinguishes them from other men as his favourites, and is not so much displeas'd with their sins (if now they deserve to be call'd so,) as with those of other men.

Philosophy has several ingenious contrivances for blunting the edge of remorse. But in this respect the popular doctrine may take for its motto, *My name is Legion, for we are many.*

Yet the popular doctrine has a certain defaced majesty, which philosophy cannot boast of. Of this we may have some idea, could we only imagine the ancient temple of Solomon to be converted into a modern exchange, and the original sanctity of the place transferred to give additional importance to the transactions of commerce, and dignity to the principal merchants; whereas, philosophic religion owes all its dignity to the towering imaginations of its adepts.

The chief thing for which I value the author of the *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*, is, that he condescends more than his fellows to know many things on the same simple footing with the meanest of the vulgar. This book, as exhibiting to us a system of philosophic religion, may very well be compar'd with a well-known treatise of the popular doctrine, call'd *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*. The author of the former, after clearing and simply evincing many points of natural knowledge, artfully goes about to undermine them all, and render them of no consequence as to the great concern of man, his situation with respect to his Creator. The author of the latter plainly enough sets before us many articles of the apostolic doctrine; yet finds means to accommodate them all to the pride of the devotee, and the honour of the preacher.

In behalf of this digression, which, however long, has not been remote from our main point in view, it may be pled, that Paul's doctrine is always best understood when contrasted with the wisdom of the Greek on the one hand, and the zeal of the Jew on the other. I shall now proceed to finish what I had to say on *Reason*, by subjoining some reflections which I had put together before the considerations of the essays occurred.

I have said, that man was distinguished from other animals by his conscience, and not by his reasoning faculty. As to the exercise of this last, it is commonly said by philosophers, that there is nearly, if not fully, as great a difference betwixt one man and another, as betwixt some men and some brutes; yea, they place the dullest men much on a footing with the most sagacious animals in this respect. However, it is evident that the differences among men, as to capacity for reasoning, are very great. Now, the apostles in addressing men,

had no respect to what distinguishes one man from another, but to that which is common to them all; they commended themselves to *EVERY man's conscience*; and their success from the beginning, has chiefly been among those least skilled in reasoning. On the other hand, the seats of learning, where the reasoning faculty is cultivated with great industry, have been first and last the chief sources of opposition to the gospel. The meanest day-labourers have full as great sensibility of conscience as those who are wholly employed in learning; yea, we may perceive this sensibility more evident in the poorest villages, than in cities furnished with all branches of education. Philosophers themselves often find it necessary to have recourse to the sentiments of the plain man, as the last resort. All schemes devised by human wisdom, find their way from the learned by slow degrees down to the vulgar. The gospel was first taught by the meanest of the vulgar. The fishers of Galilee were stationed, as the preachers of it, at the chief seat of learning among the Jews; and Paul, who was skilled in Jewish learning, was sent to the Gentiles, who held that learning in great contempt. So little regard did the Deity pay to those things on account of which men glory over one another.

As the verbal command given to the parents of mankind, showed the continued authority of the Deity over all his works; and that when he completed the form of nature, he did not leave it to support itself, or yet man to conduct himself merely by what he knew naturally, or might further learn from what he saw: so the death then threatened, which in consequence of the first transgression continues to pass upon all men, is an awful standing proof of the authority of the Divine word over nature. Death is the dissolution of nature; and to every individual the same in effect as the dissolution of all nature. At the approach of this awful period, if opportunity is had for sober reflection, the sentiments of men are greatly changed from what they were in the busy part of life. Many reasonings which then gave delight, and received force from the countenance of society, now lose their force, when man is to take his last leave of society, and all his enjoyments in it. Many soothing reasonings are founded on misapprehensions of the Divine long-suffering, manifest in supporting and cherishing this mortal life, during the short time wherein the sentence of returning to dust is suspended, and many on the boasted differences betwixt one man and another. But now the Divine long-suffering comes to a period, and all the boasted differences disappear. Now, when the best of men



consider themselves as ready to be laid open before the eye of their Almighty Judge, their deficiencies with regard to his law begin to appear so great and weighty, that all their excellencies above their fellow-men turn out to be light as the dust of the balance.

Notwithstanding the care taken by many to conceal their inward disquiet, and die *decently*, and notwithstanding the care taken by surviving friends to throw a veil over death-bed scenes; yet enough transpires to give us an idea of the real condition of man in that awful hour; to inform us, that matters are in reality no better within than they appear without; and to show us, that nothing but the Divine reason of hope can then give composure to his heart: but what thus transpires occasionally, affecting only small circles in society, is soon smothered. All individuals at separate times and places die; but society lives: the course of nature continues with it, and the sentiments of the healthy and prosperous prevail. If we could collect the last suffrages of dying individuals, we should find a great majority against those of living society. Yet we have some public view of the real condition of man, when society itself is threatened with death, as in the case of earthquakes and other sudden calamities. Besides, there are few who have lived any considerable time in the world who have not on some occasion or other been exposed to such imminent danger of losing their lives, as is sufficient to give them some idea of what happens at death. Death strips all men of their distinctions and sets them on a level. Now, the Deity, in sending his gospel to men, views their days as an hand-breadth; he considers all men as on the brink of the grave. Accordingly, the apostles commended themselves *to every man's conscience IN THE SIGHT OF GOD*. They awakened men to view themselves in that point of light wherein their conscience commonly sets them at the hour of death.

We have naturally an awful concern mixed with some anxiety about the condition of a criminal whom we see led forth to execution. And one reason is, the voice of society warrants us to hold him for an unrighteous person. The gospel leads every one whom it awakens, to view himself in a light no less awful. It draws him aside from the eye of society, and places him under the eye of God; so that he dare not lay his hand to his heart, and say of any dying criminal, *I am not as this man*.

Certain instruments of destruction have, not improperly, been called the last reason of kings: but that death which is



common to all men, is such an argument of Divine judgment, as has hitherto mocked all the presumptuous reasonings of men. Wherever the force of this argument is well observed, no solid ground of comfort will be found, but that afforded by the gospel. For what notions, founded on the course of nature, can support a man when nature itself is dissolving? No scheme but the gospel can show us any fixed point on the other side of the grave. Yet nothing else can be expected, but that men will always continue to reason against fact while society lives, and the course of nature proceeds along with it. For though all individuals are successively confuted most effectually; yet their conviction, being private, and often reserved, can have no extensive or lasting effect on the public.

Now, though the Scripture asserts and enforces all that the conscience of man can call reason, though it demonstrates all our original natural notions; yet almost every little enemy of the gospel no sooner lifts his pen against it, than he introduces himself, by declaiming, with great parade, on the sacred rights of reason, and the great danger of invalidating our natural notions. The truth is, such writers are afraid, lest the light of the gospel should too clearly evince and manifest right reason, in opposition to the fondly received counterfeits of it. They are afraid, lest the light of nature should be increased and strengthened with such additional splendour, as to discover too plainly the corruption of nature. Therefore, as impostors abound most in professions of fidelity and veracity, so these men are the foremost to assert the rights of reason and nature. None so proud of the term of medicine as quacks, none more forward in expressing concern for the health of mankind than they.

No man will be reconciled to the gospel till once his attention be awakened to hearken to reason; till the voice of reason prevail in his thoughts; till his natural notions be so ratified in his mind, as to make him see the vanity of all his artificial or invented ones. Therefore, care is taken by many to dress up these last with all the arts of eloquence, in order to divert the attention of men aside from the gospel. And it is easy for them to give out for certain maxims the most foolish and groundless presumptions with great assurance, and confident hopes of success. For having the corruption of nature on their side, they know, that any false glare, any *ignis fatuus* is sufficient to decoy men along with the current of that corruption.

A very ordinary attention to this sort of writers will show us, that they declaim about nature and reason with no less

ambiguity, no less absurdity, than the popular preachers do about faith and mystery; yet, the fashionable mob is ready to nod, wink, and smile applause at every ingenious period of the former, even as the populace gape and stare in reverent admiration of the latter. But let the popular preachers enjoy themselves, in crying, in their own way, *Faith* and *Mystery*, *Hence ye profane*; and let the gentlemen of fashion divert themselves with the rhapsodies about the sacred rights of reason glorying over the superstitious vulgar; let them continue to cry upon the matter, "Great is the image which fell down from Lucifer, and which all the *rational* world worshipeth:" Christians may content themselves with adopting the old saying, "Great is the truth, and it shall prevail; or rather in hearing their own leaders, the apostles, declaring, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

#### ON SPIRIT.

As I have hitherto spoken but sparingly on the invisible energy by which men are conducted in their ignorance and hatred, or knowledge and love of the Christian truth, I am willing to spend some time in consulting the Scripture on this head; for I would not choose to rank with those who unsettle two points where they fix one.

It may suffice, by way of introduction, to say that it is the part of bad influence, to obscure, to confound, to break the order, connection, and subordination of man's natural notions, to decoy him into disloyalty, and then leave him exposed a defenceless prey to the necessary consequence thereof; or, in two words, to deceive and to destroy. It is the part of good influence, which ever proceeds from the fountain of all goodness, to replace and ascertain man's natural notions, and to furnish him with new ones, when destitute of any that can give him comfort; or in some, to enlighten and to save, to restore man to truth and happiness. For however strongly some reasoners have maintained, that all that is true is also good, it will require but a short survey of one's own heart to convince him, that he never loves truth, nor inclines to admit it, when it presents its dark side towards his own self.

There is a certain great genius or spirit often made mention of in Scripture, whose history is coeval with that of

man, and whom I would choose rather to describe by the leading line of his character, than by any of those names which have become familiar terms of reproach; I mean that spirit, who being originally of the first order of created beings, fell from his high station, with many under his conduct, by forgetting his natural state of dependence.

It does not appear that he fell by any such proud disposition as has been generally held odious among mankind, or by acting unsuitably to what wise men in all ages have accounted good sense and greatness of mind. The clearest account we have of his fall is given us, by one who well knew his history, in these notable words, John viii, 45, (Εν τη αληθεια ουχ εσηκεν,) *He stood not in the truth.* I think I need not take time to show, that the truth so largely contested in this chapter was, that the man Jesus was the beloved Son of God, in the sense which the Jews accounted blasphemy. But we may take some notice of the occasion on which the mention of this spirit is introduced.

In opposition to the truth, and the real freedom in the family of God preached along with it, the Jews insisted on a peculiar relation to God, as his children, by their father Abraham. But they did not consider that even this boasted privilege was founded in their fleshly relation to Christ, that seed promised to Abraham, who is the Son of God. Jesus gives them to understand, that while they hated this truth, whatever relation to God they gloried in, they could be no otherwise in his family than as Ishmael the servant, the son of the bondwoman, was in Abraham's house, who was cast out for persecuting Isaac the son and heir; and that the true freedom in the house of God, as his children, in distinction from bondmen, comes only by himself the true Son of God. He shows them at large, how vain a thing it was to glory in having Abraham for their father, while they did not the works of Abraham, who rejoiced to see his day afar off, but the works of another father, who stood not in the truth, but opposed it by all his craft and power.

It is evident, then, from this passage, that the great characteristic of this angelic chief, is opposition to the sacred truth from first to last, ever since his early apostacy from it. And he is the father and prompter of all the opposers of this truth to the end of the world. For the truth opposed by him is the same that Abraham believed, and rejoiced in; the same that the Jews disbelieved, and hated; and so showed themselves to be not the genuine sons of Abraham, but a

spurious race, more properly to be ranked under another father.

Seeing, then, this chief is distinguished from the angels who stood, by his not abiding or standing in the truth, we are plainly given to understand, that this truth was made known to him, and some way acknowledged by him before he fell; so that he fell by apostacy from it. Yet we cannot say that the perseverance of those who stood, was owing to any difference or excellency in their nature, but to their being chosen of sovereign grace to be servants in the kingdom of the Son of God, and, therefore, they are called the elect angels.

We do not find any occasion more proper for its being made known to the angels, that the Son of God was to be united to his creatures in man, and become Lord of the creation in the human nature, than the formation of man, which is introduced with a very peculiar solemnity. And what may give some countenance to this is, that the same tenor of expression used by the Deity at the making of man, is repeated by his inspired prophet in the 8th psalm, in describing the universal dominion of the Son of God, under the title of the Son of man: for this psalm is in the New Testament expressly applied to Jesus Christ.

All the angels are represented as unanimously praising God, when he began to form the earth, Job, xxxviii, 4, 7, *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?—when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.* As they were witnesses to the whole progress of the Divine work in framing the world, their attention must have been in an especial manner drawn to the grand conclusion thereof in the making of man, which was ushered in with these words, *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* Here was a proper occasion for their being given to know, that the Divine glory was fully to be manifested in the human nature, by the Son of God becoming a man. We cannot date the intimation of this truth to them much later, for apostacy from it took place among them before the fall of man.

In illustration of what has been said, it may be observed, that the Apostles, Peter and Jude, compare the corruption of Christianity by its teachers, to the fall of the angels. Jude, moreover, calls to mind the apostacy of the Israelites, who fell in the wilderness, as a similar case to both these. And describing the sin of the angels who fell, he says, they kept not



their *beginning*,\* but left their own *habitation*.† And thus they are distinguished from the angels who continued standing in the truth, worshipping the Son of man as their Lord, and ministering to his redeemed church, wherein they are attentive to learn the manifold wisdom of God, and so keep their beginning, and their proper habitation. On this account these last are called the *holy angels*; for, according to the New Testament, there is no holiness but what consists in the love of this truth. So Paul says, Eph. iv, 24, *The new man is created after God, in righteousness, and holiness of the truth.* On the same account, Matt. xiii, 41, the Son of man calls them *his angels*, and 2 Thess. 1, 7, they are called *the angels of his power*.

Now, if we inquire what principle influenced the apostasy of that eminent angel whose pernicious way was followed by many, the Apostle Paul plainly intimates to us, that it was owing to his being lifted up with pride, 1 Tim. iii, 6. For he would not have a novice chosen to be a bishop, lest he should, like him, be lifted up with pride, through a conceit of superior knowledge and abilities, and so fall into the same condemnation with him. And in his epistle to Titus, he makes this the first article in the blameless character, which he prescribes for a bishop, (*μη αυθαδης*) not self-sufficient; as well knowing the sad consequences that would ensue in the Christian profession through neglect of this warning.

When we observe on what foundations the pride of mortals is elevated, we may well allow, that this great angel could produce as forcible arguments in support of his, as any reasoner since; for the dignity of the angelic nature was not

\* The beginning (*αρχη*) is a title frequently given to the Son of God in the New Testament, and may refer to Prov. viii, 22; where wisdom says, *The Lord possessed me the beginning his way, before his works from thence.* We find him also called *God's way* by Moses, Exod. xxxiii, 13; to which Jesus refers, John xiv, 4, 6; saying, *I am the way.* When we think of God as purposing to manifest all his glory to his creatures, in his Son, and so creating and fashioning all things in that view, we may well consider the Son as *the beginning*, and as *his way* to all his works.

† What was their native habitation which they left, by departing from the truth, we may learn from such passages as these: Deut. xxxiii, 27, *The eternal God is thy refuge.* Heb. habitation. Psal. xc, 1, *Lord thou hast been our dwelling-place.* Psal. xci, 1, *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty, &c.* And the Apostle John, speaking of the love of that truth which is the foundation of mutual affection among Christians, even that same truth from which these angels departed, says, 1 John vi, 16, *He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God.*

liable to those objections which now form at least a heavy contrast to that of man. When once through high thoughts of his own dignity, his attention was drawn aside from the early intimation of those things which the angels who stood desire to look into, and which were to be unfolded in the fulness of time, or when proud disaffection to it began thus to work in his mind, he would be at no loss to find objections against it. For he soon after gave proofs of his dexterity this way, in his undermining and falsifying the revelation which God gave to man.

The shout of triumph over the king of Babylon, who was at the head of the idolatrous defection from the true God, which is the type of the antichristian apostacy, recorded in Isaiah, chap. xiv, has, not without reason, been thought to point at the first apostate, who has therefore been called *Lucifer*, v, 12—14. *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!—For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.—I will be like the Most High.\**

This angel, finding himself a glorious chief, of the high order of creatures, and far excelling man, could not bear the thought that the Son of God, condescending to unite himself with the creatures, should not take on him the nature of angels, but become a man, having his delights with the sons of men; and in the human nature rule over angels, as servants to him and his brethren of mankind. He looked on this as a breach of the order of nature, and contrary to the fitness of things. He could not think that the likeness of God could be so advantageously shown in the earthly or human, as the heavenly and angelic nature, which he considered as approaching by far the nearest to the Divine. So he concluded as his reasoning prompted him, *I will be like the Most High*. Hence in the New Testament he gets the name of a *liar*, and is given out as the author of every false representation of the Deity. So in the above mentioned passage, John viii, 44, Jesus speaks of him thus: *He abode not in the truth because*

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\* The following passages, likewise describe his chief agents or representatives. Dan. vii, 25, *He shall speak words against the Most High*. Symmachus has it thus, *He shall speak words as the Most High*. 2 Thess. ii, 4, *Who opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*. Rev. xiii, 6, *And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God*. All these forms of expression are of the same import. For, in creatures, to speak and affect to be as God, is in reality to speak and act against the true God.

there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh (*ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων*) of his own, his own selfish reasonings: for he is a liar and the father of it. Jesus shows himself to be the reverse of this, when he says to the Jews, v, 42, *If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth, and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.* And when they charge him as influenced by an apostate angel, he first refuses the charge; then adds, on the contrary, ver. 49, 50, *But I honour my Father—And I seek not mine own glory.* We may take this occasion to observe, by the way, that the fullest view of God was given in the lowest state of dependence, Jesus humbled to the death of the cross.

As to what has been hinted above, we cannot imagine, that the first reasoner against revelation came short of what has been lately suggested by some Christian teachers of note, who, not being satisfied that it became God to be united to human nature, properly so called, so as to become a man, in all things like unto his brethren, sin only excepted, have imagined, for him whom they call Jesus, a soul created before the world, or rather derived from the Deity, in some peculiar manner, so as to be distinguished for its natural excellency from every other creature.

On the other hand, the angels who stood, remembering the infinite eminency of the Deity above all creatures, made no account of the difference betwixt the angelic and the human nature, so as to draw thence the least objection against his wisdom and goodness, in choosing the latter to be the centre of union with his creatures. They did not think it became them to reason from any order they observed in nature, against the declared will of the author thereof. So they were far from finding fault with *the good pleasure which he purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.* The more fully evinced, the more clearly ascertained, they saw their dependence, they found their happiness the more enlarged, as they saw the glory of the Divine character more fully opened to their view. And the lower their service was, the closer connection they had with the Son of the Highest, and the nearer access to his presence. For as the Deity cannot, like creatures, rise by improvement, his unparalleled eminence can only be seen, by observing how low he condescends.

Now, if we turn our eyes to the fruits of the first apostacy, we find the pride, by which it began, working by deceit and malice, and plainly showing itself in falsehood and murder.

For the leader in this apostacy, envying man on account of that truth which he considered as partial in his favour, and debasing to himself, went about to deceive him, and sought his death, if by any means he might overthrow the truth, the prime object of his disgust. He knew the law of dependence given to man, he knew the penalty annexed in case of transgression; so he sought to throw man utterly out of favour with God, and thus disappoint the Divine purpose concerning him. And the way he took to accomplish his design, was by blowing up the pride of man, and teaching him to reason against Divine revelation, and renounce his dependence as he himself had done.

He takes his advantage of the woman, informs the body of the serpent, eats of the interdicted fruit in her presence; the mute, grovelling animal immediately commences a speaker with human voice, yea, a reasoner even about the highest matters, the concerns of man with God. This much the sacred history plainly imports, while it shows us the woman was influenced no less by what she saw, or the fresh discoveries made to her eyes, than by what she heard. Having thus, with signs of great satisfaction, eaten of the fruit, and in all appearance, made a clear discovery of its natural virtues to communicate both pleasure and knowledge, by a notable experiment performed in her presence, he decoyed her attention, and drew her in to become a reasoner on natural causes and effects, as to the article of her dependence on God. At making the experiment, he broke forth into a question of no less triumph and defiance, than a modern reasoner would show in inventing a new argument against revelation, *Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?* Is it possible, that he who animates all nature, and whose bounty is unlimited to every other creature, hath forbid you, the natural sovereigns of the earth, the use of any tree of the garden, not to say the most beneficial one among them, to which, moreover, the meanest reptile you see may have free access, and by virtue thereof, raise himself far above his natural condition, even to the highest degree of perfection? —The woman is caught. She commences a reasoner; and by her first reply, her pride appears to be piqued, *We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, our liberty is far from being stinted as to the use of any one of them;\** but

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\* The LXX. version, Alex. MS., gives the answer of Eve thus: *We may eat of every tree of the garden; but, &c.*, making her repeat in her answer all the words on which the question turned. To this, I had no



of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, the author of nature knowing what pernicious qualities may be naturally contained in it better than we, and having a peculiar care for our health and safety, hath said, *Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

Thus have we seen some Christian writers reasoning, who, not being satisfied to what purpose man should be taught absolute dependence on the declared will of God, have thought it incumbent upon them to find out such reasons for the Divine will, as might render the compliance of man with the duty required highly rational and beneficial to him, even supposing there were no God to command him, or no explicit declaration made of his will. Such are all those called *Christian Deists*. But man was not made to live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out of the mouth of God. He was made to be a disciple to his Creator.

To return: it is evident the woman's attention was now drawn off from the sense of her duty and submission, to consider the reasons of her Creator's conduct towards her; and as her sense of freedom and dignity was now inflamed, she behoved to be averse to the notion of arbitrary authority, circumscribing her actions; which aversion is the proper spring of Atheism. This appears by her suppressing the name he had given to the tree in question, *The tree of knowledge of good and evil*. She chooses rather to design it by its situation in the garden than by the name which served to distinguish it, as a test of obedience to her and her husband; the name which, in connection with the threatening, plainly imported, that they should live or die, be happy or miserable, according as they were found to be good or evil on the trial. Agreeably to this, we find she loses the impression of the Divine threatening; and, instead of considering life and death as hinged on the Divine word, intimates an apprehension, that death might be caused by virtue of some natural quality of the fruit. So, instead of repeating the words of God, *Thou shalt surely die*, she uses another form of expression,

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regard, when I wrote what is above; for I had not then observed it. The paraphrase I have given is, I apprehend, sufficiently countenanced by our common English version from the Hebrew. So soon as the woman's mind became averse to the notion of arbitrary law or restraint, she would easily find a pretext for entertaining the largest sense of liberty, from the universal expression EVERY TREE, used first in the general unlimited grant of food, before any mention is made of the planting of the garden, Gen. i, 29; and repeated in the special grant of the garden, which was given along with the prohibition, Gen. ii. 16.

*Lest ye die.* This apprehension further appears, from her adding to the Divine prohibition, *Ye shall not eat of it*, these words, *Neither shall ye touch it.*\* Even as the Jews, neglecting the true import of the Divine law, and not having a due sense of the authority of the Lawgiver, began to dread more harm from what touched, affected, or entered into them from without, than from the threatened consequence of the iniquitous thoughts of their hearts; or, which is the same thing, the power of the Divine word, vindicating its violated authority: and, accordingly, turning aside from the great scope of the Divine precepts, employed their chief care and attention in framing and observing additional laws of their own, to guard them against bodily defilement, and its imagined effects,

The tempter pursues his advantage, and concludes, it was far from being certain, that death would be the consequence of their eating; that there was no necessary connection betwixt this action and death; *Ye shall not surely die.* And as he had already set the woman's mind to work, to give reasons why her Creator spoke as he did, he proceeds to support the conclusion he had now drawn by other words of her Creator, † namely, the title of the tree, which she had suppressed, to which he gives a gloss very suitable to his main design. "You are greatly mistaken, if you imagine God distinguished this tree, as knowing any pernicious qualities to be in it; *For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.* Ye shall be endowed with the most enlarged sentiments, and become highly enlightened reasoners, having such a thorough insight into the nature of things, as shall enable you, on all occasions, clearly

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\* This ill-placed, and ill-founded dread of the power of nature, is the principle and spring of all superstition; and by taking a full view, both of the case of our first parents and that of the Jews, we may see, that superstition is very nearly allied to Atheism, or that the transition is readily made from the one to the other. For he, who, by reasonings, is led to entertain undue apprehensions or fears of evil from the power of nature, may easily be induced, by much the like reasonings, to entertain undue expectations of happiness from that same power, till, at last, he be tempted to renounce his dependence on that God, who is the supreme object of fear and of love, and to whom all the powers of nature stand in perfect subordination, or with whom no power can justly stand in the least competition.

† Thus he continues to undermine revelation, by opposing one part of it to another, that he may make the whole doubtful, so as to become the subject of free debate, and to have no fixed sense beyond what may be suggested from the course of nature, that so men may determine themselves as if there were no revelation.

to perceive what is fit and what is unfit, and to measure exactly the just proportions of good and evil, in every thing or action. So that, having no more occasion to be overawed or controlled in your actions by unaccountable fears suggested by your consciences, or yet arising from any voice or positive precept whatsoever, ye shall clearly understand how God ought to deal with you, what in reason it becomes him to expect from you, and how he ought to treat you, as to happiness or misery. Yea, ye shall become fully qualified to conduct yourselves in all respects as to virtue and happiness, even supposing there were no God to command you, or take cognizance of your actions.

“ You have, therefore, no occasion to be afraid of any words you have heard mentioning *death*, as the consequence of your eating this fruit; for if any change of your condition was insinuated by them, you have no reason to conclude that it must be a transition to misery; on the contrary, from the experiment now made before you, ye have the most rational ground to presume, that in the day ye eat thereof, your natural condition shall be changed greatly to the better.”\*

Now, if we observe how Moses collects the motives which influenced the woman's compliance, we will find an illustration of the means used to deceive her. *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.* Moses, relating the planting of the garden, says, chap. ii, 9, *And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow, every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.* The woman then saw, by what the serpent showed her, in laying open the fruit of this tree, and eating it before her, that it was within, as well as without, no way inferior to that of the rest of the trees of the garden, being no less pleasant to the sight and good for food, than any of them. Thus was removed all ground for any suspicion suggested by her reasoning, that

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\* It might have been added to the paraphrase given above, “ and even supposing that by *death* should be meant the dissolution of your bodies, it does by no means follow, that you will thereby become miserable; but on the contrary: for so soon as your intellectual faculties are disengaged from the tenements of clay, with which they are at present encumbered, they will be, then, much more at liberty to penetrate beyond the present veil of appearances, into the most secret recesses of nature, and discern its most internal qualities. And thus, ye shall attain the full maturity of your nature; for nature delights in progress.” If all these presumptions were not then hinted or insinuated by the first reasoner against revelation, we may freely say, that they have been sufficiently insisted upon *since* by his disciples and children.

the use of it might be forbidden her on account of some bad quality contained in it. She saw, moreover, by the deceitful experiment made in her presence, that it excelled the rest of the trees, in this respect, that it was desirable to make one wise; and concluding it highly probable, that on this account, it got the name of *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*, suitably to the new gloss given it by the serpent, which appeared no less plausible and ingenious than it was agreeable to her pride; she accordingly yielded to the temptation, ate of the fruit with pleasure, and recommended it to her husband; who also complied, being prevailed upon by the additional motive of his affection to her.

Here we may take a short view of the corruption of human nature at the fountain whence it flowed. It is no new observation, nor disagreeable to daily experience, that, according to the character which men conceive of God, so they study to form their own. Here we may consider man's original impression, or knowledge of the Deity, as corrupted in a threefold view. For, 1. When man gave ear to the tempter, representing God as speaking deceitfully to him, then deceit took place in his heart. The tempter, by artful words and actions, pointed forth the Divine words as deceitful, ambiguous, and capable of another sense, than, at first hearing, they plainly imported to the conscience of man. By perverting the word of God he changed it into a lie. And the mind of man, being hereby tainted, lost the principle of truth by calling in question the Divine veracity. Thus man became deceitful, in conceiving of God as dealing deceitfully with him. And the deceit of his heart has ever since continued to be more especially subtle, as to the matter of his dependence on God. 2. The tempter having represented God as withholding from man something he knew would be more beneficial to him, than anything he had bestowed upon him, the mind of man became evil and malignant by giving place to reflections against the Divine goodness. And ever since, the disaffection of his heart has been more especially pointed against every manifestation of the Divine goodness, that served to evince and ascertain his real condition with respect to his Creator. 3. It must be adverted to, that the tempter presents to man nature aside from God. He leads his thoughts aside from the impression of power conveyed by the Divine word, to attend to the power of nature in the forbidden tree; and, by stimulating his natural sense of freedom, as being a creature made for dominion, he persuades him that, by a proper exercise thereof, he might



avail himself of the powers of nature to advance to the highest degree of perfection, and so have no reason to stand in awe of any superior, as having no more occasion to depend on him for wisdom, or consequently for happiness. Thus atheistical pride took place in the heart of man, and he came short of the glory of God, by seeking his own, independently of him. Here is the origin of all idolatry, and here is the true source of the atheism of the philosophers, who acknowledge no God but nature.

Thus, the first apostate drew his own image on man, who now became like him in deceit, enmity, and pride, as much as he could be without the knowledge of that truth from which his tempter had apostatized. And thus man became very fit to resist and oppose that truth when it should be revealed to him.

Thus he who stood not in the truth, sought to overthrow it by devising the ruin of men. But however averse he was to the thought, that the image of God should be shown in man; yet as he knew not the fulness of the Divine character that was to be manifested, so neither did he know the means by which the manifestation or image of it was to be drawn forth, and arise to view. In the height of his crafty disaffection, he served only as a tool to promote the grand design he thought to thwart. His opposition to the truth made way for the revelation of it among depraved mankind to his own condemnation, even as all his attempts against it since that time have still served to make it shine the clearer.

It was the intention of the Deity to express his image fully in man. While man remained upright, the majesty of God, as the Creator and upholder of the universe, was fitly expressed in his submission to the law of dependence delivered to him by the Divine voice. But that the fulness of God might be made manifest, it was necessary that men should depend on him for more than was yet to be seen in the universe.—Till sin and misery took place among mankind, as there was no room for God's opposition to sin to appear among them, so neither could his boundless mercy and all-sufficiency to save be manifested. And as there was no room for showing spotless virtue, or unreserved submission to the Divine will, tried in the greatest extremity of distress, so neither could the greatness of the Divine delight in such virtue be displayed; nor yet his wisdom and power in bringing the greatest good out of the greatest evil. And it must be added, that unless human nature had been dignified, in being assumed by a Divine person, there had not been room enough for

displaying among mankind these divine perfections in their proper or infinite extent. But, not to open too many views at once, it may suffice to say.

As God was now to appear, not only as the avenger of sin, but also as the deliverer from sin and misery, it was his design, that all the objects of his favour among mankind should depend on him for a righteousness of his providing, even as the first man was taught to depend on him for his earthly life, and all its enjoyments. In the free gift of righteousness, all the divine perfections are readily brought to view. And the Apostle Peter, summing up at once the glory of the restored creation, says,—*wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

In the first intimation of the saving truth to fallen man, is hinted a distinction of mankind into two classes, under the designations of the *seed of the woman*, and *the seed of the serpent*: and this hint is sufficiently illustrated to us in other places of Scripture. Thence it appears, that in the former class are comprehended all with whom the Son of God took part in flesh and blood, and who, partaking of his Spirit, are joined to him as members of one body to the head; so, according to the apostolic style, make in him *one new man*.—And of every member of this body it may be said, *He that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.* This account of the *seed of the woman* is supported by the like account given by the Apostle Paul of the *seed of Abraham*, Gal. iv. The spirit by which this one body is animated, is distinguished from every other, under the titles of the *Holy Spirit*, the *Spirit of God*, and the *Spirit of the Truth*: and, according to the Scripture, this Spirit is God. In the latter class are comprehended all who have the same temper of mind which began in the first opposer of the truth, who borrows his name from the serpent, which he made use of in deceiving man. The Scripture declares all such to be under his influence, and to be conducted by him, in their opposition to the truth: so he is called *the Spirit that now worketh in the children* (*απειθείας*) *of unbelief or disobedience.* And the union of all who are influenced by him, is to be seen in nothing else but their enmity to the saving truth.

This spirit obtains in Scripture various designations, describing the nature and extent of his influence. He is called *the Prince* and *the God of this world*, also *the Spirit of the World*, and *the Spirit of Error*; he and his associates are called *the Rulers of the darkness of this world*; and his dominion is called *the power of darkness*, in opposition to the light of the Divine glory which shines in the truth. So all who are

rescued from his power by the evidence of the truth are said to be turned from darkness to light. He is, moreover, designed by two Hebrew names, signifying *the adversary* and *the destroyer*; and by two Greek ones, signifying *the accuser* or *calumniator*, and *the evil* or *wicked one*; all pointing forth the opposition conducted by him in the world to the Divine goodness manifested in the truth, and to all those in whom the truth takes place. So we find the Apostle John ranks all mankind under two heads. For, speaking of himself, and all who held the same truth with him, he says, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world (*ἐν τῷ ποιῆσθαι*) lieth in the wicked one."

IF, casting our eye on the whole history of this spirit, and considering the nature of his agency, and the various names given him, we should incline to distinguish him by one capital designation, methinks, with great propriety, we might call him *the Spirit of self-dependence*; which is only shortening the style used in describing his emblem in the watery abyss: "He beholdeth all high things; he is a king over all the children of pride;"\* and corresponds with the forecited description given of him by Paul, namely, "the Spirit that now worketh in the children of infidelity or disloyalty."

Here I willingly adopt the words quoted at the foot of the 156th page of vol. 1, of *Meditations, &c.* from a treatise called, *Christianity, the Great Ornament of Human Life*. "Now, this *self-dependence* may be ranked among the *most dangerous* of the infernal politics, because the fatal poison lies deep, and too often undiscerned."

Self-dependence being the leading principle with the prime enemy of the truth, and the true spring of all his opposition to it, the way he multiplies his offspring is by propagating his own leading sentiment; and wherever that sentiment appears, there his power is manifest; even as wherever the sacred truth is believed, there acts the Spirit of the truth, whose agency is inseparable from it: and wherever the faith of it shows itself working by love, there the power of that Holy Spirit is manifest. And, in general it may be said of every doctrine about the concerns of man with God, that a certain spirit or temper of mind goes along with it; so the Scripture, awakening the attention of Christians to the examination of doctrines, uses this form of expression, "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of God."

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\* Compare Job xli, 34, with Is. xxvii, 1.

Here it must be remembered, that since human nature was corrupted at the fountain, by the parents of mankind throwing off their dependence, their posterity derive from them only nature corrupted, or affected with the bias originally received from the adversary, who has therefore still more ready access to them than he had to the first pair. He has no occasion to renew the task of disaffecting loyal subjects from their sovereign, but only to cherish and strengthen the roots of that disaffection which he planted in human nature at the first; unless we turn our eyes to those in whose minds the spirit of the truth hath grafted a new principle of loyalty. There indeed he labours with all his might, but in vain, to overthrow it; though he is successful against many, who by their profession seem to have it.

All mankind, then, are naturally influenced and conducted by the spirit of self-dependence, not excepting those who are chosen to be heirs of salvation. For when these last are brought to the knowledge of the truth, they are said to be *turned from the power of the adversary unto God*. Hence is that opposition stated betwixt God and the world, and so often insisted on in the New Testament. Hence we learn the difference betwixt the *taste* of men and that of God.—When Peter showed a temper of mind averse to the humiliation of Jesus unto death, whence the brightest discovery of the Divine glory was to arise, Jesus rebuked him, as influenced by the adversary: “For [said he] thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” If Peter received such a rebuke after he had been blessed by his Lord, and his faith approved, as proceeding from Divine teaching, we may surely with all freedom ascribe to its proper source every sentiment opposing the spirit of the truth, though uttered by men of the greatest reputation for piety. The first Christians were so well instructed as to the opposition betwixt God and the world, that it was considered as a first principle among them. And it was thought enough to cool their minds to all that is coveted and admired in the latter, to remind them of that opposition, by telling them, *It is not of the Father, but is of the world*.

Nor are we to imagine, that by the *world*, in this oppositions, is chiefly to be understood the more infamous part of it, whose practices were always condemned by what is called the *public* in every nation. No; the fact stands quite otherwise: for Jesus Christ and his apostles always met with the warmest opposition, from even the most reputable and venerable part of the public; and if they were sometimes insulted by *lewd fellows of the baser sort*, we find it was at the instigation of



the devout; for men of very different characters are easily united in their opposition to the truth; and as it fared with Jesus Christ and his apostles, so will it always fare with their doctrine to the end of the world, when it is maintained in its ancient simplicity. On this occasion we may say, that any writer in behalf of the ancient gospel, would act a very absurd part in appealing to the public for their approbation. If he would appeal to any of his fellow-creatures, it must be to the consciences of those who know and love the truth, and that too with a reserve of recourse to the decision of the apostles, by whose writings it must be tried how far any man knows and loves the truth.

THE opposition we have been speaking of, has appeared, more or less in every age of the world, from the first to the present, agreeably to the early intimation given of it in the address of the Deity to the serpent in the presence of the woman; "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed." In the same view we must understand these words of Jesus, "I am come to set fire on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled? Suppose, ye, that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay, but rather division. From henceforth, there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." The bright discovery of the Divine goodness made by Jesus Christ, awakened the spirit of opposition to show itself more clearly, and burn with a more violent flame than ever it had done before. In the foregoing ages, as we find all along traces of the truth, so do we also of the opposition; and no less is intimated in these words of Jesus, "And what will I if it be already kindled?"

The Scripture assures us, it was by the influence of the prime opposer of the truth, that the first son of Adam slew his younger brother, a believer and lover of it. From the history of *Seth*, contrasted with that of *Cain* and his family; from the life and prophecy of *Enoch*, and the state of mankind in the days of *Noah*, a preacher of righteousness, we learn how the opposition showed itself until the flood. From what happened in the family of *Noah* after the flood; from the building of the tower in the plain of *Shinar*, and the progress of idolatry when *Abraham* was called; from the history of that and the following patriarchs, and even from what happened in their own families; and, lastly, from the oppres-

sion suffered by their descendants in Egypt, we see how the opposition appeared until the erection of the kingdom of Israel. Henceforward, till the coming of Christ, we have a twofold view of the opposition, as it showed itself not only in the hatred of the neighbouring nations to that kingdom, but also among the peculiar people themselves.

The Scripture takes express notice of the agency of the adversary against the chosen people, of whom Christ was to come, both before and after the Babylonish captivity. Moreover, if we think of the various sorts of idolatry, through attachment to which the neighbouring nations hated the worshipers of the one true God, and by which many of the Israelites themselves were corrupted; we find the Scriptures affirming, that all the worship paid to idols, or strange gods, under whatever names, is at bottom paid to the chief apostate and his associates. We find also, that amidst the peculiar people was maintained all along a disaffection to the prophetic word, which testified among them beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. And this disaffection held pace with their neglect of the Divine law. With this, Stephen boldly charges them in their presence, when he concludes his summary view of their history in these words: *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the just One, of whom ye have now been the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

WE are now led to consider how the opposition was conducted when the Son of God himself appeared in the world, who could with great propriety say, I AM THE TRUTH. Now the controversy was pushed to the uttermost and brought to a final decision. Now the characters on both sides are clearly marked, and it is fully made manifest what is and what is not of God. But as we took some view of this subject in the foregoing letter, our reflections now may be the more general.

After the voice from heaven, directed to Jesus at his baptism, had solemnly declared who he was, he is conducted by the Spirit of the truth into the wilderness, there to be exposed in the most destitute circumstances to the assaults of the adversary in person, for the trial of his faith, that so, learning by experience the full character and abilities of his rival, he might

be prepared to withstand the various opposition he was afterward to meet with from all sorts of men under his influence.

The adversary having craftily taken occasion from the necessitous condition of Jesus, to tempt him to call in question the truth he had heard from heaven, by putting it to the proof for his present relief, next presents himself to him in the height of his grandeur, as the god of this world, showing him all the kingdoms and the glory thereof, as who should say, *I will be like the Most High*; and offering all to him, on condition of receiving homage from him for the same. With these two attempts he joins a third, in showing his power to destroy, by forcibly carrying away Jesus to a place of such danger, as seemed to leave room for no alternative, but that of being slain, by falling headlong, or, which was far worse, of letting go the truth.

Thus he attacked Jesus with all the address that his craft, his haughtiness and malice, seconded by his great power, could furnish him with. But he was utterly foiled in his enterprise, finding no part in him where he could make the least impression. And the whole temptation issued in a notable confirmation of the truth he sought to undermine; for Jesus obtained a new proof of his being the Son of God, and having pleased him on the trial of his faith, in the miraculous preservation of his life by the ministry of angels sent from his Father. And thus he received a pledge beforehand of his resurrection from that death, wherein all his sufferings were to issue. Here, then, we have a short plan of the following history of Jesus, represented to us in a private scene at his entrance on his public ministry.

Here also we have a summary view of all the motives by which the adversary works upon the minds of men, to hinder them from admitting, or to cause them to forsake the truth, which may be distinguished under three heads. He tempts them, (1.) by considerations touching the necessary supplies of life: (2.) by the fittest allurements for inflaming their pride and gratifying all their passions; and (3.) by the fear of temporal calamities and death, the issue of them all. The great corruption of Christianity, which by his agency took place after the days of the apostles, and still continues, is a standing proof how successful he has been in urging these motives.

Hence we see how Jesus honoured his Father, by a steady attachment to his word, and submission to his will, and that in circumstances very different from those wherein the first man was placed. Jesus, in the most straitened condition, held fast the grand point which the first man let go in the

height of prosperity, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* All appearances concurred with the Divine word, to assure the first pair that they were the favourites of God; yet they let go the word which imported, that they held all their happiness of him, by giving ear to a false interpreter of it. Jesus held fast the Divine word, declaring him to be the beloved Son of God, when all appearances were strong against it. They, surrounded with abundance, and secure from fear, proved disloyal for one morsel of meat. He, destitute of the necessaries of life, continued faithful and submissive: nor could his constancy be shaken by the most imminent danger. They, enjoying large dominion, at the rate of acknowledging no superior but their Creator, were tempted, with imaginary prospects of being greater, to grudge at the test of their submission to him, as an unreasonable restraint of their liberty. But he could by no means be prevailed upon to entertain a thought of exchanging the extremely low and straitened condition wherein his Father had placed him, for all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, at the rate of receiving them from the hand of another, or paying the least homage to him who made the offer.

On this occasion, we may well say, how greatly was the religion of Jesus corrupted, when its teachers, with the multitudes following them, accepted of this very offer, with the condition annexed; when the Christian nations bowed before the throne of spiritual pride, erected above the kingdoms of this world, and aggrandized with all the glory of them, worshiping the dragon, which gave his power thereto. For thereto, we are told he *gave his power, and his seat, and great authority*; so made good, to those who accepted the condition, the offer which he had in vain proposed to Jesus. This worship is so universal, that in the passage I have been referring to, it is said to be paid by all *whose names are not written in the slain Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world.*\* Against this worship in the following chapter, is denounced an awful threatening, which ought to be attentively considered by all who promote reverence for secular establishments of religion, Rev. xiv, 9—12. The expression is, indeed,

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\* Thus the Apostle's words, in Rev. xiii, 8, ought to be read and understood. For it would require great straining, in criticism, to show us how the Lamb could be said to be *slain from the foundation of the world*; and, besides, such criticism would ill suit with the simplicity of the apostolic style.



somewhat figurative, yet it is easy to see that the meaning is very dreadful. And to remove all complaint of obscurity, or excuse for ignorance, the twelfth verse describes, in the simplest and plainest words, the character of those who stand clear of the evil condemned in that passage.

THE temptation which Jesus resisted, having led back our thoughts to that by which the first man was ensnared, we may here pause a little, and observe how the discovery of the Deity is carried forward from the beginning, that so we have the more distinct view how the opposition is all along conducted. For the latter always follows the former, like a shadow, and serves eventually to make it shine the brighter.

The most awful apprehension we have of the Divine Majesty, is by his voice in speaking. This is much insisted on throughout the Scriptures, and particularly in the book of Psalms, in Isaiah, and the four Evangelists. And Longinus, though no believer of the Scriptures, yet quotes Moses for an instance of the sublime, where he introduces the Deity thus, *And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.*

That Divine person who is called the Son of God, acts as the speaker of the words of God, expressing the mind of the Father unto his creatures; so his name by way of distinction, is said to be **THE WORD OF GOD**. The Apostle John, in the beginning of his gospel, speaks of his agency in the making of the world, under the title of the **WORD**, who in the beginning was with God, and was God; plainly pointing to his part in the threefold agency of the Deity in that work, as described by Moses. *And God said—And God made—And God saw that it was good.* Where the Father is represented, as approving, or beholding with delight what was done, according to what was spoken. Agreeably to this, we find the same person who is called the Word, under the title of Wisdom, saying, *I was daily his delight*, Prov. viii, 30, plainly referring to the several days wherein the world was made. The words immediately following, are, *Rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.* While he was speaking the world into order, he had always in view the great purpose of showing his delight in the closest connection with sons of men, by the revelation of the Divine mercy. Thus we have a noble account given for the solemnity with which the agency of the Deity is represented, in the work of each day.

When the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men,

John the Baptist spoke of him thus, John iii, 34, *He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God; for God giveth of the Spirit by measure unto him.* In the voice which came from the excellent glory, we not only have a representation of the communication of the Father's mind to Jesus, but we also see him confirmed, and authorized, as the speaker of the Father's mind; for the voice closes with these words, *Hear ye him.* In Jesus we not only behold the Divine will honoured, by the most perfect submission to it, under the greatest trials, but we also find the authority thereof exercised in the most majestic manner; for while he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, he, at the same time, spoke with that authority and power which is peculiar to the Divine Majesty. *He spake, and it was; commanded, and it stood;* healing those who were otherwise incurable; turning the storm into a calm; raising the dead; and changing the hearts of men by a word of his mouth. And, hereby, he gave a sure pledge of the veracity and power of that saying, whose effect is yet to come, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away;* and of that other, *Behold I make all things new.*

The first view we have of the majesty of the Divine word, is in commanding the light to shine out of darkness; in giving birth to, and establishing the course of nature. Man was last formed, and he was made for hearing the voice of God. He was so made, that his life was incomplete till he heard that voice; incomplete we may say, for want of a better similitude, like a dial before the sun has shined upon it. He was fitted, as the wax to the seal, for receiving the impression of the Divine word. He was erected, as a living conscious monument, to bear for an inscription, *By whom, and how, the world was made,* or that the world was framed by the word of God. His conscience was framed to be a standing receptacle for the power and majesty of that voice, by which all things were made, and by which they are upheld.

The adversary, who himself fell by disaffection to the truth, made known to him by the Divine voice, as judging it unsuitable to the order of nature, tempted man upon the word spoken to him by God, and not on what he naturally knew without revelation. Man had a natural knowledge of God by the things that are made, and a sense of right and wrong in his conscience without revelation. But his life was not framed to depend wholly thereupon; nor was it principally hinged upon his conduct, regulated by his own reasoning, while his reasoning faculty was yet uncorrupted. It de-

pended on a word spoken to him by his Creator. It was the business of the adversary, then, to work upon his sense and natural knowledge; and to turn his reasoning against the revelation to which he knew his life depended, even as he afterwards sought, though in vain, to do with Jesus.

THE adversary carries on the whole opposition to the glory of God and the happiness of men, in order to do it the more effectually in an indirect manner. For he opposes both these, under the pretence of maintaining and promoting them. Even as the worship he seeks for himself among men, is also indirect; for it would be foolish to suppose, that he should seek to be worshiped under any of those dishonourable titles given him from the other side of the opposition, or under the character drawn for him by the Spirit of the truth. Yet he is really worshiped, wherever his sentiments, corrupting revelation, are received and admired.

As he is well acquainted with human nature, he makes his address chiefly to that disposition or fitness, wherewith man was originally framed for hearing God. And he acts as the pretended image of God, or the pretended speaker, and interpreter of his mind. As he is not acquainted with the will of God, so knows not how to oppose it, till it be revealed; and as he always finds the greatest advantage against men, in practising upon some divine revelation already made to them; so he proceeds, following the track and progress of revelation, imitating and counterfeiting, or disguising, perverting, and adapting it to his own purpose.

Depraved as human nature now is, its original fitness or disposition for receiving revelation, is yet to be seen in the great corruption of that disposition. The universal propensity of mankind, in all ages, and in all nations, eagerly to imbibe, and tenaciously to retain, some pretended revelation, has been taken notice of by writers on all sides, and variously reasoned upon: the fact, however, is acknowledged by all.—Yea, those who openly renounce all kinds of revelation, (soliciting themselves, meanwhile, with fond presumptions, as ill supported as any kind of it,) do yet freely own, that it is with the greatest difficulty that even the wisest of men can disentangle themselves from religious prejudices. And we daily see, that the most profligate felons, when they come to show any remorse at the near approach of death, generally express at least as great concern for their having neglected or profaned the religious rites of their country, as for any other crime.

The adversary, then, finds his greatest advantage and success among mankind, by acting as the director of their consciences, or their leader in religion. He has the firmest hold of them, when he has them subject to him in their devotion. And thus he has so great influence over men, that no less than the power which attended the command to the light to shine out of darkness, and the command to Lazarus to come forth from his grave, even the same power which attended the apostolic testimony from the beginning, and is inseparable from it to the end of the world, can awaken, or rather create, attention in them to take in the knowledge of the true God.

Not to stay in considering particularly how revelation was corrupted and counterfeited in its progress from the fall of man, in the patriarchal families and in the kingdom of Israel, till the public ministry of Jesus Christ, by the exhibition of false-deities, sacrifices, oracles, priests, prophets, sanctuaries, and symbols; we may now take some general notice of the opposition made to Jesus, which issued in his death.

THE kingdom of the Hebrew being, properly speaking, a theocracy, it was the same thing there to be a devout man and to be a loyal subject. Their laws, their government, and forms of worship, were prescribed by the Deity, who took cognizance of the behaviour of the rulers, and of the whole nation, and so superintended the execution of his own laws. Their history abounds with various manifest interpositions of the Deity. And though these were not so remarkable and frequent after the captivity as before, yet the theocracy still subsisted till the destruction of Jerusalem; which, taking place in virtue of the Divine word on account of their impiety or disloyalty, showed at once, in a most signal manner, that God had been their King, and that they were now abandoned by him.

This people, among whom the power of the Divine word was so remarkably manifest, served as a standing memorial in the earth of that power by which all things are made and upheld; and to show, that as God takes cognizance of the actions of men, so he will at last give judgment according to truth. But they also served for another purpose, no less momentous. They were trustees for the oracles of God, containing the promise and various pledges of salvation to mankind by the Messiah, with such previous descriptions of his person, character, and work, as that, when he should appear, the fulfilment of the grand promise might shine forth with the clearest and most unexceptionable evidence. Among this



people, if any where, sincere national piety might have been expected. All advantages were on the side thereof. Public and private happiness, in the enjoyment of all earthly blessings, was expressly connected with it. But so depraved did human nature appear, even when placed in the most advantageous circumstances, that the most eminent friends of God were the most remarkable sufferers, and the chief objects of the public hatred among them long before the Saviour appeared in the world. If the fire of opposition was thus *already kindled*, how must it flame forth when now the fulness of time was come, that the Divine righteousness should be revealed among men by the appearance of Jesus Christ the Son of God?

He appeared at the time when it was presumed that the national righteousness was carried to as high a pitch as could well be hoped for, till the grand complete reformation expected from the Messiah should take place. They were now thoroughly weaned from the gross idolatry of the neighbouring nations; they were zealous for the worship of one God? they were ardent in their wishes and hopes for the sudden appearance of the Messiah, and as it were prepared to meet him. The expectation was general. They were full of the fond thoughts (like those which possess the minds of modern Christians concerning some future calling of the Jews and Gentiles) that the time was at hand, when piety and integrity, worldly peace and prosperity, issuing forth from their capital city, should overspread the earth. We may have some idea, then, of what the Jews were at that time, if we can represent to ourselves a Christian nation firmly persuaded of the near approach, and in eager expectation of what we hear fondly called in sermons, and other writings, *The thrice-happy period*, or *The best of eras*.

Yet in these very circumstances was the whole revelation made to the Jews, with their whole national constitution formed upon it, so corrupted, as to be pointed by them in the strongest opposition to him who was the great end and scope of it, Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Nor was this occasioned by any new disorder or insurrection, making a sudden breach of the constitution: no; the venerable, the prime deputies in the theocracy, watchful over the public tranquillity, took the most cautious method of apprehending Jesus without tumult, solemnly condemned him, and stirred up the people to ask his death of the Roman governor. The whole matter was conducted according to the coolest sentiments of the nation, sentiments wherein they af-

terward uniformly and steadily persisted, and such as still prevail in every nation called Christian.

The pride of their national righteousness made them despise the divine; yea, the very zeal they had for their law, made them oppose the end of it. Their table or altar, which was instituted for their feasting with God on his sacrifices, became a snare before them; and their happy national constitution, which should have been for their welfare, a trap to entangle them. In comparison with any other people, they had the advantage much every way; yet every advantageous circumstance in their favour they themselves industriously made use of to their own utter ruin. But, not to multiply reflections where they occur so readily, what should hinder us Gentiles, who have now got the advantage on our side, to lay our hand to our heart, and frankly return the acknowledgement once made in the name of the Jews by one of the foremost of them?—*What then? are we better than they?—No, in no wise.*

AT the time we have been speaking of, as the opposition showed itself in a new and clearer manner than formerly, so a new style or form of expression was introduced, to distinguish the opposite sides. Till now, it had been most openly foreshowed or prefigured in the stated separation betwixt the favourite nation and all others. That nation was distinguished by the names of *Israel, Judah, the holy people, the seed of Abraham, people of God, &c.*, from all others, called in the general the *nations*, or the *Heathen*, and the *families* or *tribes who called not on the name of the true God*. But now, as no distinction was to be established betwixt any one earthly nation or body politic and others, and as the separation betwixt the two seeds, intimated by the Deity at the fall of man, was to be clearly manifested by the appearance of him who was primarily pointed at by the designation of *the seed of the woman*; as this separation, I say, was to take place in the midst of the favourite nation, it is evident that new names of distinction became necessary.

*Jews*, from *Judah*, was now the most common national name; yet it would seem, that Jesus, in his doctrine, declines even to make use of this name, choosing rather to say, instead thereof, *the world*. I do not find that he ever used it in speaking to his disciples, or even to any of his own nation, except once in his answer to the high priest, after having first made mention of *the world*: John xviii, 20, *I spake openly to THE WORLD; I ever taught in the synagogues, and in the temple,*

whither the JEWS always resort, and in secret have I said nothing. Nor do I find it mentioned by him to others on more than two occasions. 1st, When, in answer to the woman of Samaria, he says, John iv, 22.—*Salvation is of the JEWS*; and 2dly, To the Roman governor, John xviii, 36,—*If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the JEWS*. He openly opposed their claim to the title of *Abraham's seed*, while he acknowledges Zaccheus, the publican, for a son of Abraham. He sometimes mentions the name of *Israel*, yet we may find at the same time some hint of the restriction of his meaning. As, to take one instance for all, when Jesus said of Nathaniel coming to him, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*. The difference betwixt Israel after the flesh and Israel after the spirit began now to be explained. Agreeably to this, Paul, opposing the boasting of the Jews, says, Rom. ii, 17, *Behold thou art called a Jew*;—and v. 28, 29,—*He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, &c.* Now also the difference of clean and unclean, which had so long subsisted betwixt the Jews and other nations, began to turn on its true hinge, when Jesus said to those who believed on him, *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you*.

All other distinctions began now to give place to the capital one established betwixt *the world and Jesus* with his *disciples*, to whom he said, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me* (πρωτον ἑμου) *the first of you*. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*. When Jesus was proved to be the *Christ* by his resurrection, and openly confessed as such by his disciples; and when they came to be joined by the uncircumcised at Antioch in the same confession, so could no more be distinguished as any particular class of Jews, they were called *Christians*. This name, though it seems to have been given to them first by the world, was yet well received among themselves, being of the same import with the phrase (ἐκ Χριστου) often used by Paul, to signify those *who are Christ's*, taken originally from the words of Jesus, Mark ix, 41.

As Jesus Christ stands at the head of all who are his, receiving worship from them as their God and King; so he points forth the adversary as conducting all who are against him, and acting as the prince of this world; even as Paul calls him, in the same view, *The god of this world*. Thus we see how greatly the earthly theocracy was corrupted,

when the favourite nation, formed under it, came to such a height of impiety and disloyalty, as to put to death the Son of God, the King of Israel, subjecting themselves to his adversary as *their prince and their god*.

UNDER the influence of the prince and god of this world, we find the Roman virtue, the devout zeal of the Pharisees, and the more enlarged sentiments of the Sadducees, all pointed against him, who is the adequate object of the fulness of the Divine good pleasure and delight. Hence we may see, when Paul came to know the dignity of the person who suffered on the cross, and observed there what aspect the world bore to the source of all his happiness, with how great propriety and majesty he said, *Far be it that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*. At the cross of Christ, Paul took his last leave of the world, and all that is admired in it. Hence we see what he was to expect from it in his course of preaching salvation through that cross. But if the world, like a dying man, looked cold and averse to him, he was bold to profess himself fully even with it. He did not regret the want of its countenance; he enjoyed a ground of glorying, which made him look above it: and whatever other source of boasting men had to talk of, he was in readiness to despise it, with full as great confidence as they were capable to do his.

The whole corruption of revelation, with every notion of the Divine character opposite to the gospel, is in the New Testament called *the darkness of this world*. The adversary and his angels are called *the rulers of that darkness*. Agreeably to this, Paul speaking of those who with himself knew the grace of God in truth, says, Col. i, 12, 13, *Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love*.\*

We have seen, then, whence the apostles learned to insist so much as they do in their writings, in declaring what is *of the world*, and what is *of God*; or, in other words, what is

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\* *Son of his love*. Here, by the way, we may observe one reason why Jesus Christ is called the Son and image of God, and accordingly worshipped as God: for if the Divine love was to be fully manifested to men by a gift equal to, or fully expressive of it, surely no less than a person of infinite dignity, a divine person, was fit to be the proper and adequate product thereof. Accordingly, we find, that the Scripture gives us no other measure of the Divine love but this gift; and this gift is the full measure thereof. *God so loved the world, that he gave his Son*.



of the flesh, and what is of the spirit; and in stating the opposition betwixt these in the strongest manner; and to be so diligent in animating Christians to fight the good fight of faith, and contend earnestly for it; and why they issued so many awful threatenings against all who went about by any kind of trimming, or reconciling methods, to quench the fire of that contention which Jesus Christ came to revive in the earth. Those who wanted to make a fair show in the flesh, and sought to make Christianity more palatable to men, or less obnoxious to their hatred, that the offence of the cross might cease, gave the apostles the greatest disquiet. Though nothing is reckoned more idle and foolish by many called Christians, than a controversy about the faith; yet the great effect of the Spirit of the truth on any man in whom he dwells, is to make him zealous in contending for it, and withal ready to bear patiently all the effects of the world's hatred and contempt of it. Thus he labours for the glory of God; thus he shows the greatest good will to men. Paul spent his life in this contention, and he thought it well bestowed therein: *Yea, (says he in his epistle to the Philippians,) and if I be offered (or poured out as a drink-offering) upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.* And he urges these same Christians to zeal in this contention, after his example, as the great purpose for which they were gathered together into church order; yea, as the principal characteristic of a conversation becoming the gospel. *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.* But to proceed:

The new state of things, the kingdom or church erected by Jesus Christ, is the true, heavenly, and eternal theocracy, prefigured by the old earthly one, which passed away. This new kingdom received its form and establishment when the King thereof was anointed and seated on his throne; when the soul and body of the Son of God, wherein he became exceeding sorrowful unto death, were brought into the full possession and enjoyment of that glory and blessedness, which he had with the Father before anything was created. In

consequence of this great event, all who from the beginning had died in the faith of the promise; with all who now on earth believed its accomplishment, were formed into one body under their common head by the Spirit, which was not given till Jesus was glorified. Now the spirits of just men were made perfect, God having provided some better thing for us, (says Paul to the Hebrews,) that they without us should not be made perfect. They were happy before in the joyful expectation of the accomplishment of their promise; but as they could not see it accomplished, so they received not the grand thing promised till now. They had been from the beginning chosen to this kingdom, now they were incorporated into it.

The holy angels are brought into a new order in this kingdom, and they enjoy greater happiness, by seeing more of the Divine glory, while they act as servants to the Son of man in ministering to the heirs of salvation, than while they exercise the high powers given them in the earthly theocracy: *For unto the angels (says Paul) hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.*

The seat of this kingdom is in heaven, and all the grand things spoken of Jerusalem, the seat of power and centre of worship in the earthly theocracy, hold true in their fullest sense when applied to this; and they are constantly applied, accordingly, in the writings of the prophets explained by the apostles. Moreover, all the power of this kingdom is exercised by the king himself, without any deputies or representatives. This kingdom, then, cannot be moved; no enemy, no deceiver, can approach to the seat of power, where all the interests of the kingdom are eternally secured.

But this kingdom, for the sake of its imperfect subjects, and for the sake of those who are chosen to be yet made subjects of it, makes likewise an appearance on the earth in the open profession of the faith in the world.

To support this open profession, that the truth might be retained in its simplicity among those who believed, that it might be confirmed by its genuine effects, and that the light thereof might shine before all men, societies were gathered in divers places, by the influence of the gospel on the minds of men, and formed by the inspired apostles into church order, so as that each of them should be a representation by itself of Christ's kingdom in the city or region where it was gathered. Each of these societies, then, which were formed by the direction of the apostles, might justly be considered as a heavenly theocracy on earth. For as all the concerns of its union were heavenly, so in these it was subject to no jurisdiction

under heaven. And, indeed, nothing less than the power of Christ's resurrection, and motives arising from the state of things beyond the grave, could preserve the members of such a society in fervent love to the truth, and patient suffering for it, and retain them in the order and appoint them, the younger subject to the elder, and all of them one to another, in the fear of God.

Accordingly, we find the names and descriptions of the one entire heavenly kingdom, commonly applied by the apostles to each of these societies, as, *The church of God, the body of Christ, the spouse of Christ, &c.* In the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we see with what Divine power and majesty the first of these was erected in Jerusalem. The glory which attended the erection of the earthly theocracy of old, was far excelled by what took place in this society. The minds of the people in the former were filled with the greatest dread and terror, the latter were filled with the greatest joy and confidence, even while under the most awful view of the Divine purity and holiness.

But as many were capable of professing the faith, so fit to be received as members, who were but partially enlightened, so did not thoroughly understand the truth, so as to obey it from the heart; and as a natural bias against it still remained, even in the minds of those who did understand it, these societies were liable to be greatly corrupted, both as to their faith and order, and at length to be so far alienated from Christ, while professing his name, as to become the synagogues of his adversary. Paul, writing to one of them, says, "I am jealous over you, with the jealousy of God: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from simplicity toward Christ."

As to this appearance of the heavenly kingdom on the earth, both in respect of the persecution from without, and corruption from within, to which it is exposed; Christ is said as yet to rule in the midst of his enemies; and he continues to do so, till all his people, in conformity to him, who was made perfect through sufferings, be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and their bodies raised from the dead to the full possession of it.

Against the heavenly kingdom, the adversary is represented as exerting his abilities to the utmost, to destroy all of it within his reach: for the ancient sentence passed upon him, in terms borrowed from the natural grovelling condition of

the serpent, "Upon thy belly thou shalt go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life," confines his agency to the earth. He opposes this kingdom, by labouring to overthrow the truth on which it is erected. Jesus, in answer to the question, *Art thou a king then?* gave this account of his kingdom, *Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.* The adversary makes it his business to change the Divine truth into a lie. So we are told, the grand apostacy was to come by *his energy, with all power, and signs, and wonders of a lie.* And the reigning leaders in this apostacy, who are represented with crowns like gold on their heads, are said to have a king over them, whose name, the reverse of *Jesus*, is the *destroyer*. All who received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, but wished for a perverted gospel to suit their pride and worldly lusts, now obtained it, and believed a lie to their destruction. Jesus Christ intimates no less, than that the power of deceit would be so great, that only the elect, and they scarcely, should escape it. The power of deceit, which began to work even under the eyes of the apostles, has extended itself greatly since their days. So that false characters of God, false Christ's, false spirits, have been revered for the true; yea, and all the sacred words of *grace, righteousness, atonement, holiness, &c.*, have been applied to the basest counterfeits of what was anciently meant by them, and these counterfeits treated with all the respect due to the genuine originals.

Thus, by stratagem, as well as by open contempt, malice, and violence, the adversary with his seed, continues to *make war with the remnant of the woman's seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ,* till the resurrection of the dead, when he shall be divested of all power, and become a mere sufferer of punishment, on a level with the meanest of those who are deceived by him. So that those who fear not God, have no occasion, according to the popular notion, to dread any harm from him in the other world.

I have as yet spoken but sparingly, and in the general, of the Spirit of the truth, having described it hitherto, chiefly by showing what is opposed to it. But a more particular consideration thereof will naturally occur afterward, in speaking of faith, and its effects.

IN the meantime, it may not be amiss here to take some view of the spirit which breathes in the religion of the pre-



sent age, more especially on the leading point of acceptance with God. And this I think we may have, by glancing at the writings of some few of those whose names are highly respected by the different classes among us.

I shall begin with those two great men who are amply recommended to our esteem, as humble disciples of Jesus Christ, in the manner following: "The celebrated *Erasmus*, and our judicious *Locke*, having trod the circle of sciences, and ranged through the whole extent of *human literature*, at length betook themselves solely to the *Bible*; leaving the sages of antiquity, they sat incessantly at the feet of Jesus."\* &c.

Thus speaks Erasmus in a small treatise against Luther. † — "For though Paul says, *Where sin hath abounded, grace also hath superabounded*; it does not, therefore, follow, that before one is by grace made acceptable, he may not through Divine assistance, prepare himself, by works morally good, for the Divine favour, &c. I agree with their opinion, who ascribe a little to free will, but very much to grace," ‡

Mr. Locke, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, shows at large, from the Scriptures, with great perspicuity, that men obtained eternal life, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But not knowing the truth which the apostles understood by these words, so not finding any ground of acceptance with God in them, he very plainly rests our justification before God, on the homage we pay to him, in giving credit to any promise or truth he is pleased to reveal, as that Abraham should have a son; or rather, in putting together these two words, and affirming, in any sense we please, that *Jesus is the Christ*, together with our best endeavours to obey the precepts delivered by him; from whom, beside a clearer declaration of our duty, and greater encouragements to virtue, arising from the prospect of a future life, he proposes no other advantage to us, but that, p. 289, "If we do what we can, he will give us his Spirit to help us to do what and how we should." This, I think, is the scope and substance of the whole treatise. However, we may hear a few more of

\* Meditations, vol. 1, p. 151.

† Entitled, *De libero arbitrio collatio*.

‡ *Quamquam enim Paulus dicit, Ubi abundavit peccatum, superabundavit et gratia; non tum sequitur ex hoc, quod, ante gratiam gratum facientem, non possit homo, adjutus auxilio Dei, per opera moraliter bona, sese præparare favori divino, &c.*

— *Mihi placet illorum sententia, qui nonnihil tribuunt libero arbitrio sed gratiæ plurimum.*

his own words. p. 193, "God dealt so favourably with the posterity of *Adam*, that if they would believe *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, the promised King and Saviour, and perform what other conditions were required of them by the covenant of grace, God would justify them because of this belief. He would account this faith to them for righteousness, and look on it as making up the defects of their obedience; which being thus supplied by what was taken instead of it, they were looked on as just or righteous, and so inherited eternal life."— p. 213, "The faith required was to believe *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, the anointed, who had been promised by God to the world, Amongst the Jews, (to whom the promises and prophecies were more immediately delivered,) anointing was used to three sorts of persons, at their inauguration, whereby they were set apart to three great offices, *viz.* of priests, prophets, and kings. Though these three offices be in holy writ attributed to our Saviour; yet, I do not remember that he any where assumes to himself the title of a priest, or mentions anything relating to his priesthood. Nor does he speak of his being a prophet but very sparingly, and once or twice as it were by-the-by. But the gospel, or the good news of the *Messiah*, is what he preaches everywhere, and makes it his great business to publish to the world."

Page 244.—"All, then, that was required before his appearing in the world, was to believe what God had revealed, and to rely, with a full assurance, on God for the performance of his promise; and to believe, that in due time he would send them the *Messiah*, this anointed King, this promised Saviour and deliverer, according to his word. This faith in the promise of God, this relying and acquiescing in his word and faithfulness, the Almighty takes well at our hands, as a great mark of homage paid by us poor frail creatures to his *goodness* and *truth*, as well as to his *power* and *wisdom*; and accepts it as an acknowledgement of his peculiar providence and benignity to us. This oblation of an heart, fixed with dependence and affection on him, is the most acceptable tribute we can pay him, the foundation of true devotion, and life of all religion. What a value he puts on this depending on his word, and resting satisfied in his promises, we have an example in *Abraham* whose faith *was counted to him for righteousness*, as we have before remarked out of Rom. iv. And his relying firmly on the promise of God, without any doubt of its performance, gave him the name of *the father of the faithful*, and gained him so much favour with the Almighty, that he was called *the friend of God*; the highest and most

glorious title can be bestowed on a creature. The thing promised was no more but a son by his wife *Sarah*. and a numerous posterity by him, which should possess the land of *Canaan*. These were but temporal blessings, and (except the birth of a son) very remote; such as he should never live to see, nor in his own person have the benefit of. But because he questioned not the performance of it, but rested fully satisfied in the goodness, truth, and faithfulness of God, who had promised, it was counted to him for righteousness, &c.

*Page 251, & seqq.*—"What shall become of all the rest of mankind, who, having never heard of the promise or news of a Saviour, not a word of a *Messiah* to be sent, or that was to come, have had no thought or belief concerning him? To this I answer,—The same spark of the Divine nature and knowledge in man, which, making him a man, showed him the law he was under as a man, showed him also the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compassionate author and father of him and his being, when he had transgressed that law.—He that made use of this candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his duty, could not miss to find also the way to reconciliation and forgiveness when he had failed of his duty; though, if he used not his reason this way, if he put out, or neglected this light, he might perhaps see neither.

"The law is the eternal, immutable standard of right.—And a part of that law is, that a man should forgive, not only his children, but his enemies, upon their repentance, asking pardon, and amendment. And, therefore, he could not doubt, that the author of this law, and God of patience and consolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail offspring if they acknowledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest for the future to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned to be just and right. This way of reconciliation, this hope of atonement, the light of nature revealed to them; and the revelation of the gospel, having said nothing to the contrary, leaves them to stand and fall to their own father and master, whose goodness and mercy is over all his works."

*Pages 290, 295.*—"There remains yet something to be said to those who will be ready to object, If the belief of *Jesus of Nazareth* to be the *Messiah*, together with those concomitant articles of his resurrection, rule, and coming again to judge the world, be all the faith required as necessary to justification, to what purpose were the epistles written? I say, if the belief of those many doctrines contained in them, be not also necessary to salvation? and if what is there deli-

vered, a Christian may believe, or disbelieve, and yet nevertheless be a member of Christ's church, and one of the faithful!

"To this I answer, That the epistles were written upon several occasions.—They were writ to those who were in the faith and true Christians already, and so could not be designed to teach them the fundamental articles and points necessary to salvation.—They were writ upon particular occasions, and without these occasions had not been writ; and so cannot be thought necessary to salvation." *Small Edition, London, 1695.*

Such use did these two men make of the Bible, and such disciples of Jesus did they prove.

Let us next attend to Archbishop Tillotson, whose doctrine, since he wrote, has been heard from a thousand pulpits.

*Folio volume of his works, London, 1735, sermon 12.* Of the inward peace and pleasure which attends religion. Psalm cxix, 165. *Great peace have they which love thy law.*—"But now religion frees a man from all this torment [of guilt], either by preventing the cause of it, or directing to the cure; either by preserving us from guilt, or clearing us out of it, in case we have contracted it. It preserves us from guilt, by keeping us innocent; and in case we have offended, it clears us of it, by leading us to repentance and the amendment of our lives, which is the only way to recover the favour of God, and the peace of our own consciences, and to secure us against all apprehension of danger from the Divine justice; though not absolutely from all fear of punishment in this world, yet from that which is the greatest danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means, a man's mind is settled in perfect peace, religion freeing him from those tormenting fears which he can, upon no other terms, rid himself of: whereas the sinner is always sowing the seeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying the foundation of continual discontent to himself.

—"Now, whoever sincerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured, that God hath no displeasure against him; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness,*" &c.

*Sermon 13.* The nature and benefit of consideration, Psal. cxix, 59, *I thought on my ways,* &c.

—"The dismal thoughts of being miserable forever, should effectually discourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the sinner, and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to surprise him the next



moment. And can we make too much haste to fly from so great and apparent a danger? When will we think of saving ourselves, if not when (for aught we know) we are upon the very brink of ruin, and just ready to drop into destruction?

"5. Upon this naturally follows, *a full conviction of the necessity of quitting this wicked course.*

"6. Lastly, *an apprehension of the possibility of making this change.* God, who designed us for happiness at first, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by sin, was pleased to restore us again to the capacity of it, by the redemption of our blessed Lord and Saviour, has made nothing necessary to our happiness that is impossible for us to do, either of ourselves, or by the assistance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg of him. For that is possible to us, which he may do by the assistance of another, if we may have that assistance for the asking: and God hath promised to give *his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So that, notwithstanding the great corruption and weakness of our natures, since the grace of God which brings salvation hath appeared, it is not absolutely out of our power to leave our sins and turn to God; for that may truly be said to be in our power, which God hath promised to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

"So there is nothing on God's part to hinder this change. He hath solemnly declared, that he sincerely desires it, and that he is ready to assist our good resolutions to this purpose. And most certainly, when he tells, that *he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live; that he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; that he would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;* he means plainly as he saith, and doth not speak to us with any private reserve, or nice distinction between his secret and revealed will; that is, he doth not decree one thing, and declare the contrary, *etc.*—I do not say that this change is perfectly made at once.—In the usual and settled methods of God's grace, evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict; and many times after they are routed, they rally, and make head again; and 'tis a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength and maturity, and before a man comes to that confirmed state of goodness, that he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But yet this ought not to discourage us; for so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way,

and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us: and if we pursue our advantages, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hands; and we, who moved at first with so much slowness and difficulty, shall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleasure and delight.

*Sermon 31. The parable of the ten virgins.*—"In such dreadful confusion shall all impenitent sinners be, when they shall be surprised by that *great and terrible day of the Lord*: and the case of a *dying sinner*, who would take no care in the time of his life and health to make preparation for another world, is not much more hopeful and comfortable.

"For, alas! how little is it that a sick and dying man can do in such a strait of time? in the midst of so much pain and weakness of body, and of such confusion and amazement of mind? With what heart can he set about so great a work, for which there is so little time? With what face can he apply himself to God in this extremity, whom he hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his life? and how can he have the confidence to hope that God will hear his cries and regard his tears, that are forced from him in this day of his necessity? When he is conscious to himself, that, in that *long day of God's grace and patience*, he turned a deaf ear to all his merciful invitations, and rejected the counsel of God against himself: in a word, how can he who *would not know in that his day the things which belonged to his peace*, expect any other but that they should now be forever *hid from his eyes*, which are ready to be closed in utter darkness?

"I will not pronounce anything concerning the impossibility of a *deathbed repentance*; but I am sure that it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one example, that I know of, in the whole *Bible* of the repentance of a dying sinner; I mean that of the *penitent thief* upon the *cross*: and the circumstances of his case are so singular and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope and encouragement to men in ordinary cases. We are not likely to suffer in the company of the *Son of God*, and of the Saviour of the world: and if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave ourselves towards him so well as the *penitent thief* did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a life.

"And the parable in the text is so far from giving any encouragement to a *deathbed repentance* and *preparation*, that

it rather represents their case as desperate, who put off their *preparation* to that time."

Thus preacheth the Archbishop, in a manner easy to be understood.

Let us now hear that learned philosopher and critic, whose sentiments are warmly recommended to the attention of the public by not a few writers, John Hutchinson, Esq.

This gentleman, by his skill in the Hebrew language, takes upon him roundly to oppose the apostolic doctrine concerning the Divine sovereignty, the person of Christ, and acceptance with God.

*Vol. 3, Introduction to Moses'—fine Principio, p. 90.*

We are to consider the state of God, in respect to these adversaries [*the angels who fell,*] put man into at the first; as if he had said, (if it was before their fall,) before his angels; (if it was after their fall,) before the angels who stood, and those who fell; as he did in the case of the trial of *Job*, where both are mentioned: "I will create another system, and another race of creatures, to be called man, who shall have powers and opportunities vastly inferior to what you have, and only give him a small degree of instruction and information, compared with what you have had; so not a match for any of you who have fallen, or who shall fall: I shall give him a law; and (if one may presume to say) without farther interposition on either side, he shall persevere in love and obedience to me, to reproach any of you, and be a rule to judge and punish any of you by who have fallen, or shall fall; and if any of you who have fallen, or who shall fall, and persist, and so tempt and seduce man, and he shall repent, that will be a just reason to exclude you from mercy, and admit man into new terms, &c."

*Vol. 7, Hebrew writings perfect, pp. 353, 354.* "And as Adam was upon terms of salvation, and God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return, believe, do his part, and live; therefore I must rectify the construction of the adverbs עתה and כן Gen. ii, 22, which they make *nunc ne forte*, a prohibition, a negative, which prohibited the means of eternal life; because rectifying it destroys the purport of all the Jewish forgeries, and puts an end to the disputes about predestination, which have disturbed the church, formed most of the sects; shows what was then the only means of recovering eternal life; and shows, that man had not forfeited or lost the power of coming into the terms proposed, which I cannot forbear mentioning, though it be not in my design to illustrate it now." Then, after rendering יהיה, *yet, by and by, at*

*length*; and w, the action of a person in doubt, *fortassis, perhaps*, and producing authorities, he proceeds, "So at length, possibly, he may exert his power, and lay hold also of the tree of lives, and eat and live forever."

Vol. 8, *Use of reason recovered by the data in Christianity*, p. 49, "Where pride hath entered, 'tis hard to plead guilty. When that is allowed, 'tis hard to own that a man hath no share in saying [for *saving*, I suppose] himself so and so only, hard to be believed, that believing only entitles a man to take the benefit: so by reason of these difficulties, and for attributing what is due to the *Aleim*, faith is made the part of man."

Vol. 9, *Use of reason, &c., part 2*, pp. 64, 65. "The plea by which those fools (*the loose thinkers*) have imposed upon the vulgar, is contained in the unstated, undetermined words of liberty, freedom, &c. State the case, and those words are for us. Man has the power of things within his reach, to do what he will; if God have laid down terms of salvation, and *e contra* (*he has the power*) to save or destroy himself," &c.

Vol. 8, *Use of reason, part, 1*, p. 13. "Such illiterate creatures have forged a notion of predestination, which is, if possible, more injurious to the *Aleim* and men. If we could see as Jehovah *Aleim* see, we should see how they foresee, how every free agent will behave himself; particularly which will reject, and which will accept their gracious terms of salvation; and we should not compare or measure their infinite wisdom and justice by the share of wisdom it was just for them to give, or give means to attain, to a free creature in perfection; much less to that which remains in our present corrupted state; and presume to charge them with predestinating free agents to be some eternally happy, and some eternally miserable, but each humbly acknowledge," &c.

*Ibid*, pp. 17, 18. "A created intelligent agent cannot be free, without liberty to choose; so to take life or death, happiness or misery; so the great ones could not before, or at the creation of any free agent, decree it to be happy or miserable."

*Ibid*, pp. 35, 36. "I have showed that Christianity had its institution by a conditional covenant and oath between the *Rubbin* before this world was created; that one *Rub* engaged for men, if the first fell, to become surety for the person he should choose to inhabit, and for his brethren who came into the terms, to communicate power to him for his performing obedience, atoning for them, &c., and for their performing such services as should entitle them to the benefits of that atone-



ment, &c. ; and another *Rub* engaged to influence, persuade the soul, the mind of that person, by outward and inward means, to qualify himself for the undertaking voluntarily ; first to reject the baits of Satan, to perform perfect obedience, to give up himself for a sacrifice ; and others to relinquish Satan, to separate themselves from all things offensive, and to qualify themselves to accept the benefits."

So much for this author's character of the Deity. Let us now hear his account of the person and work of Christ, whom he commonly designs a *compound* and a *double* person.

*Vol. 6, Glory or gravity*, pp. 219, 220. "As Christ was compounded of two persons, and as he and the inspired writers of the New Testament sometimes spoke in or of one person, sometimes of the other, sometimes of the joint persons ; when those distinctions are made, however [taken running] they appear to thwart each other, and be inconsistent, they will then appear to be strictly and properly spoken. God, the second person, was named *Glory*, had by covenant laid down that glory, till he had performed his part, which that was not consistent with here, and was then to reassume it ; the man, who alone had always other titles given to him, was to be taken into the glory, so to have glory given to him ; both, then, to have it ascribed to them as one person."

*Ibid, supra*, p. 201. "So, in distinction to the essence, which was the glory, had laid it down or veiled it, taken on flesh, through which only the splendour appeared for the time, but had power to reassume his glory ; and the manhood, who was to appear like a servant, was to suffer, was to be raised, and taken more immediately into the essence, and with it to be glorified."

*Ibid*. pp. 256, 257. "As the Word is God, that it may not seem strange, that he is said typically to be cut off, it was fact, that the God was cut off from  $\omega\mu$  the man at his death, and till his resurrection."

*Vol. 6, Remarks upon the Observations on a Sermon, &c.* p. 253, 254. Mr. H. represents the humanity as saying to the Divinity, or the human saying to the Divine Person, what we render, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* "He that left the manhood  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ , was surely, according to our ideas of things, and according to the words of the law, *an execration* ; notwithstanding that, when it was performed, it was by covenant to entitle that person to have the glory of redeeming, ruling, and saving those who accepted and came into the benefit, nay, to be the glory of the Aleim."

In whatever sense this author maintains his  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  was an

*execration*; yet it is evident, that, according to his representation of the fact of Christ's death, and the account he gives of his dying words, it was not a Divine, but only a human person, that suffered and died. Yea, if we attend to this author, we must all along think of him who was born of the Virgin only as a human person, inhabited by the Deity in some eminent manner beyond other saints. Thus all his swelling words about the atonement vanish into smoke, while he presents us only with the obedience of a human person. But as every *heretic is condemned of himself*, we have a pretty strong condemnation of this learned gentleman from his own mouth, *vol. 6, Glory or gravity*, p. 235. "Those who expect to be saved by a creature, or a dependant being, have showed themselves illiterate, so ignorant, so proud, so malicious," &c.

This author who boasts much of his knowledge of the Old Testament, and is gloried in as having taken off the veil from it, makes the following confession, *vol. 6, Glory or gravity*, p. 242. "I pretend not yet to be sufficiently prepared to explain the New Testament, nor do I design to attempt going further now, than just to hint the manner of wording that affair" [the Trinity, and the person of Christ.] He had, indeed, done less harm to many, had he contented himself with the amusement of accommodating Hebrew words to his scheme of philosophy, and not meddled with things for which he was sensible he was not prepared. The apostolic writings were by far too vulgarly simple and plain to be understood by a genius like his.

As this author's persecuting principles are well known, I need not quote the many passages wherein they are warmly maintained. I shall only observe, that he carries them to a remarkable height, when he affirms in his *Religion of Satan*, p. 105, That "a man who is not a real Christian, is not qualified to be a member of society." All the arguments for persecution, used by this author, or by any other, may I think, be thus shortly summed up. Because the sovereign of the universe, who laid upon men his law, requiring godliness and humanity, thought fit, for the breaches of that law, to destroy the old world by a flood, Sodom and Gomorah by fire, the Canaanites by the sword of Joshua, 185,000 in the Assyrian camp by the ministry of an angel, Jerusalem by the sword of the Romans, and Lisbon lately by an earthquake; and will at last judge all the world in righteousness: therefore, we are warranted, each of us, to set up for a Deity, and, in direct opposition to all godliness and humanity, thirst after one another's blood, according as we are led by our own caprice.

As this author breathes the very same temper with the

apostate Jews, though he fell into a violent quarrel with them about his philosophy, and the sense of some words; if we would become proper followers of his, we must study the Hebrew language according to his rules, in order that we may be enabled, with an air of profound learning, to renounce all the principles of godliness and humanity. It is happy for the learned followers of this author, that they happen to live among such illiterate neighbours as have been taught more humanity from the English Bible, than they from the Hebrew; otherwise they would soon lose their heads for the most impious heresy.

I shall now take some notice of two renowned gentlemen, who having been considered among the dissenters as a kind of trustees for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, have shown themselves most unworthy of the confidence reposed in them, by their complaisantly yielding up the most obnoxious of those doctrines for the sake of their reputation in the polite world; and that in such a sly manner, as to lose as little as possible of their weight and influence among the more strictly religious and devout: I mean Dr. Isaac Watts and Dr. Philip Doddridge.

The former, not content with yielding up the apostolic account of Christ as a Divine person, has conspired with the latter to overthrow the gospel-doctrine of faith, and the imputed righteousness, in a treatise called *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*; which being written by the one, and planned and revised by the other, may justly be considered as the joint production of both. But let us hear them separately. As to the account Dr. Watts gives of the person of Christ, I shall content myself with quoting a few words from his treatise called, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, printed 1722. In p. 181, he says, "By the appointment of the Father, the Divine nature dwells in *Jesus the Son of man*, who of himself, and in himself, is but a man, and *could do nothing*."

I need not here take notice of what this author has published since, in support of what is now quoted, and setting forth at large his notion of the pre-existence and peculiar origin of the human soul of Jesus Christ, wherein he makes the great dignity of his person to consist. I shall rather proceed to take notice of his doctrine about acceptance with God.

In a book called *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, octavo, London, 1747, discourse 7, entitled, *God in Christ is the Saviour of all the ends of the Earth*; or, *Faith Represented in its Lowest Degrees*, on Is. xlv, 22, *Look unto me and be ye saved*, he says, "2. Believing in Christ may be represented

in this place, by *looking to him*, to express *the lowest and the weakest degree of faith*, for the encouragement of poor convinced trembling sinners. When persons are awakened to a lively apprehension of their guilt, and a quick sense of their danger, and see themselves every moment liable to perish under the wrath of an offended God, and at the same time find their own utter inability to save themselves; it is proper that the *act of faith whereby we are saved*, should be expressed in the easiest manner, that we may allure them toward Christ, the only Saviour, and may encourage them to hope. When they are, as it were, at *the ends of the earth*, at a wide distance from *God and Christ*, they may look towards him, and send a wish of desire and dependence that way; like *dying, drowning sailors in a storm*, that look towards the shore to see if there be any hope. And such a look as this is ordained of God, to derive all salvation from so almighty and complete a Saviour as Jesus Christ is; for it contains in it the whole nature of saving faith, as the flower and the fruit are contained in a little green bud, though the several parts, and the leaves of them, are not yet unfolded, nor appear to sight.

Such a look of a convinced sinner to *Christ*, implies in it a distressing sense of his sin and present danger; a belief that there is help for him in Christ, and an aversion of the eye from every thing else; a renouncing of all other dependencies, an earnest readiness and desire to partake of this salvation, such as Christ offers it; that is, to make him holy as well as happy; and it includes also thus much of *trust* or confidence, that if the soul has any hope at all of its own salvation, Christ is the only ground of this *hope*. There is and will be some sort of *expectation* of relief from the hand to which we look when we see ourselves perishing.

3. *Looking to Christ* for salvation, is a word that shows how little hand we have in our deliverance from sin and death," &c.—“But some poor trembling sinner will be ready to say, Surely this so little and so low an act of faith, that I am ready to question whether this can save me or no: how shall I know whether my looking to *Christ* is of that kind as shall be effectual to my salvation?”

Now in answer to such an inquiry, let the fearful soul remember what I have said before, under the *second particular*, concerning the several acts of the soul that are secretly included in this *looking to Jesus*, and ask itself, whether it has put forth these acts or no? Besides this, I would mention also these two *properties of saving faith*, as it is described by *looking*.



1st, It must be such a *look* as immediately affects the heart with love and sorrow; sorrow for our sins, and love to Christ our Saviour. 2dly, It must be such a *look* as changes the soul and temper into another image, even the image of Christ. A saving look of faith to our Lord Jesus Christ, will happily influence all the powers of nature, and all the actions of life. This is seldom done indeed at once, but by slow degrees," &c.

Let us now hear Dr. Doddrige in his *Family Expositor*, on Acts v, 31, *Him hath God exalted*, &c. The paraphrase runs thus: "But this very person, notwithstanding all the outrage with which you treated *him*, hath God exalted at his own right hand, [to be] a *Prince and Saviour* to his people; to give repentance, or to send terms of peace and reconciliation by him, even unto *Israel*, by whom he had been so ungratefully insulted and abused, and to bestow on those that shall repent the free and full remission of all their aggravated sins."

Rom. ix, 30. *What shall we say then*, &c.—Paraphrase, *What shall we then say* in the conclusion of the whole argument? Surely this, *that the Gentiles, who pursued not after righteousness*, who had a little while ago no knowledge or expectation of it, and no desire after it, *have now*, to their own unspeakable surprise, and that of the whole world, *attained to righteousness*, that is, to the possession of a religion whereby they may be justified and saved; *even the righteousness which is by faith* in the gospel; and consists in humbly committing the soul to Christ in the way that he hath appointed."

I shall now produce for a specimen of the Scots popular preachers, these three remarkable gentlemen, Mess. Guthrie, Boston, and E. Erskine.

Mr. Guthrie, in his *Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ*, part 1, chap. 7. *Of faith*, after having told us in some respects what faith is not, proceeds thus: "I say, true justifying faith is not any of the aforesaid things; NEITHER IS IT SIMPLY THE BELIEVING OF ANY SENTENCE THAT IS WRITTEN, OR THAT CAN BE THOUGHT UPON." This I recommend as a saying worthy to be kept in remembrance by all readers and hearers of the popular doctrine.

In part 2, chap. 8. *Of covenanting with God*, he says, "Go speedily, and search for his offers of peace and salvation in the Scripture, and work up your heart and soul to close with them, and with Christ in them, and with God in Christ; and do it so as you may have this to say, That you were serious and in earnest, and cordial here, as ever you were in any thing to your apprehension; and, for aught you know,

Christ is the choice of your heart, at least you neither know nor allow anything to the contrary: whereupon your heart doth appeal unto God, to search and try if there be aught amiss, to rectify it, and lead into the right way.

"Now, this cleaving of the heart unto him, and casting itself upon him, to be saved in his way, is believing; which doth indeed secure a man from the wrath that is to come, because now he hath *received Christ, and believeth on him*, and so *shall not enter into condemnation*, as saith the Scripture."

Mr. Boston, in his *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, near the close of *State 2*, answering some objections upon man's natural inability to recover himself by *obeying the gospel*, writes thus:

"*Object. 1.* If we be under an *utter inability* to do any good, how can God require us to do it? *Ans.* God *making man upright*, Eccl. vii, 29, gave him a *power* to do every thing he should require of him. This power man lost by his own fault.—Now, we having, by our own fault, *disabled* ourselves, shall God lose his right of requiring our task, because we have thrown away the strength he gave us wherewithal to perform it? &c.

"*Object. 2.* Why do you, then, preach Christ to us; call us to come to him, to believe, repent, and use the means of salvation? *Ans.* Because it is your duty so to do. It is your duty to accept of Christ as he is offered in the gospel; to repent of your sins, and to be holy in all manner of conversation. These things are commanded you of God; and his *command*, not your *ability*, is the measure of your duty.—*Finally*, Though ye cannot recover yourselves, nor take hold of the saving help offered to you in the gospel; yet, even by the *power of nature*, ye may use the outward and ordinary means, whereby Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to ruined sinners, who are utterly unable to recover themselves out of the *state of sin and wrath*. Ye may, and can, if ye please, do many things that would set you in a fair way for help from the Lord Jesus Christ. Ye may go so far on, as to be *not far from the kingdom of God*, as the *discreet scribe* had done, Mark xii, 34, (though it would seem) he was *destitute of supernatural abilities*. Though ye cannot *cure* yourselves, yet ye may *come* to the *pool*, where many such diseased persons as ye are have been cured; though ye have none to *put you into* it, yet ye may *lie* at the *side* of it; and *who knows but the Lord may return and leave a blessing behind him*; as in the case of the impotent man, recorded John v. 5, 6, 7, 8? I hope Satan does not chain you to your houses,

nor stake you down in your fields on the Lord's day; but ye are at liberty, and can wait at *the posts of Wisdom's doors*, if ye will, *etc.*—These things are within the compass of *natural abilities*, and may be practised where there is no *grace*. It must aggravate your guilt, that you *will* not be at so much *pains* about the state and case of your precious souls; and if ye do not what ye *can* do, ye will be condemned, not only for *want* of grace, but for your *despising* of it.

“*Object 3.* But all this is needless, seeing we are utterly unable to help ourselves out of *the state of sin and wrath*.  
*Ans.* Give not place to that delusion, which puts asunder what God hath joined, namely the use of *means*, and a sense of our own *impotency*. If ever the Spirit of God graciously influence your souls, ye will become thoroughly sensible of your absolute *inability*, and yet enter upon a vigorous use of *means*. Ye will do for yourselves as if ye were to do *all*; and yet *overlook* all ye do, as if ye had done *nothing*. Will ye do *nothing* for yourselves, because ye cannot do *all*? Lay down no such impious conclusions against your own souls. Do what you *can*; and it may be, while ye are doing what ye *can* for yourselves, God will do for you what ye *cannot*. *Understandest thou what thou readest?* said Philip to the *Eunuch*. *How can I*, saith he, *except some man should guide me?* Acts viii, 30, 31. He could not *understand* the Scripture he read, yet he could *read* it; he did what he *could*, he *read*; and while he was reading, God sent him an interpreter. The *Israelites* were in a great strait at the Red Sea; and how could they help themselves, when upon the *one* hand were mountains, and on the other the enemy's garrison; when *Pharaoh*, and his host were *behind* them, and the Red Sea *before* them? What could they do? *Speak unto the children of Israel* saith the Lord to *Moses*, *that they go forward*, Exod. xiv, 15. For what end should they *go forward*? Can they make a passage to themselves through the sea? No. But let them *go forward*, saith the Lord. Though they cannot turn sea to dry land, yet they can go forward to the shore. And so they did. And when they did what they *could*, God did for them what they *could* not do.”

Near the end of *Head 1. State 3*, we have a very good view how the popular doctrine makes the gospel subservient to human pride as its tool, or as a means for producing those exercises of soul wherein justifying faith is made to consist. The *advice* to the *unregenerate* are thus concluded. “Were these things deeply-rooted in the heart, they might be the *seed* of that *fear* and *sorrow*, on account of thy soul's state, which

are necessary to prepare and stir thee up to look after a Saviour. Fix your thoughts upon him offered to thee in the gospel, as fully suited to thy case; having, by his obedience to the death, perfectly satisfied the justice of God, and brought in *everlasting righteousness*. This may prove the *seed of humiliation, desire, hope, and faith*; and put thee on to stretch out the withered hand unto him at his own command."

Instead of making any remarks on the treatise from whence this quotation is made, I shall here subjoin the commendation given of it in the *Dialogues*, vol. 2, p. 30. The note at the foot of the page, after making a particular reference to this treatise, proceeds to commend it thus:—"Which, in my opinion, is one of our best books for common readers. The sentences are short, and the comparisons striking. The language is easy, and the doctrine evangelical. The method proper, the plan comprehensive, the manner searching, yet consolatory.—If another celebrated treatise is styled, *The Whole Duty of Man*, I would call this *The WHOLE of Man*; as it comprises what he *was* originally,—what he *is* by transgression,—what he *should be* through grace,—and, then, what he will be in glory."

Mr. E. Erskine, on *the assurance of faith*, chap. 6, says,—"And this very committing of the work of faith unto him, from a sense of your own inability, is that believing which we urge and call you to, &c.

"Unbelief and carnal reason are ready to argue, because God by his Spirit can do all, therefore we will sit still and do nothing. But the Spirit of God, whose reasonings I am sure are infinitely better, argues after a quite different manner, Phil. ii, 13. *Work out the work of your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.* O what glorious encouragement is here for a poor impotent sinner to essay and mint at believing! Here is the *arm* of omnipotency, reaching forth itself for thy help and through-bearing, in the work he calls thee to. Up, therefore, and be doing: for *thy God commands thy strength*, and, therefore, let him be the *glory of thy strength*.

"But say you, seeing we cannot *work* the work of faith, why does he yet *command* it? Is it not a hardship to require of us what we have no ability to do? *Ans.* Why do you send your little children to school with the A, B, C, in their hands, before they can read one letter? You do not think it a hardship to put the book in their hand and bid them read, though they know not a letter, because you offer to teach



them yourself, or by another in your place. So here, we are commanded to work the work of God, which is to believe in him whom he hath sent; which yet is no hardship, notwithstanding of utter inability for it in ourselves; because at the same time that he commands believing, he tells us, for our encouragement, that he himself is the author of faith, and is ready to work in us both to will and to do. If a *master* should command a *servant* to poise or lift a burden which he is not able to move, or to work a turn which he has no skill to manage: it might indeed discourage the servant from attempting it, if he were required to do it by his own strength or skill. But when the master tells him, I will assist, I will direct, I will *do all*, only *put to thy hand*; what servant would refuse or decline the service in this case? or if he should, do you not think he would deserve to be beaten with many stripes! The application is obvious. It is God's ordinary way to come and join with the poor soul, and enable it to believe, while, in obedience to his command, it is minding to believe in Christ. Like a kind master of a school, when the child, in obedience to him, takes the pen in his hand and scribbles the best way he can, the master takes his hand in his, and leads and learns him to write. So when we take, as it were, the pen in our hand, and offer to write at his command, he takes our hand in his, directing, strengthening, and enabling us to believe. So that, if there be but a willing mind to this work, it is accepted. Where he gives to *will*, he will also give to *do* of his good pleasure. These two are inseparably connected in the order of God's covenant.

“But you may still object, All the endeavours of a natural man are still but natural and sinful actions, and will ever God concur, by his almighty power, with the acts or endeavours of nature? *Ans.* Although God be not obliged to concur with the endeavours of nature; yet such is his grace, love, and good will towards man upon earth, such is the strength of his desire after our salvation, such pleasure has he in a sinner's believing; such a regard has he to what he himself has commanded, that we find him many times actually concurring with the poor helpless sinner, in impotent mints at obedience to what he calls for. It was no gracious principle that moved *Naaman*, the *Syrian*, to go wash in the waters of *Jordan*; yet, because he did what was commanded, God was pleased to concur with the mean of his own appointment, and cured his leprous body; and, for ought I know, his soul also. Let us believe as we can, in obedience to God's command, and in a dependance upon his almighty power; and while

we are doing so, although the act be at the beginning but natural, yet in the very acting, promised and purchased grace strikes in, and turns it into a supernatural act of believing. As when Christ was about to work that famous miracle at *Cana*, in *Galilee*, he does not first turn the water into wine; but he first bids them pour out the water, and, in pouring of it out, the water was changed into wine. So the *loaves* were multiplied while the disciples, in obedience to the command of Christ, were dividing them among the multitude. Just so here, while the poor soul, in a subordination to the Divine power, and in obedience to the Divine command, is attempting to believe, a God of grace changes the attempt into a true genuine faith; so that the soul, through the mighty power of God, ere ever it is aware, is brought really to believe, and that in a way it knows not how; for *the wind blows where it listeth*. Thus, I say, in the very act of faith, we are enabled to act it; when we take the pen in our hand, God takes us by the hand and writes for us, leading us in the *way we know not*."

I shall likewise content myself here, with subjoining the general encomium given to the writings of this author, in the *Dialogues*, vol. 3, p. 310. The note at the foot of the page, after a particular reference to his doctrine on the *assurance of faith*, proceeds thus: "Was I to read in order to refine my taste, or improve my style, I would prefer Bishop Atterbury's Sermons, Dr. Bates' Works, or Mr. Seed's Discourses; but was I to read with a single view to the edification of my heart, in true faith, solid comfort, and evangelical holiness, I would have recourse to Mr. Erskine, and take his volumes for my tutor."

To show the extensive influence of the popular doctrine about acceptance with God, even on the minds of those who have had abilities and courage to combat many popular opinions, I shall take notice of one remarkable instance, the author of the *Fable of the Bees*. This author's main doctrine,\* about the corruption of human nature, being the same with that taught by the Scripture, has proved extremely provoking, both to fools and philosophers, making the latter lose all their boasted coolness of temper. The substance of all

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\* I say his *main doctrine*. For it cannot be denied that he has strained some particular points, as in the case of luxury for instance, further than the Scripture warrants; and of this some enemies of his main doctrine, which needs no straining to support it, have not failed to take undue advantage.

that has hitherto been advanced against it, amounts, I think, to this, that the author himself had certainly a very corrupt heart. And I reckon no friend of his will ever deny the truth of this charge: for as he intended to describe human nature in general, and not any one particular class of men, as distinguished from others, it does not appear that ever he denied himself to be a human creature. Though this author has clearly evinced the corruption of human nature, to the no small confusion of all the sons of pride, as appears from the weakness of their replies, joined with the violence of their reproaches; yet we cannot learn from him, what is that virtue or holiness of life which is well pleasing to God; because he appears to have been as ignorant of the true principle thereof, as the bulk of popular preachers. We must, then, say of this author, something like what has been already said of the learned prelate, who alarmed all England with his doctrine on the words of Jesus Christ, *My kingdom is not of this world*. As the learned prelate clearly demonstrates what Christ's kingdom is not; but could not show what it is, as being ignorant of the foundation on which it is erected; so this author clearly demonstrates what holiness is not; but could not show what it is, as being ignorant of the true principle or spring from whence it flows. Now let us hear him.

*Free Thoughts on Religion, 2d edition, London, 1729, preface, p. 4,* "I demonstrate, that what is commonly understood by faith and believing, is the easiest part of Christianity, in which very few are defective; but that the most difficult part of our religion consists in subduing our passions to the love of God, and in obedience to his commands. *Page 20 of the book,* Christians, then, are not bad for want of FAITH,\* or of WISHING TO BE GOOD;\* but because they are not able to overcome their appetites and curb their passions, or rather have not resolution enough to set about and persevere in the attempt of it, whilst they are unassisted with the Divine grace."

*Inquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn, London, 1725, chapter 5; of the regulations concerning felons in prison, and the good effects to be expected from them.* After having proposed several regulations, the author

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\* I have taken the liberty to distinguish these words with small capitals, as they serve to show, how much even the most inquisitive men are conducted by tradition, or the religion of their country, as to any notions they have about acceptance with God.

proceeds thus, in p. 43, "When the condemned should, in every respect, receive the treatment I have required, and by this means, undisturbed by earthly cares, have leisure, in sober sadness, to review their past life, and examine into the multitude, as well as enormity of their offences; then, after thorough contrition, and an open confession in behalf of justice, animated by faith, betake to constant prayer: we ought to believe, that thus exerting themselves in the work of salvation, by the good guidance of able divines, and their own unwearied endeavours, many of them would find favour in the sight of the Almighty; and that several, even as they went to death, would be regenerated and comforted from above, with a strong assurance of forgiveness."

This author does not indeed speak of *the love of God* and of *obedience to his commands*; but as these expressions are as general, and of as undetermined meaning, as *holiness* or *virtue*, their import must always be measured by what a man holds about acceptance with God. And as to this point, it evidently appears, from the last quotation, that this author goes fully into the spirit of the popular doctrine. Part of his style about faith, indeed, differs from that of some popular preachers; yet, on the whole, it is plain, that the exercise of his penitent and theirs must be at bottom much the same. After all the noise that has been made about this author, his account of human nature, though writ in such a manner as to be read by many who have no taste for theological tracts, is really no other than what is to be found in a thousand sermons, of first repute for orthodoxy. The greatest fault I can find with him is, that on the point of acceptance with God, he turns out to be a votary of the popular doctrine, and would restore depraved human nature, by chiming in with the greatest corruption, both of it and of the gospel. From this instance we may see, that men may have very extensive views of the corruption of human nature, and of the necessity of power, more than human, for its recovery; and yet, in the matter of acceptance with God, be entirely conducted by the spirit of self-dependence.

I shall now, in the last place, take some notice of the most fashionable form of Christian doctrine, as presented to us in a periodical performance, well received by the public. We have it in a censure passed on Dr. Sykes, for inadvertence, in the following words. *Monthly Review for September, 1755, p. 237.* "For to appease God, or to appease God for sins, or on account of sins, or make God propitious, is neither the language nor doctrine of Divine revelation, whatever simi-



lar passages may be extracted from heathen writers, whose general scheme of religion was absurd or idolatrous. May we be permitted to suggest a thought, not altogether improper on this occasion, and calculated to elucidate the reasonings in this epistle [to the Hebrews]? viz. that the sacrifices of the law may be considered, as the public methods of declaring and ascertaining the legal or political transgressions **ONLY**, for which they were specially ordained; and that they who had violated the legal national constitution, and were, thereby, liable to legal penalties or punishments, were, by the intervention of the priest or high-priest, the authorized legal officers, proclaimed actually possessed of pardon, and exempted from legal punishments on account of their political sins. But none of these external or political processes certified the remission of moral guilt, or proclaimed any exemption from the punishments of the invisible world. Whereas Christ, by the doctrine or promises of his religion, attested by his death, and divinely confirmed by God's raising him from the dead, hath exhibited, certified, and proclaimed God as **ESSENTIALLY PROPITIOUS** to the penitent believer; and as an authentic testimony, that God appointed, approved, and accepted Christ's obedience to death, he hath raised him from the dead; and by the generous donation of his grace, empowered him to execute and accomplish the promises peculiar to the gospel covenant, viz. that God by him will raise up the truly penitent and faithful to the possession of a blessed and a glorious immortality: for the sins of persons thus qualified, shall be entirely blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, Acts iii, 19, 20, xxvi, 18, 19. Persons of those moral dispositions **ONLY** do now receive the *promise*, and shall hereafter be invested with the **ACTUAL POSSESSION** of the heavenly inheritance, or eternal life."

As this kind of reasoning will not probably have much weight with any who seriously read the New Testament, or even with any who seriously think of themselves and of their Creator; all such having every where, in all ages, found need for some sort of atonement; therefore, I see no occasion for showing much zeal against it at present. For I am far from being disposed to enter into concert with those zealous gentlemen, who would seem to be the pillars of orthodoxy, and who taking it deeply to heart, that such doctrine as is now quoted should step into the fashion, and, with a self-satisfied smile, turn aside theirs, as worn out with age, to be exposed to merciless ridicule, notwithstanding all the fresh pains taken to enrich its dress, are, therefore, very liberal in

their invectives against the authors of the Review; whom, with no small regret, they perceive to be the very mouth and index of the fashion. I freely allow these two sorts of men to scold or smile at each other, as best suits their several humours. What I would say at present is, that the bulk of mankind, who are less practised in reasoning, do now and then think more seriously, have greater sensibility of conscience, and sooner listen to its simple dictates; or, at least, are more readily affected, when reminded of them, than those ingenious gentlemen, who have studiously acquired a habit of thinking artificially, and of accommodating the words of their religion, as well as the dictates of conscience, to fashionable, enlarged, and genteel sentiment. Hence it is, that the body of the people every where, have always been fond to have some notion of atonement included in their system of religion. Therefore we may at least say, that, if ever the doctrine now quoted shall become popular, we will see something very new and uncommon.

The doctrine contained in the quotation would persuade us, that Jesus Christ died and rose again, to confirm and ratify what is commonly accounted *natural religion*, and to assure us of its sufficiency to lead us to happiness. The popular doctrine does indeed come to the same issue at last; but then, by means of its mystic round-about course, it has this advantage among people, who have not been able to reason away their conscience, so still retain some sense of guilt, that it soothes and encourages their minds with some notion of partial atonement, connected with their best endeavours; and so animates those, who are seriously exercised therein, to study greater regularity and strictness of life, than is commonly produced by any doctrine which excludes every notion of atonement for sin.

I shall now conclude this general view of our popular and fashionable writers, with observing, what will readily occur to any lover of the ancient gospel, and the same spirit runs through them all, though it takes various courses, and assumes various shapes, among different classes of men, in order to compass the same end; and though it does not, like the Spirit of the truth, lead its several children to very cordial affection toward each other.

I am, &c.

## LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

YOU never appear in a more amiable light to me, than when I find you accounted a sick-brained enthusiast, or sometimes, in softer terms, a man of a good enough heart indeed, but a weak judgment, by many who would take it much amiss not to be held for good Christians. These men despise you on the account of the likeness your doctrine bears to that of the apostles, or rather judging yours and theirs to be the same. The very sound of *imputed sin*, or *imputed righteousness*, is disagreeable to their ears; and the subject does not appear to them to be of sufficient importance to draw their serious attention, or to lead them to inquire what the Scripture says or means concerning it. Thus you are vile in their eyes; and it would complete my esteem for you, could I hear you saying, with the man after God's own heart, *And I will be yet more vile than thus.*

For when I would think of you with pleasure, and sympathize with you as an honourable sufferer by the reproach of these men, my satisfaction is abated, by hearing the applause given you by those votaries of a perverted gospel, who prefix to your name the title of **THE INCOMPARABLE**. And what chiefly gives me concern is, to think, that in your writings, any just occasion should be given to expose you to their commendation. As men of this sort bear the deepest grudge against the ancient gospel preached by the apostles, he who stands high in their esteem, must either be a great deceiver, or greatly deceived himself, or at least much mistaken by them. As I am far from being willing to consider you in the first of these views, I shall make it the business of this letter to take notice of some of the leading sentiments and ways of speaking, which I apprehend you have adopted from such men without sufficient examination.

As man was formed a religious creature, and mankind every where behooved to have some religion, great men and politicians have in all ages taken advantage of this, and instituted some public leading in religion, that might best answer the ends and purposes of worldly society. The religion of

Jesus, who was born to bear witness to the truth, and thereby to reign, serves to form individuals of all nations to be members of one grand society in the world to come. So it may justly be reckoned the only religion in the world that is not political, or which cannot be adapted to promote any system of politics, without being greatly corrupted, or becoming the reverse of what it was when first instituted.

As human nature has in all ages been found to be depraved, and men every where acknowledged to be more or less blameworthy, some atonement or consideration for averting the displeasure of the Deity has readily been admitted in the framing of all national religions. In this respect the religion of Jesus stands distinguished above all others, as it exhibits an atonement of the highest dignity, proved to be effectual by the highest evidence.

Religion holds and draws man by the two strongest movements of his heart, *fear* and *hope*, which are sometimes resolved into one, namely, *self-preservation*. Real, as well as fictitious causes of fear, are every where ready at hand; but in all religions, except the true, the grounds of hope are entirely fictitious.

The true religion sets forth in a full and clear light a distinction in man's heart, which, though not utterly lost, has been greatly obscured and confounded in all other religions; even a distinction betwixt that in him which witnesses for God, and the principle of all his disloyalty; or, in a fewer words, betwixt his *conscience* and his *pride*, or self-conceit. In all others the concerns of conscience and of *pride*, are in many respects intimately blended together, so that agreeably to the genius of any one or all of them, a man may be very religiously, very conscientiously, very piously or devoutly proud. But the word of God which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, fairly divides asunder these two real opposites, which the wise and religious in all ages have taken much pains to reconcile. Paul himself, who had been from his youth a diligent student of religion, and a notable proficient, assures us, that he did not understand this distinction till he became a Christian: and, indeed, no body else can have courage to attend to it.

The genuine product of sinful man's conscience is *fear*: and he can have no *hope* naturally, but what is suggested by, or grafted on his pride.

HAVING promised this much in the general, we may now turn our eyes more particularly to those who are most suc-



cessful in propagating a perverted gospel, the popular preachers. These men do indeed press very hard upon the conscience to awaken fear; but when they have driven the serious hearer almost to despair, by an awful description of his miserable condition, and by representing him as utterly unable in every respect to contribute anything toward his own deliverance, they at last condescend, with no small art and address, to make some comfortable exceptions from the foregoing awful doctrine, which comes now to be wrapped up in more loose and less absolute terms. And the audience is addressed thus: "Ye will do for yourselves as if ye were to do *all*; and yet *overlook* all ye do, as if ye had done nothing. Will ye do *nothing* for yourselves, because ye cannot do *all*? Lay down no such impious conclusion against your own souls."

It would be a reflection on their skill and understanding to suppose, that such reserves were not all along in their eye; but, then, we must consider that it was by no means seasonable to disclose them till now. Now is described, in a variety of particulars, a convenient resource where the pride of the serious hearers may exercise itself with great hopes of success. And he is animated thus: "Do what you *can*, and it may be, while you are doing what ye *can* for yourselves, God will do for you what you *cannot*. 'Tis *probable* this course may succeed. God is good and merciful." &c. Now the field is open for every one who wills to run. The Scripture, 'tis true, says, *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, &c.* However, the preacher finds it necessary on this occasion, to warn his hearers to avoid all thoughts of this doctrine of election at present as the suggestions of Satan; because (says he) there is in this doctrine no visible ground for faith to rest upon. And, indeed, it must be owned, that this doctrine affords no visible resource for the pride of any man; while yet it always hath, and ever will prove the most comfortable of all resources for them who have lost sight of every other.

If we consider these gentlemen in their assumed character of mediators between the Deity and men, we shall find them, in their own way, very careful of the honour of both parties. In speaking of the former, they can declaim in such a manner also of his glory, as it would seem no flesh had any room left to glory in his presence. In their animating addresses to men, they elevate them in such a manner, as to leave them no other use for the Deity, but to be an assistant to their pride. Meantime they are far from forgetting their own honour; for while they are thus employed, they effectually secure to

themselves the devotion of the people, who find their concurrence necessary to help them in putting forth their acts of faith, of which it is difficult to form any distinct notion unless we consider them as acts of sympathy, or rather sympathetic feelings corresponding with the doleful or animating notes of the preacher, by turns. Such of the hearers as may be reckoned proper adepts in this doctrine, must find no small pleasure in these transitions from fear to hope, wherein they behold the success of their serious endeavours, and find an exquisite gratification of their pride. Here we are readily reminded of the *desirable things*, the incentives to, and objects of religious desire: against which the Divine judgments are so often pointed in the prophetic writings.

The forementioned gratification may, I think, be justly deemed the highest criminal pleasure that human nature is capable of. We need not wonder, then, that such people should highly adore the ministers of such pleasure; and that they should show but a very cold regard to the writings of the apostles, which are extremely unfit for gratifying their favourite passion. Accordingly, we may daily perceive, or, as often as the trial is made, that nothing is more odious to these people than to hear of the comfort of the guilty arising solely from the simple belief of the truth, or, which is the same thing, from the bare truth itself. To see one of those people converted to Christianity, would be seeing such another miracle (abating the extraordinary signs) as the conversion of Paul. If we have known any such converts, we have no doubt observed them showing the like remorse and shame as upon the gratification of any other guilty passion.

Though it is natural to expect, that these preachers, in their double dealing with God and man, should be expert in using the maxim. That the perfection of art lies in concealing the artifice; yet while they proceed, twisting together the language, or even the doctrine of the Scripture with their own, the difference betwixt the former and the latter, which is indeed very great, and the absurdity of joining them together, must often strike our eyes if we do not shut them. After they have told us at large, that we can do nothing to justify ourselves, we may perceive them greatly embarrassed in directing us, what we must do in order to attain justification. They say, and unsay, so much about working and doing, that though it is evident all along, that the doing of something is necessary; yet neither they nor their hearers can have any distinct notion of what is to be done. In this respect they answer exactly to the description given by Paul of their pre-

decessors, who swerved from the faith in much the same manner. In his first epistle to Timothy, having made mention of *faith unfeigned*, he adds, *From which some have swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.* Accordingly, we find them, for the ease of their own understanding, and that of their hearers, betaking themselves alternately, now to reasoning agreeably to nature, then to what they call *mystery*, or rather their favourite *depths*.

Sometimes, they take great pains to show us how very little we do when we put forth an act of faith; yet, again, this act, however little, when narrowly inspected, is found to contain such a variety of particular acts of great importance, as would require a whole sermon to display them. It now resembles a *little green bud*, containing both the flower and the fruit; though the several parts, and the leaves of them, are not yet unfolded, nor appear to sight; it is found to contain in miniature, or in embryo, every justifying qualification in the natural way. Or, we may say, it resembles a small piece of paper, which, when put in the scale, is found so light as scarcely to move the balance; but when examined by the eye, is found to be a note of many thousand pounds value. This small piece of paper we are to hold forth for our justification; and though we ourselves are, in our secret thoughts, sufficiently sensible of its value, we are to hold it forth, humbly acknowledging that it is light even as vanity, and thankfully to receive in return the expected benefit, under the notion of a mere favour or free gift bestowed upon us, without money and without price. For thus Mr. Boston presumes we will behave when under right influence; "Ye will do for yourselves as if ye were to do *all*; and yet *overlook* all ye do, as if ye had done *nothing*."

As it is in confounding the simple notion of the faith given us in the Scripture, that such men more especially play their game, and put the change upon us, leading us most effectually to establish our own righteousness, while they entertain our ears with many swelling words of vanity concerning the Divine; we may find them, among other arts, very remarkable for an uncommon use of similitudes and metaphorical expressions in their descriptions of faith. The common use of these is to help our attention and understanding to a more ready apprehension of the things reported to us. Their use of them serves to amuse our fancy, and to confound our understanding; while the main tendency of the discourse is, to stimulate our pride, and set in motion our several passions in subserviency thereto. They give us parables without things,

mere shells without kernels. We are led to expect a substance but grasp at a shadow. When the images are removed, we find no reality remaining. Accordingly, we find they seldom or never incline to tell us what they mean by *faith*, but by some laboured circumlocutions. Their conduct in this respect is not unlike what we have heard said of men dexterous in another sort of traffic.

“ Unwillingly to be short or plain  
In any thing concerning gain.”

They constantly represent faith to us as furnished with hands, feet, wings, &c., or under the notion of some instrument operating our peace with the Deity. Accordingly, they ascribe to it various ideas of motion and action; and though a very simple motion well meant may do the business, yet that which has the greatest activity in it, is commended to us as by far the best. Thus we are taught by Mr. R. Erskine, “ Though a slow and simple motion, if it be real and upright, is what has the promise, *Him that cometh he will in nowise cast out*; yet the Scripture speaks of a hasting, striving, running, fighting, and wrestling, that should be aimed at. A man that is running from the greatest misery to the greatest happiness, would endeavour to have his motion such, as would evidence his hatred to the one, and his great liking to the other.” And he adds in the same sermon\* the following encouragement to beginners: “ They who would fain mint to get up unto their feet, may read a strong encouragement from a preventing call of God to them to rise, and come away.” If we deprive their faith of its hands, feet, and every idea of motion, we shall be at the greatest loss to know what it is; whereas nothing is more easy to be understood than the belief of a truth, or one’s being persuaded, that a report is true. It is likewise easy to be understood, that no small motion is produced in our minds by doubtfulness, anxiety, and our various efforts to quiet ourselves: but no sooner does the salutary truth appear, than all that motion ceases. If an alchymist, after much fruitless labour, should, from some unexpected hand, hear and understand the secret of making gold, all his former perplexity would be at an end, and he would then begin to labour upon a more joyful and hopeful plan. Nor would he grudge to admit the conviction of the vanity of all his former skill, labour, and expense.

Another of the arts of these preachers, consists in their use of

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\* Entitled *Christ’s love-suit*. Song ii, 13, *Arise*, &c.



scholastic words. These words, like the cups and balls of jugglers, serve them for a variety of purposes. By these, they sometimes blindfold the people, and sometimes make them stare, while they imagine some profound meaning to be contained in them; and at any rate, these words serve to confound and perplex the plain simple doctrines of the gospel, as well as to furnish upon occasions no small matter of idle disputation among the teachers. I shall only point at one instance. Mr. E. Erskine divides the sufficiency of the atonement into a threefold distinction. The first he calls *intrinsic*, the second *ordinate*, and the third *legal*.\* Then, after giving his explication of them, he very gravely tells us which of these faith has to do with, and which not. The preachers of his doctrine are at present at no small variance as to the proper use of these words, publishing ingenious controversies for the benefit of those who are disposed to read them. The poor people, who cannot well fathom such depths, must be left to follow the guides they severally most admire.

We may also take notice of the great ambiguity of the words and phrases which have been used on this subject, and the changes which have happened in them; some falling into disrepute, and replaced by others of less obnoxious sound: for no stone has been left unturned to intercept the light of the sacred truth, and decoy our attention with an endless variety of the most abominable jargon about faith. The time and pains taken by the apostles, in holding forth the heavenly ray of hope, have been employed by thousands of preachers in directing us how to search for farthings in a dunghill.—The word *merit*, as applied to our faith or our endeavours after it, has generally fallen into disrepute among the Protestants, as having been long tarnished by Popish fingers. Instead of it *condition* is often used with approbation. Yet this has likewise become suspected; and many preachers scruple to use it without clogging it with some explication. *Instrument*, I think, is now the word least accepted against. And this can serve us for *receiving*, *applying*, *closing with*, and *taking hold of* the proposed benefit. And this instrument is sometimes a *mouth* for receiving, and sometimes a *hand* for taking and giving. We are likewise told, that faith has two hands; one for taking home Christ to ourselves, and another for giving away ourselves to Christ. But if faith must be called an instrument, and if it be at the same time

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\* See his sermon on Heb. xi, 7, *By faith Noah, &c.*, in a volume of his sermons printed at Edinburgh, 1755.

maintained that justification comes by faith only; then I am at full liberty to affirm, that he who is possessed of the instrument, hand or mouth, is already justified without regard to his using the instrument, his taking or giving with the hand, or receiving with the mouth. Thus, the artifice by which they would impose upon us may be very easily discerned.

We also hear much of *terms*. If they venture to tell us, that we are justified by a righteousness imputed to us, they must add, *upon the terms of the gospel*. Accordingly, they warmly exhort to comply with, and accept of the terms, or to receive the benefit on *gospel-terms*. Thus we are taught to treat the Deity, as free states or sovereign princes do with each other; the one obtaining peace of the other by complying with his terms. In short, these men will make a thousand shifts rather than speak plain truth. Let all the prophets and apostles be consulted upon the question, What is required of us in order to acceptance with God? we will find their unanimous reply to be, *Every thing* or *nothing*; for no trimming is countenanced among them.— If we attempt to do in any sense, we bind ourselves to do all; yea, the least attempt to do in this matter, is shown to be damnable criminal. What, then, is the ground of hope? The Divine truth itself.

Where shall we find among the popular preachers that unreserved freedom of speech which so well becomes the declaration of Divine truth? We shall seldom find them speaking anything like the language of the gospel, without cautioning, mincing, or clogging it with some exceptive, *but, if, only, though, &c.* If they sometimes tell us, that nothing is required of us in order to our peace with God, they quickly add, but a few particulars; which at present must be considered as coming up the length of *something*, but which in another chapter, when they have more leisure to expatiate upon them, will be found to contain *every thing*.

I AM sorry to find that the *Dialogues*, which do indeed contain several bold strokes, uncommon to the popular preachers, should yet, in too many places, be tainted with their noxious influence. But what author can drink out of such fountains, and not transmit some of their qualities into his writings? We are, indeed, too apt to be ensnared by reverence for men, in competition with our common Maker. We are afraid, or we think it ungentle, to say with confidence, *Let God be true, and every man a liar*.

Aspasio, in his fourth letter to Theron, says, or, which is

the same thing, adopts with approbation the following words: † “OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST is so called, (the JUST ONE,) not so much for having fulfilled all righteousness in his own person, and performed an unsinning obedience to the will of GOD, as because by his righteousness imputed to us, we also, upon the terms\* of the gospel, are justified, or accounted righteous before God.”

A note is subjoined, cautioning what is said of *terms*, in the following manner: \* “That is, *freely*; or, as the prophet speaks, *without money and without price*. For nothing is requisite, in order to a participation of Christ and his benefits, but a conviction of our extreme need, and an humble desire to receive them; receive them as gifts of pure grace, to the most undeserving creatures. This point, which is so intimately connected with our comfort and hope, the reader may see more fully stated in *Dialogue 15*.” If we turn our eyes to *Dialogue 15*, which contains, indeed, some excellent and just things, we find Aspasio speaking thus: “So that nothing is required, in order to our participation of Christ and his benefits, but a conviction of *our* need, a sense of *their* worth, and a willingness to receive them in the appointed way; that is, *freely*, and as matter of pure grace.” ‡

According to this dialogue, Theron, in order to his participation of the righteousness of Christ, has no occasion for any righteousness of his own, yea, none but such “as the *Samaritan* woman and *Zaccheus* the publican possessed; or such as the *Philippian* jailor and the profligate *Corinthians* might boast.” He is divested of every qualification but extreme indigence, guilt, and unworthiness; of every recommendation but that of extreme wretchedness: and not our own duty and obedience, but Christ’s suffering and Christ’s obedience, are declared to be the terms. Thus it would seem the nail is thoroughly driven, and no room left for any reserve. But, then, we must carefully remember, that though Theron is divested of all *righteousness of his own*, of every *qualification* and every *recommendation*, he must yet be well provided with *requisites*, even such as may embolden him to make the *appropriation*, which is declared to be essential to faith. Here for distinction’s sake, I am obliged to call the sovereign cure sent from heaven to relieve the guilty, by the name of the **SOLE REQUISITE**. And I do it with the more pleasure, that it so readily calls to mind that significant saying of Jesus, *One thing is needful*. Now I beg leave to make a few remarks,

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 † Vol. 2, pp. 336, 337.

‡ Vol. 3, p. 239.

Theron, as guilty and unworthy, as destitute of righteousness, of every qualification and recommendation, is perfectly on a level with all his fellow creatures, and can see no difference whatsoever betwixt himself and those who shall eternally perish. Thus, indeed, the gospel considers whom it relieves; thus all who are relieved consider themselves, when they are first comforted by it, or when they believe it: and the gospel, when it first speaks relief to them, intimates no difference betwixt them and others. On the other hand, Theron, as furnished with his *requisite*, must perceive a manifest difference betwixt himself and others; such a difference as gives all the promises a peculiar direction to him, and such others as are, I must not say *qualified* here, but furnished with the proper *requisites* as he is; such a difference as may encourage him to consider himself as a friend of God, and an heir of eternal life, and so affirm what is accounted essential to faith. The faith, then, by which Theron is justified, must be the persuasion of the reality of this difference. Though the apostles declared every one to be born of God, and to have eternal life, who believed that *Jesus is the Christ*; yet that ancient truth is now considered among us modern Christians as a very insipid tale: we have come the length to say gravely, we see not what comfort or benefit can be derived from it. According to what is now imagined, the first Christians, when they believed the truth, wanted the very essence of faith; and beyond all peradventure they wanted what is now called so. For what else is the essence of modern faith, but mere self-conceit, maintained with a high hand, and dignified under many sacred names, as the leading principle of religion? But the essence of their faith was the eternal God: *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

Aspasio, I think, will agree with me in saying, that *without faith it is impossible to please God*, or that nothing is well pleasing to God about any man till he believes. And I am ready to agree with him in maintaining, that the proper scriptural faith cannot be where any thing essential to it is wanting; and the Scripture will keep us both in countenance, if we should affirm that no man, before he believes, can have any ground of hope but what is fictitious and vain.

Now Theron does not arrive at the faith taught him by Aspasio, till toward the latter end of Dialogue 16, and scarcely then. For past the middle of it, after many reasonings against the appropriation he is exhorted to make, he still anxiously says, "My soul is in jeopardy," p. 293. And all



that we can hear from him at last, is much liker the language of a fond, selfish presumption, not sufficiently assured, than of that boldness and confidence, which so well becomes a man affirming a Divine truth, wherein his own pride is no way flattered: pages 305, 306. "May I then believe—that—all—are—mine?" follows a modest complaint of remissness and inactivity; then, p. 306, "O! that I may arise, and with the Divine assistance, shake off this stupor of unbelief?" He is very willing to believe, that he is a gracious person, but his confidence fails him; and a considerable part of Aspasio's reasoning with him is to the same purpose, as if he were comforting the lady described in these well-known lines:

"Thro' hopes of contradiction oft she'll say,  
Methinks I look so wretchedly to-day!"

He often compliments and encourages him upon his complaints, extracting thence some hopeful sign or other; whereas, an apostle would have enforced them, and given him some broader foundation for them; would have declared the Divine truth, which respects no man's person; and if he gave not credit to it, instead of sympathizing with him, declared the judgment of God against him. But whatever he called faith, I think we are not led to consider Theron as having arrived at his faith, till the period above pointed at. He indeed says, not far from the end of *Dialogue* 15, p. 256, "I am ready to declare, in the language of Agrippa, *almost* thou persuadest me to commence a believer." And at the very end of that dialogue, he aims strongly at it. But as he cannot be said to profess the faith while he persists disputing against it, we cannot well look on him as a believer, till toward the close of *Dialogue* 16, where his objections grow languid; and, then, though we cannot say he is fully persuaded, yet we may say according to the popular style, *he desires to believe*.

If, then, I am allowed to say, that faith is the entrance into the Christian religion, and that there can be no true piety nor good hope but what follows upon it, I must at the same time be allowed to express some surprise at finding Theron in very hopeful circumstances, while he is yet an unbeliever, so cannot with any propriety be called a Christian. For Aspasio often congratulates him on the happy change he perceives in his condition; and while Theron cannot be brought to believe, Aspasio beholds his title perfectly clear to every heavenly blessing. I see no way of accounting for this, unless we say, that Aspasio finds the unbelieving Theron furnished with every requisite fit to embolden him to claim, to accept, and to pos-

sess; or, in other words, he plainly sees that Theron is a sincere penitent, and commenced a good and righteous man; and, therefore, is surprised why he will not entertain a better opinion of himself, and put an end to his anxiety, by exerting the appropriating act of faith, or which is the same thing, by affirming with confidence the goodness of his title to life. I apprehend, that an expert preacher, who would lead me to hope for life by repentance in the natural way, might pursue his plan with much less embarrassment, by haranguing in the manner many have done on that passage of Ezekiel, which was considered in a former letter: *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.*

It is now time to take some notice of the *requisites* insisted for, in order that one's title to the blessing may appear; *conviction, &c.*

One must have seen little of the deceits of the popular sermons, if he has not perceived what large work is cut out for the pride of the devotee, in the doctrine about convictions of guilt. So many directions are given, such care and pains, and such exercises of mind are required, for attaining proper convictions that it is by no means to be wondered at, if the soul devoutly employed in these, should entertain some question like this: Whether the pains taken to find himself guilty, and the distinction he thereby acquires above the careless and profane, may not go far to counterbalance all the guilt he comes in this way to be sensible of?

HERE, we may stop a little, and see what the Scripture teaches on this head. It will support us in saying, that sin and misery are inseparably connected; that man is an object of mercy by that which constitutes him miserable, or fixes and ascertains his misery, whether that misery be presently felt in any intense degree or not. If two men are led to execution for the same crime, the one overwhelmed in sorrow, and the other elevated to noisy mirth by strong drink, we justly reckon the condition of the latter to be fully as miserable as the former, and if mercy respects mere misery, wretchedness, and unworthiness, it will certainly as readily regard the insensible person as him who has the quickest feeling of what is before him; otherwise it behooved to regard the one as more worthy than his fellow; which would be inconsistent with the nature of mercy, at least that of Divine mercy; for wherever the least degree of worth appears, there the province of mercy ceases, and that of justice and equity takes place.

Happy is it for men, that the Deity does not consider our condition in the manner that we commonly do. Perhaps the world never made a finer appearance as to all that is admired in it, than when the Divine compassion to the nations was manifested. The Roman power and laws had civilized the world; the Greeks had enlightened it with learning and wisdom; and the Jews diffused piety every where. Peace, with her many advantages prevailed, to render the life of men more agreeable. But how did it then appear in the eye of the Deity? Isaiah informs us: *Darkness shall cover the earth, and; gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise,—and his glory shall be seen.* Were we to take a summary view of the images used to describe the state of the world then, we should find it now considered under the notion of a great infirmary of sick, maimed, and bruised; than under that of a vast and darksome dungeon, filled with criminals in chains, ready for execution, &c. Moreover, those to whom mercy was shown, are represented as extremely insensible of their real condition as *past feeling, yea, dead in trespasses and sins.* But, says the messengers of glad tidings to the heathen, *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved.)*

The Divine mercy is not narrow and limited, nor, like that of man, backward to interpose, till some inviting and amiable requisite appear in the object. No; it prevents the most hardened rebels, and brings every requisite along with it: or rather the Divine grace operates all its effects by the *sole requisite*, the righteousness which it brings to view. It reigns among the insensible and the dead through that righteousness unto eternal life. If we inquire at Paul, why the gospel is called the power of God to save men, he tells us, *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed.* If we ask again, how the righteousness it reveals appears to be Divine, he adds, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* In the death of Christ, where wrath was evidently revealed from heaven, we have the broadest view of the Divine displeasure against all unrighteousness of men, as well as a high proof illustrated by his resurrection, how differently God judges of righteousness from what men do; that which was highly esteemed among men, being found to be an abomination in his sight; and that which was *disallowed of men*, found to be *chosen of God and precious.* In the death of Christ, then, is held forth the broadest

view of human guilt and misery, and the clearest discovery of the all-sufficient remedy. There Divine judgment itself is made to rest for a light to the nations. There is no occasion, then, for popular preachers to lead men through their idle process of a law-work, before they will condescend to display the glad tidings before them.

If Christian teachers would imitate the apostles in preaching, let them hold forth the sacred truth, Christ crucified, the Divine wisdom and power to salvation; and so leave it wholly to God to make converts. The merciful truth is all-sufficient to save. It needs no requisite, no preparative from man to produce a relish for it. It creates a relish for itself; it answers to the majesty of him whose voice it is, and who framed the conscience of man for hearing his voice; it wounds and it heals; it kills and it makes alive; it blocks up and darkens all the resources of the pride of man, in the light of which he formerly walked and lived; and it brings him light and life from an unexpected quarter, by opening, as it were, a window in Heaven. No lecture about any law can affect the conscience of man like this truth, which shows the Divine law magnified and honoured in the most eminent manner; which demonstrates the Deity to be inflexibly in earnest as to every word spoken in his perfect law, and so demolishes all the subterfuges of human pride. What preparative, what requisite, had Paul when the merciful truth surprised him on the road to Damascus? And if we inquire what effect it had upon him, we find it made such a revolution in his sentiments, and all the springs of his life, as if we should see the course of a mighty torrent changed from east to west by the shock of an earthquake. The extraordinary signs affecting his body, showed what befel his mind. The miraculous shutting, and the miraculous opening of his eyes, were signs of that *turning from darkness to light*, which Jesus told him his ministry was to operate among the Gentiles: and he tells us himself, he was designed *for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe to life everlasting*.

It is likewise true, that convictions of guilt are often awakened by other means than the truth of the gospel, such as sickness, the approach of death, and other calamities. Moreover, though nothing less than the saving truth can thoroughly wound the root and principle of man's alienation from his Maker, yet many convictions are often produced by a partial view of its evidence, which so nearly resemble those which issue in repentance unto life, that nothing but the event can distinguish them. We cannot, therefore, judge merely from



the disquiet produced in any man's mind by a sense of guilt, whether his convictions will land in the saving knowledge of the truth or not; so cannot have the least ground to suggest to him any hopeful symptom in his condition from thence. But this much I think may be said, that if we find any man heartily pinched with a sense of guilt, we have good reason to conclude, that it is sore against his will. For no man willingly puts a thorn deeper into his own flesh than he can easily pull it out again. I must frankly own, then, that I see no more difference betwixt a careless and convicted sinner, than is betwixt a felon ranging his round at large, and one newly apprehended by the officers of justice: and for my part, I think it would look liker an impertinent sarcasm than any thing else, to tell either of these last, that he was now in a very hopeful way. As for Theron's convictions, which are acquired by his good-natured compliance with the advice of his friend, leading him to take a strict survey of his deficiencies, I am not at all surprised to find them assuaged and healed up again by the skill of the same friend, kindly reminding him of his several excellencies and amiable virtues. But the wound which God gives, none but God can heal.

Perhaps never man made his obeisance to the imputed righteousness, in a more generous and genteel manner than Theron has done. In the beginning of *Dialogue* 14, Theron, having seriously ruminated on the several branches of Aspasio's doctrine, having considered the blessings proposed in it, and that Aspasio had affirmed his interest in these blessings, begins to conceive some liking to that doctrine.—So his soliloquy ends with these words: "This doctrine, especially in such a connection, begins to put on a *more recommending* appearance. My prejudices are really wearing away. I am almost a convert." Well, after all other objections are desisted from, the well-disposed Theron is still more afraid, lest the gospel have some unrighteous tendency, than of any bias of unrighteousness in himself. Page 269, "But are the interests of *morality* secured? This is what I am strongly inclined to doubt. And to say the truth, this is now my principal objection to your scheme." Aspasio commends his concern for morality. "I shall never blame my friend for being vigilant and jealous over the interests of morality.—I am glad to find, that a jealousy for the interests of morality is the chief obstacle in the way of your assent." Aspasio, after quieting his friend's righteous jealousy on that score, finds him still unreconciled to his doctrine; and takes notice of the reason, saying, "You have not the proper pre-

parative,—a sense of your great depravity, your extreme guilt, and your utterly undone condition;” telling him withal, that instead of those convictions which are “*slight*, and *hover* only in the imagination,” he ought to have such as are *deep*, and *penetrate* the heart.” Theron being now satisfied, that there was nothing in the gospel that could give any reasonable disgust to his righteous disposition; and not being willing to remain unprepared for any of the blessings to which his friend had assured him he was already entitled to by it, very obligingly inquires, “What method would you advise me to use, in order to get these convictions impressed on my heart?” Aspasio, sensible of the difficulty there was of finding matter for conviction in the heart of so good a man, in order to his being furnished with the first requisite, directs him to several pre-requisites; which, I think, may be distinguished into four. 1st. As Theron could not readily find himself guilty by any rule he was already acquainted with, in order thereto, he behooed to study more law; 2dly, Examine himself in the most impartial manner; 3dly, Implore the Divine aid, or that of the enlightening Spirit, to assist him in his business; 4thly, and lastly, Keep a diary: as if one could reap any spiritual benefit from studying the Divine law, or know how “pure, how extensive, how sublimely perfect it is,” before he knows Christ, the end thereof for righteousness;—as if such a one could judge of his spiritual state impartially;—as if one could pray for the Holy Ghost before he believes the truth, whereof he is the Spirit; as if a diary, kept by such a one in the manner directed, did not naturally serve to administer more delicate food for his pride.

I AM apt to wonder what business Aspasio had to urge, in the manner he does, the *imputed righteousness*, upon one who had little or no occasion for it. Methinks he acts below the majesty of the sacred theme. The gospel was never intended to improve the righteous, and elevate them to a higher condition; but to relieve the wretched. Had Aspasio no dissolute youth, no grey-headed sinner, within the circle of his acquaintance, to whom the news of forgiveness might have been acceptable; and whose story might have been much more encouraging to the guilty, than to hear of so well accomplished a gentleman as Theron, obsequiously performing everything requisite to entitle him to all the comforts of the gospel? Or did Aspasio imagine, in so late a period of the world, he might at last make the imputed righteousness bear a lovely appearance in the eyes of fine gentlemen? Would

it not be more agreeable to the Scripture, if one asks directions for his improvement, to tell him, in a word, *Be perfect*; keep the commandments and thou shalt live! to tell the wretch, who despairs of improvement, that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness! to lay open to all men the deceits of the popular doctrine, both as to conviction of guilt and faith! to ask them, Is it true that they have sinned or not? If it stand true in their conscience that they have, this is conviction. If they have sinned, this is enough to damn them, whatever sense they have of their sin. And this is preparation enough for mercy. To ask them again, Is the gospel true or not? If they hold the gospel to be true, this is faith. Then, let every man show by his works of what sort his faith is; or what he understood in his heart by the gospel, when he affirmed it with his mouth to be true; seeing there is only one truth which can save men, and not any meaning that men may please to affix to the words of the gospel.

But my wonder at the rules and directions given to Theron for his attaining unto righteousness, is abated when I hear Aspasio declaring his own experience, near the end of *Dialogue* 14, and assuring Theron, that he has "trod every step in the way which he recommends to his beloved friend. He has made the trial, and can set his *probatum est* to every expedient which he advises; and may very truly say, with his Divine Master, *We speak that we do know*,\* and testify that we have experienced; or, with the evangelical prophet, *This is the way*, the way of peace, of holiness, and of joy, *walk ye in it.*"† Aspasio, then, hath found out a path, by walking wherein the guilty may confidently hope to arrive at righteousness at last. He assures us that he himself, by carefully walking therein, followed after righteousness, and attained it. And his friend must follow him, upon the faith of his success. But how greatly does his experience differ from that of Paul, both as to himself and all his converts? By the ministry of Paul, the nations were converted. But what account does he give us of their conversion? He assures us, *That the nations, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness.* We must say, then, that righteousness was brought unto them when they were not seeking after it, but following a quite opposite course. And thus the prophet, in the passage above referred to, foretells the case was to happen, *Thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way.* Not the way to righteousness; for the

\* John iii, 11.

† Is. xxx, 21.

word heard from behind, even the word of faith which the apostles preached, brought righteousness nigh, or home to them. Righteousness itself, then, is the way. And the point to which it leads is a glorious resurrection from the dead.

The voice from behind brings men righteousness and places them on the way. So that to be entered the first step on the way to attain unto righteousness, and to hear and understand the voice, are all one and the same thing. Jesus Christ says, *I am the way*; and, *Whoso findeth me, findeth life*: and he is found of them who seek him not; for he came to seek and to save that which was lost. Again, Paul says to such as had believed on Christ, so had attained to righteousness, *As ye have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him*. He would have them to walk in the way into which they had been already noticed, and proceed therein unto the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls, counting all things loss to attain unto the blessed resurrection of the dead. And thus he illustrates to us the words of the prophet, *This is the way, walk ye in it*.

Shall we think it safe, then, to attend to Aspasio's experience, in proof of which we have no more but his most confident assertion? Or shall we not judge it safer to hear the voice of the Divine Master, whom it well became to say, *We speak what we do know*? Especially, seeing we have the Divine *probatum est*, or the highest demonstration from Heaven, in his resurrection from the dead, ascertaining the truth of all that he knew or spoke: Shall we not hearken to Paul, preaching the word of faith, which brings nigh the Divine righteousness, and declaring to us what he uniformly experienced and observed, throughout the course of his ministry, not only in himself, but in many thousands beside? Or shall we hearken to Aspasio, who, not unlike a Jewish doctor, stands up before us, holding forth his diary in his hand, prefaced with manifold directions, teaching us how to follow after righteousness, and calling aloud to us to follow him, and saying, in language too daringly borrowed, *This is the way, walk ye in it*.

Let us now observe the effect of the foregoing rules and directions on Theron's mind. Having diligently applied himself to the work enjoined him by his friend, he obtains the desired convictions of guilt, and by degrees the other requisites also. Yet after all, by the continued representation given us of his case, one is apt to be struck rather with the idea of *virtue in distress*, than that of the *remorse of a criminal*.—And the reason is plain; because his convictions are acquired



by the exercise of piety. And, indeed, it would seem that no small exercise of piety was needful, to find guilty so good a man as Theron. Yea, Aspasio himself seems to be affected with much the same idea, as appears by the many congratulatory replies and soothing commendations, wherewith he endeavours to animate the drooping spirits of his friend. Yea, he frequently takes occasion to illustrate the Divine beneficence, faithfulness, and compassion, by minding him of instances of the similar virtues in himself; and these not as uncommon, but as the ordinary occurrences of his life.

Theron having expressed his convictions in Letter 2, Aspasio replies, in the beginning of Letter 3, thus: "Though all your letters give me pleasure, none was ever so highly pleasing as your last. I look upon it with the same secret joy, as a compassionate physician observes some *very favourable* symptoms in the crisis of a beloved patient's distemper." What Theron says in Letter 9, is thus taken notice of by Aspasio, in Letter 10, (vol. 3, p. 149.) "When you mentioned the past indolence, and the present fervour of your prayers, I could not forbear reiterating my praises to God on your behalf. "This is a proof, my dear Theron, that you are going in the way everlasting," &c. Near the beginning of Letter 12, Aspasio addresses his friend thus: "Why this *dejected* air in your temper? Why those *pensive* strokes in your letter?—Let me anticipate your reply, and make answer to myself—This gloom, I trust, is a sign of approaching day.—Another favourable presage is, that you take the direct and certain way to obtain substantial comfort. The righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, after which you inquire, about which you are solicitous, is a never-failing spring of consolation." And near the end of the same letter, "This sorrow of which you complain, may be the seed of spiritual and eternal consolation." Here I cannot forbear wishing that Aspasio had rather rebuked Theron's solicitude, as an attempt to establish his own righteousness, in a new shape, under the deceitful notion of working his way toward that of Christ. For it is the same thing, whether we talk of obtaining righteousness by the law of Moses, by the light of nature, or by Christ, if any solicitude of ours be held needful to obtain it. Yet men have always been disposed to put the change upon themselves in this matter, by shifting words and names.

As the instances occur more frequently, in the 15th and 16th *Dialogues*, of Aspasio's taking notice of such favourable symptoms in his friend's case, as distinguish him for one of

those peculiarly respected by the Divine promises; I think I need not spend time in quoting them at large, especially as I have already pointed at some of them, and may have occasion to touch upon them further in the sequel; nor shall I insist much on the other requisites, connected with the conviction of guilt, which are described in *Dialogue* 15, in language like this,\* “The sacred privileges of the gospel are to be enjoyed by *every one* that unfeignedly esteems them, and earnestly seeks them,”—that “longs for them.”—that, “is willing to receive in the appointed way,”—“whose heart is awakened into habitual and lively desires after the salvation of Christ.” Such are encouraged in the following manner: “What is this but in the spiritual sense to thirst? To you therefore the promise is made. To you the riches of this benign dispensation belong.” But I have better ground to say, that every one who unfeignedly esteems the Divine law, is awakened into habitual and lively desires after its purity, and is willing to receive life in the way appointed therein, shall assuredly find it to be “a never-failing spring of consolation;” so needs not be pushed on by any perplexed commentary on the gospel to undergo the twofold fatigue, of first getting the bias of his heart changed from all evil to all that is good, so acquiring a righteousness of his own; and, then, humbly denying he has any, in order to what is called closing with Christ.

Aspasio is often straitened how to illustrate his twofold doctrine. And he had been much more straitened, had Theron only continued to press him with a few more pertinent objections, not difficult to be found. I am apt to wonder, why he does not mention charity or love among his requisites, seeing he makes them to consist of its leading branches or affections. For do not unfeigned esteem, longing, lively desire, willingness to comply, belong to love? Yea, does not love comprehend every good disposition whatever; seeing love is the fulfilling of the law? But perhaps some difficulties attending the saying broadly, and in as many words, that love is a requisite in order to justification; for many noted preachers, besides the apostles, have said that love is the fruit of faith.

WE may now proceed to observe, that the popular preachers, while they show no small regard to distinctions devised by themselves, or their predecessors, and delight to range the Scriptures, according to them, are very unmindful of the plain

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\* Pages 254, 265, with p. 239, vol. 3.

simple distinctions left us by the apostles, to guide us in the understanding of their doctrine. Many voluminous controversies have arisen, and much confusion has taken place, through the neglect of the plain distinction made by Paul in these words, 1 Cor. xiii, 13. *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.* Though Paul, as well as the other apostles, always establishes an inseparable connection betwixt faith, hope, and charity, or love, he would have us to remember, that any one of these is not the other, but that they are still THREE. When he affirms that we are justified by faith, he would not have us to think that we are justified by any the least motion or degree of hope, or of love. This point must be carefully attended to, because, as there have been from the beginning many counterfeits of faith, so it will be found, that every man's hope and love are of the same nature with his faith. The capital question then must be, What is the faith by which men are justified?

The apostles used the word *faith* or *belief* in the same sense we do to this day in common discourse. We are properly said to believe what any man says, when we are persuaded that what he says is true. There is no difference betwixt our believing any common testimony and our believing that of the gospel, but what arises from the very nature of the testimony. For thus the Apostle John states the matter, 1 John v. 9, *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater*; so must produce greater certainty or firmness of persuasion.

When once a man believes a testimony, he becomes possessed of a truth; and that truth may be said to be *his faith*. Yea, we have no idea of truth, but with reference to its being believed. The question about faith must be set aside, when the inquiry turns upon how a man is affected by a testimony which he believes? His passions and affections are set in motion, according to the nature of the thing testified, or according as the testimony brings him matter of joy or grief, hope or fear.

Now, we often become possessed of truths bringing us pain or pleasure, when it would be ridiculous to say, we contributed anything to the obtaining of them. If the alarm-bell brings me pain, or if the great guns of a neighbouring castle, intimating some public occasion of joy, bring me pleasure, at unawares, I am not conscious that my pain or my pleasure was of my own procuring, unless some nice reasoner should

say, I became possessed of the sad or of the joyful truth, by performing the duty of hearing.

As the whole efficacy of faith flows from the nature and importance of the thing testified, he who is justified by faith, is justified by what he believes. He has peace with God; not conscious of any difference betwixt himself and others; but hearing that Jesus is the Christ, or that he hath fulfilled all righteousness, which now becomes to him a truth, so his faith. As Jesus Christ and the apostles often speak of *faith* and *the truth* indifferently, or to the same purpose, we may just point at a few instances. John i, 17, *Truth* came by Jesus Christ. Gal. iii, 23, But before *faith* came. Verse 25, But after that *faith* is come. John xvii, 19, That they also might be sanctified through the *truth*. Acts xxvi, 18, which are sanctified by *faith* that is in me. John xvi, 13, the Spirit of *truth*. 2 Cor. iv, 13, the Spirit of *faith*. John xviii, 37, every one that is of the *truth*. Gal. iii, 9, they which be of *faith*. Acts vi, 7, obedient to the *faith*. 1 Pet. i, 22, in obeying the *truth*. 2 Tim. i, 5, the unfeigned *faith* that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also. 2 John ver. 2, for the *truth's* sake that dwelleth in us. 3 John ver. 3, the *truth* that is in thee. I might likewise take notice of many other phrases, where the style is somewhat varied, but which still carry the same meaning; as where Paul, Rom. v, speaks of being *justified by faith*, and *justified by his blood*; by both which it is plain, he means the same thing.

EVERY one who believes the same truth which the apostles believed, has equally precious faith with them. He has unfeigned faith, and shall assuredly be saved. If any man's faith be found insufficient to save him, it is owing to this, that what he believed for truth, was not the very same thing that the apostles believed, but some lie connected with, or dressed up in the form of truth. So this faith can do him no good; because, however seriously and sincerely he believes, yet that which he believes is false, and therefore it cannot save him. There is but one genuine truth that can save men.

To illustrate this matter, let it be remembered that the saving truth which the apostles believed was, *That Jesus is the Christ*. The apostles had one uniform fixed sense to these words, and the whole New Testament is writ to ascertain to us in what sense they understood them. Every one who believes that *Jesus is the Christ* in a different sense from the apostles, or who maintains anything in connection with these



words subversive of their real meaning, believes a falsehood; so his faith cannot save him. In the days of the apostles many affirmed along with them, that *Jesus is the Christ*, who yet meant very differently from them. The far greater part of Christendom will affirm in like manner; yet we shall not easily find many who, when they come to explain themselves, have the same meaning with the apostles. Let us, then, lay aside all questions about faith, or how a man believes; and let the only question be, What does he believe? what sense does he put on the apostolic doctrine about the way of salvation?

It may likewise be observed, that the difference often takes place betwixt the confession of the mouth and the belief of the heart, which time can only discover. We cannot have a proper view of this difference, by observing that many preachers, in both our national churches, solemnly declare their adherence to the public standards of doctrine, from which they widely differ in their sentiments; because their dissimulation is, generally speaking, easily discerned. But a man may so explain himself about the way of salvation, as to leave no reasonable ground to suspect that he has any different meaning from the apostles; yet some future trial of his faith may show, that what he spoke with his mouth, was not the persuasion of his heart: and though it may not appear, that he had any intention to deceive others, yet it may appear to his own conscience, as well as to others, that he had been deceiving himself, and retaining false sentiments, clothed with sound words. It may be added, that many never discover this mistake through the whole course of their life, but go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand; yet we have no other way of judging what a man believes in his heart, but by what he confesses with his mouth, and the influence it has on his practice.

Though the lives of many are very opposite to their declared principles; yet what a man believes in his heart, will certainly influence his conduct in life. God bare witness to the apostles, as having unfeigned faith, as influenced by the spirit of it in their lives, and as proper judges how far others, by their words and actions, appeared to be possessed of the same genuine truth or unfeigned faith with them. Every one, while he appeared to agree with them, was considered as having the same unfeigned faith with them, and as a brother for whom Christ died. Accordingly some corrupters of the Christian doctrine are said to have swerved from faith unfeigned; and others are charged with denying the Lord that bought them. And Paul, describing a heretic, says,

Tit. iii, 11, *He that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* He is unhinged as to the Christian doctrine, or turned off from the foundation of the apostles and prophets; and he sins against the authority of the Christian revelation, to which he professes subjection, so is self-condemned; that part of the truth which he himself professes to hold, serving to condemn him as to his error.

To illustrate what has been said, we may observe what Paul means by one's *believing in vain*. 1 Cor. xv. 2. Speaking of the gospel which he preached, he says, *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* Some of the Corinthians denied the resurrection of the dead, while yet they affirmed, along with the apostles, that Christ arose from the dead. On which the Apostle says, v. 13, 14, *If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is vain.*—To believe in vain, then, is to hold, along with the truth, some error which undermines it, makes it void and of no effect. And the same Apostle shows us at large, in his epistle to the Galatians, that however zealous Christians we may be, if we add to Christ's death any requisite whatsoever in the matter of acceptance with God, Christ shall profit us nothing, Christ is become of no effect unto us. In general, the apostles ascribe every opinion or practice which they condemn to some error in faith, or a lie held in the place of the truth, 1 John i, 8, and ii, 4.

Among those who appear to have the same faith with the apostles, we are not allowed to make any difference, till some event make that difference appear. Some are said to believe only for a time, while others believe to the saving of the soul. Though, during the time that the former are said to believe, we can by no means distinguish them from the latter; yet Jesus Christ plainly intimates to us, that there is a real difference, even at the first instance, betwixt the faith of the former and that of the latter. The only use, then, that this intimation can serve for, while appearances are good, is to lead every man to examine himself, and prove his own work. The real difference I speak of, is pointed forth in the parable of the sower, Matthew xiii. In distinction from all who believe only for a while, to believe in vain, he who believes unto the saving of the soul is thus described, v. 23: *But he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and UNDERSTANDETH IT, &c.* Those others may appear to men to understand the word of faith as clearly as the last.—

Their faith may have the same marks with his, of being genuine. It may be attended with the same signs of repentance, with the same expressions of desire and joy, or the same appearances of hope and love; while yet they do not understand the word of faith as he does. They do not understand how the bare word of faith, or Christ's death alone, can give them peace with God, without some pious requisite or other, which they secretly either hope to attain, or presume they have already acquired. Some secret notion of the necessity of some difference betwixt themselves and others, is lodged in their minds along with the knowledge they have of the truth.— And though the new knowledge they have got may make many warm and kindly impressions on their hearts, and show itself in many amiable appearances in their lives; yet the little old leaven which is still retained, however much it may lie hid for a time, will, by degrees, leaven the whole lump.— Their whole religion will become subservient to the darling reserve made for their pride, and it will require only a proper temptation to lay them open.

To have a more full view of this matter, we may take notice of some facts recorded in the gospel history, Luke iv, 16—30. In the synagogue of Nazareth, on the Sabbath day, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah these words: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, &c.*; adding, *This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.* The effect of his address to the people, is described in these words: *And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?* From this animated description, we see what lively impressions of Divine grace filled the minds of all the people. Their eyes were fastened on him; they all bare him witness, heartily approving the application of the prophet's words, and so acknowledging him for the prophet of Israel; yea, moreover, wondering at the grace which flowed from his lips, so as they could scarce believe their own eyes, that he was Joseph's son, who had been brought up from his childhood in their city. Had one of our popular preachers beheld this audience, he had certainly pronounced them all converted. But Jesus perceived a mistake about Divine grace hinted in their question, *Is not this Joseph's son?* This mistake he unfolds and opposes in the following words: "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself;

whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."

No mistake about the gospel can appear to us more natural than the sentiment of the people of Nazareth. They fondly imagined, that seeing their fellow-citizen, who had proved a very acceptable neighbour, growing up among them from his childhood in favour with God and man, and now turned out to be the Saviour, foretold by all the prophets, they had some natural claim upon him; and that it would not be equal and reasonable, or suitable to the love of one's country, that others should be benefitted by him, and they neglected, they who had grown up with him, and mutually exchanged many kind offices during their long acquaintance. Yet so great was their awful respect, that they durst only insinuate their sentiment in the most distant manner in the question, *Is not this Joseph's son?*

Jesus perceives their meaning, and speaks it out for them: *Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician heal thyself.* And the first check he gives them is in these words: *Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.* He who, being endowed with extraordinary powers from above, speaks and acts for the Deity, must look above all the particular ties by which any one part of mankind is connected together, and distinguished from the rest; and, therefore, must be more especially unacceptable to those of his own neighbourhood or country, who will naturally claim the chief benefit of the abilities he is endowed with. Then he proceeds to remind them, in what manner, and how contrary to all human expectations, the Divine favours were distributed in the days of Elijah and Elisha. In the days of the former, though many widows were in Israel, a Canaanitish woman receives the distinguished favour. In the days of the latter, though many lepers were in Israel, only the captain of an hostile prince's army is cleansed. All the while he takes no notice of what devout people now would call their eager looks or acts of faith, fastening upon, or taking hold of Christ, the lively sense they had of their need of him, their rapturous



impressions of grace, or yet their ardent longings to enjoy him with all his benefits, except it be in the way of repulsing them.

It is time now to observe how the audience was affected when Jesus had thus explained himself. "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill (whereon their city was built) that they might cast him down headlong." How soon is the fervent piety of these people changed into mortal spite? Yet nothing but our inattention can make us think their case any way singular or extraordinary. For it is a very common sight at this day, to see people of the first reputation for piety, who can weep very devoutly at hearing their favourite sermons, and talk for hours together of the impressions that grace has made upon their hearts, very forward and zealous in showing their contempt and spite against the doctrine of the true grace of God.

I shall close my view of this passage with observing, that Jesus, *passing through the midst of them, went his way, and came down to Capernaum*, where he preached for some time, and healed many; and thence proceeded in like manner through the other cities of Galilee. Thus he gave evidence to his own disciples of his Divine power to rescue himself from death, and disappoint all his enemies. And thus he continued to distribute his favours among those who were considered, by the wiser or more enlightened part of the nation, as sitting in darkness and under the shadow of death. And thus he foreshowed how he would withdraw his favours from the Jewish nation, who claimed a relation to God beyond others, and bestow them freely on the Gentiles, who were not looking for them. Thus ended the long acquaintance which had subsisted betwixt Jesus and his fellow-citizens of Nazareth. For we do not hear that he ever visited them any more. So fatal is a mistake about the Divine grace, and in such dismal consequences does it issue!

LET us now consider a little, the account given us of the ten lepers that were cleansed, Luke xvii, 11—19.

If by the cleansing, which was common to all the ten, we understand, that *escaping the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, which is common to those who understand the truth, and those who believe for a while, we shall, then, perceive the difference betwixt these two sorts of believers properly pointed out to us,

by the different behaviour of the nine from that of the tenth.

All the ten uttered the same prayer, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.* They were all cleansed. But one of them comes to be distinguished from the rest, in the following manner: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks, and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." Hence it is evident, that this stranger, as Jesus designs him, when he takes notice of his thankfulness, had a very different notion of mercy from the other nine. The other nine were Jews, so judged they had a nearer and more natural claim than strangers upon any merciful dispensation which God exhibited in their nation. And as they received only the same favour that was as freely bestowed on a stranger, even the worst of aliens, a Samaritan, as on them, they did not think very highly of the matter. Their hearts were not filled with such gratitude as his, who could think of no reason for his being cleansed, but mere mercy properly so called. So this last receives the countenance and approbation of Jesus, in opposition to the other nine.

Jesus reads to us the very same lesson, from the comparison which he makes betwixt Simon, the Pharisee, with whom he dined, and the notoriously sinful woman who anointed his feet; which he illustrates by the parable of the two debtors, Luke vii, 36. The intended instruction is summed up to us in v. 47, where Jesus points at the evidence and proof of the woman's having received forgiveness; *Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* And from the whole passage taken together, it evidently appears, that he to whom little is said to be forgiven, so loveth little, has good ground to fear lest he be found at last not to be forgiven at all; even as he who, by breaking, and teaching others to break, the least of the Divine commandments, runs the risk of being called *the least in the kingdom of heaven*, plainly runs the risk of being excluded the kingdom of heaven altogether. The more closely we consider the sayings of Jesus Christ, the greater difference will we perceive betwixt the Spirit of Christianity, and that of the books most universally approved

among us. Mr. Richardson, in a work,\* where the professed design is, "to inculcate upon the human mind, under the guise of an amusement, the great lessons of Christianity," says, near the end of the *conclusion*, which is supposed to be written by Mr. Belford, a reformed libertine, "Happy is the man who, in time of health and strength, sees and reforms the errors of his ways!—But how much more happy is he who has no capital and wilful errors to repent of! How unmixed and sincere must the joys of such a one come to him!" I shall only observe here, what every one of his readers will readily perceive, that this quotation contains the spirit and substance of all that this author has writ; but how far agreeable to Christianity, every lover of the New Testament may easily judge.

Let us next learn from the words of Jesus, how infants at the beginning of life, and how condemned felons at the end of it, enter into the kingdom of God. Thence we will see how little account the Deity makes of all the mighty bustle of our thoughts throughout the busy scene of life.

The first case is set before us, Luke xviii, 15–17, *And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them; but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no ways enter therein.* One great advantage we have by the gospel-history is, that we find the same mistakes about the kingdom of God, which were afterwards to take place among the professors of Christianity, arising in the minds of the first disciples, so as to be taken notice of by their Lord, and rebuked by him for our instruction. As to the present case, we find the disciples thought it impertinent to bring infants to Jesus, seeing they could not give heed to his word, nor have their souls exercised about sin and righteousness, nor profess faith and repentance like themselves. By the like reasonings do some of our devoutest dissenters forbid little children to be brought to Christ, to be blessed of him in partaking of the *one baptism*, which the Scripture plainly shows to be the common privilege of the *one body* of the *one Lord*, or of that heavenly kingdom to which the infants of believing parents are declared to belong. Jesus rebukes the disciples, and gives them plainly to understand, that if they did not enter into the

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\* Clarissa Harlowe.

kingdom of God on the very same footing with infants, or if they imagine they could contribute anything to their entrance more than they, they should be for ever excluded thence.

The other case is described to us in the account which Luke (chap. xxiii, 39-43) gives of one of the malefactors crucified along with Jesus. This is the noted passage on which the far greater part of preachers discover their disaffection to the Divine grace, and, consequently, to the salvation of mankind. This may be considered as a principal touchstone of the regard men profess to the sacred truth. Here the fashionable and the popular preachers take one another by the hand in a friendly manner. And in general it may be said, that though these two sorts of men do not choose to walk long in company together, yet they meet as it were by instinct, without any material difference, on all the most important occasions. Their different schemes resemble our old and new made roads in some parts of the country, which though they frequently take different courses for a considerable way, the one shorter and the other longer, do yet now and then intersect each other, and are sure to coincide at the end of every remarkable stage.

My quarrel with the Archbishop, whom I formerly quoted on this subject, is very moderate. He was a moral philosopher, and it would seem that it was chiefly in compliance with the rites of his country, that he gave any place to the name of Jesus Christ in his scheme of religion. For his scheme would suffer no great loss by the want of that name. The like may be said of Mr. Locke, and many other philosophical Christians. My principle quarrel is with those who give out themselves for preachers of Christ, and of salvation only through his name. How often do they tell us, that we have but one instance of a hardened sinner finding mercy at the close of life? and they insist upon it in such a manner, as if they deeply grudged mankind the benefit of that one instance. But happy is it for mankind, that that one instance cannot be overthrown, but will stand unshaken to the eternal confusion of all who bear any grudge against it. Might they not also tell us, that we have but one instance of Christ's dying for the sins of men, that that day is past long ago, and that the like will never happen again? Perhaps it would surprise us to hear any preacher talking at this rate; but how great must our surprise be if Mr. Flavel were the person. Mr. Flavel, who has long been considered as an eminent *master* in what is called our *Israel*, in a treatise called *The Fountain of Life*,



*Sermon*, 32, on Luke xxiii, 43, amidst a great deal to the same purpose, has the following words: "And there is this one instance in the text, and no more, that gives an account of a person so called. Such a conversion as this may not be ordinarily expected by any man, because such a time as that will never come again; it is possible if Christ were to die again, and thou to be crucified with him, thou mightst receive thy conversion in such a miraculous and extraordinary way; but Christ dies no more; such a day as that will never come again."

Thus the preacher leaves no room for any such sinner as the thief on the cross to hope for salvation, unless Christ were to die again, which is acknowledged to be impossible.

But stay, let us see what he is afraid of. He is afraid lest men delay their conversion at present, in the hope of being converted at last. For all men are supposed to be desirous of being converted some time or other before they die. What then shall we understand by *conversion* here? If by conversion *faith* be meant, shall we say that men harden themselves at present, in judging any testimony to be false, by living in the comfortable hope of holding it true at last? This will never do. By conversion, then, we must here understand the changing of a sinner's heart to love righteousness and hate iniquity, even that change with which the promise of life is connected, in Ezek. xxxiii. This change, or some pretence to it, is the same thing with what is called *repentance*, by all those who declaim largely on the inefficacy of a *death-bed repentance*.

Now, seeing the hope of the guilty is made to take its rise from the consciousness of this change, the preachers certainly do well to warn their hearers by all means to take special care, that this change be as early and as sincerely as possible: "For, alas! how little is it that a sick and dying man can do in such a strait of time?" whereas a healthy young man may easily be persuaded that he can do a great deal in this matter; and moreover, that he has no such occasion to blush before his Maker, or question his friendly concurrence, as an old sinner, who has delayed his efforts to the last. All the while, I do most heartily agree with the preachers in maintaining, that he who does not find himself disposed at present to forsake all evil, and fulfil all righteousness, has no reason whatsoever to expect that ever he shall find in himself that disposition in any future period of his life, not to mention his dying hour.

However, it is granted, that the happy change, which is

supposed to be the source of good hope, was wrought in the heart of one dying thief in a miraculous and extraordinary way. And while this is granted, we are warned not to imagine, that in an ordinary way any ground of hope remains for dying criminals now, seeing it is not every day that the Saviour dies. We are left to conclude, then, that the ordinary way of attaining good hope, is by endeavouring to make our hearts beat time to the moving addresses of a fervent preacher. Yea, we have got arguments framed to our hand, which lead us to infer from the old extraordinary cases, much more probability of success in the ordinary way. According to the sentiments of a noted preacher, whom I formerly quoted near the end of my third letter, we must reason thus: If Christ was anciently found of them that sought him not, even of them that followed not after righteousness, how much more will he now be found of them that seek him according to the directions given in sermons? Meanwhile it gives me some satisfaction to perceive, that these gentlemen are themselves conscious, that there is a real difference betwixt the ancient and the modern, or betwixt the extraordinary and the ordinary conversion; though I have not the satisfaction of finding that their knowledge of this difference does them any good; while I see them making use of the Divine conduct of old as a prop to support their modern inventions. To have a proper view of this matter, we must conceive it thus: God brought sinful men into favour with himself of old in a miraculous and extraordinary way. He acted, then, beyond and above the course of nature, raising the dead, and calling into being things that were not; choosing the naughty, the weak, and base things of the world, leaving the mighty to glory in their abilities. But now all things move in their natural channel. Now men are justified in a plain, ordinary, and natural way. It was, indeed, extraordinary and miraculous, to see men who had no righteousness of their own, made happy by the knowledge of the Divine righteousness revealed to them; but it is quite ordinary and natural, to see men glorying in a conceit of their own.

I formerly quoted Mr. Boston on this subject, declaring, "It is unreasonable to think, that it should fare at the last with those who have had means of grace all their days, and despised them, as it may do with those who never have such means till they come to die." I shall give a few more of his words from the same sermon. "This conversion of the thief, doubtless was a perfect surprise to him, a thing he was not looking for.—What is his example to thee? Is it rational

for thee to expect that favour which one has sometimes been surprised with, and got when he was not looking for it?—The conversion of the thief on the cross was an extraordinary manifestation of our Lord's power, made for special reasons. And, therefore, though it shows what the Lord can do, it does not show what ordinarily he will do.—It was done in such a juncture of time, as the like never was, and the like never will be again; namely, when the Lord of glory, the Saviour of the world, was actually hanging upon the cross, paying the ransom for the lost elect world;" &c. To this I shall add one other quotation from the close of the *The Afflicted Man's Companion*, written by Mr. Willison, whose books are in great repute with thousands of devout people. "The Scriptures contain a history of more than four thousand years; and yet, during all that time, we have but one example of a man that truly and sincerely repented when he came to die; and in this man's case there was such an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances as never happened before, and can never fall out again to the end of the world. This man had the happiness to die close by the newly-pierced side and bleeding wounds of a crucified Jesus, when he was lifted up in the height of his love, drawing sinners to salvation; which was a juncture that can never have a parallel.—Again, the man never had any offer of Christ, nor day of grace, before now: he surrendered himself upon the very first call; and his faith in Christ at this time was truly singular and miraculous.—Besides, your way of sinning differs vastly from his. He was not guilty of presumption as you are; he did not slight Christ's calls and offers in the day of his health, and delay his repenting and closing with them, in hopes of an opportunity for them at the hour of death as you do." According to this reasoning, it may well be said, Wo to the afflicted man, if the sense of his own merit utterly fail him at the hour of death.

Never could Proteus assume more shapes, or change them with more dexterity, than these men do, in order to evade and oppose the revelation of Divine grace. From these two quotations we have a lively view of their dexterity this way. In the present case we are given to understand, that Divine grace was stretched beyond its natural extent, to an extraordinary height. And, agreeably enough to this, we are taught to think, that the atonement had then an extraordinary merit and virtue. The sacrifice for sin was then bleeding, his side newly pierced, and he was lifted up in the height of his love. But these are not all the extraordinary circumstances we are reminded of here. The pardoned sinner had extraordinary

merit, namely, of the negative kind; for when all are allowed to be sinners, he who is least guilty is supposed to have most merit, as having least demerit. Now, this sinner, in comparison with wicked sinners, who harden themselves in sin with presumptuous hopes, had no guilt, no demerit at all. Moreover, we must think, that he had within him a very lively spark of goodness, which, though hitherto smothered by bad company, needed only to get air, in order to blow up unto a vigorous flame. For he surrendered himself upon the very first call. And, then, his faith in Christ at this time was truly singular and miraculous, and, therefore, justly deserved to be taken notice of, and rewarded in a very singular and miraculous manner. Thus all the extraordinary circumstances here conjoined, tally together in the most agreeable manner. Extraordinary mercy was, upon an extraordinary occasion, shown to extraordinary worth. But in ordinary cases, men would do well to expect only ordinary mercy. For as the eminent prelate, whom I formerly quoted, hath told us, "We are not like to suffer in the company of the *Son of God*, and of the Saviour of the world. And if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave ourselves toward him so well as the *penitent thief* did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a life.

The popular preachers could not have chosen a more proper place to show their real sentiments, than within view of the very cross of Christ, and the transactions that happened there. The appearance of Divine grace, pouring contempt on all boasted human worth, is so striking here, that it is no wonder to find them stumbling at it. And here it is indeed that they lay themselves open. Methinks, from their doctrine on this head, we may get hold of some idea of their *faith*, which they labour so much to cover with mist, and hide in the dark. The idea of it, that will best correspond with their doctrine, on this part of sacred history, stands thus. *Faith*, we must say, is a *pious resolve* to become better men than we were before. It is a *little green bud*, which must be put forth in the spring, in the prospect of blossoming all summer, and ripening into fruit in the autumn, before the winter of old age or of sickness and death arrives. In this view of matters, their doctrine becomes so far quite plain and intelligible. For what regard, in an ordinary way, is to be paid to a dying criminal resolving to reform? Are his resolutions to be trusted? Can he expect to be treated on a footing with one who has time before his hand to put them in practice? "With what face can he apply himself to God, in his extremity, whom he



hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his life? And how can he have the confidence to hope, that God will hear his cries and regard his tears, that are forced from him in this day of his necessity? Whereas the pious resolves, the prayers and tears of a blooming young man, must no doubt bear a very different consideration. But, then, a question naturally arises here, that would require a very able casuist to determine: How shall a healthy young man, resolving at sunset to reform, do it in hopes of acceptance, or be assured that he shall see the light of the next day, that he may have an opportunity of showing the sincerity of his resolves by putting them in practice? perhaps it will be readily answered, that his resolves may be accounted sincere, who makes them in perfect health, out of pure hatred of sin and love of righteousness, uncompelled by the fear of sickness, death, or future judgment.\* But here, again, more difficulties occur than we have time to mention. The popular doctrine, then, however plain and natural some parts may seem, will not lead us far straight forward; and no sooner does it oblige us to turn the first corner, than it leads us into darkness and confusion.

We must, then, either grope in the dark, along with the popular doctrine; or we must follow the Scripture, and say, that all who receive the kingdom of God, receive it on the same footing with infants, and dying criminals, and find mercy in the same miraculous way with them;—that all who believe the gospel, find in it a righteousness sufficient to recommend

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\* An author, who himself knew no better cure for a guilty conscience than *pious resolves*, has however written some lines, which I think may be pertinently quoted here.

Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears  
The palm, "That all men are about to live."  
For ever on the brink of being born,  
All pay themselves the compliment to think,  
They one day, shall not drivel; and their pride  
On this reversion takes up ready praise;  
At least, their own; their future selves applauds;  
How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!

All *promise* is poor dilatory man,  
And that through every stage;

At *thirty*, man *suspects* himself a fool:  
*Knows* it at *forty*, and reforms his plan;  
At *fifty*, chides his infamous delay,  
Pushes his prudent purpose to *resolve*;  
In all the magnanimity of thought  
Resolves; and re-resolves; then dies the same.

them to the Divine favour, at all events, whether they live or die, without seeing the least difference betwixt themselves and any dying malefactor.

To ease the popular preachers of any further trouble with *this one instance*, which they have so long gnawed upon, of a hardened sinner finding mercy at the gates of death, a gentleman of distinction in the church of Scotland, the late Dr. Wishart, hath contrived a method to account for the salvation of the thief on the cross, in a natural way, without any miracle at all. This he has done in a discourse, called, *An Essay on the Indispensable Necessity of a Holy and Godly Life to the Happiness of Heaven; showing that this necessity, according to the plain tenor of the Gospel, is without reserve or exception.* He ought also to have said, that the holiness necessary to begin our happiness, must be without any reserve or exception; for, according to the Scripture, none enter happiness but they who are *perfectly* righteous. In this discourse, he undertakes to show it to be "a thing impossible, that a man should go on in a vicious course to the last, and then obtain the salvation of his soul," p. 9. To prevent mistakes about words, it may be proper to observe, that by the *last*, he all along means the time when one is confined to his death-bed, especially the latter part of that time, or when a criminal is led forth to execution. In the preface he says, "The chief matter contained in the following papers, appear to me, after a long and deliberate consideration, to be the truth of God plainly declared in his word."—"This publication stands in need of no apology. I have indeed been long and strongly prompted to it, by my own heart, as the best service I could think it in my power to do, for the honour of God, and the greatest good of my fellow creatures." And he had a rebuke ready prepared for such as shall "impute to bad or sinistrous designs, what (says he) I know to be written with the most honest purpose." So that whatever come of the gospel, we are not allowed to make any reflections against the integrity and holiness of this author. And no doubt it would be more rude to do so, as the leading sentiment in this essay is full warmly espoused by not a few preachers.\*

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\* On this sentiment we have the following improvement in Mr Macknight's *Harmony of the Four Gospels*, Page 192, Paraphrase, Matt. xxvii 44, *The thieves also which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.* Luke says, that only one of them did so. The other exercised a most extraordinary faith,\* at a time when our Lord was deserted by God, mocked by men, and hanged upon a cross as the worst of malefactors.'

The note is—\* "It has generally been thought that this grace was

One thing is very evident in this essay, that the author labours much to possess our minds with an idea of the former life of the criminal, pardoned on the cross by Jesus, very different from that given us by Luke, or any other of the evangelists. Whether Luke or he wrote with the best design, or the greatest regard for the honour of God and the good of mankind, is a question proper to be considered by such as read them both. Were we left entirely to form no other notion of that criminal's character, but what arises to us from the words of Luke, we should think of him neither more nor less, but that he was a *thief*. On the other hand, if we are disposed to form our notions of him from the essay, we shall conclude, that the infamous expression under which Luke sums up all he has to say of his character, denotes only a single blemish in one of the best of lives, long ago wiped off by repentance and amendment. The author of the essay, after noting Luke's words, says, p. 87, 88: "He might for all of that, have been an *early* saint, and a very good man in the main, and have led a very good life in his former days, for the most part; he may, for any thing we are told, have been surprised through weakness, or tempted by want, to the crime he com-

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begun in the thief, and raised to perfection all of a sudden, and on the present occasion too, when every circumstance concurred to hinder him from believing. Yet it is far from being certain, that either his faith or repentance were the fruits of this particular season. He was acquainted with our Lord's character before he came to punishment, as is plain from the testimony he bare to his innocence. *This man hath done nothing amiss*. He may, therefore, have often heard our Lord preach in the course of his ministry, and may have seen many of his miracles; and, from the consideration of both joined together, may have been solidly convinced that he was the Messiah. Nay, it is possible, that he may have been a good man, as well as a professed disciple of Christ. For his untimely and misfortunate end might be occasioned by a single act of gross wickedness, of which he sincerely repented, and into which saints themselves may fall, through the strength of temptation, consistently with their being in a state of grace: witness David's adultery and murder. The thing I say is possible. And, therefore, those who encourage themselves in sin from this example, as if it was an instance of a late-accepted repentance, proceed upon suppositions, which, though they may have existed, yet no man can be certain; while in the meantime, the matter, is of such undeniable importance, that it loudly demands the exclusion of every doubt.

In this age of refinement on the gospel, we are not to be surprised, if we soon hear our preachers of first note gravely remarking, that the honest thief well deserved to find mercy; and that, in reference to the well-known parable, it was but natural and rational, that the good publican should go down to his house justified, rather than the wicked Pharisee. See the ingenious turn which this commentator gives to this parable.

mitted: and have met with his just condemnation for the first, and the only instance of it he had been guilty of." And a little after he proceeds thus: "It may, for anything we are told, have been a long time since he was guilty of the crime before he suffered for it; during all which time, he may have been going on in a course of sincere repentance, and thorough amendment." Our author is not content with suggesting, that thus the case might be, but he urges us to think it really was so, by the following argument, backed with an awful reproof to such as shall adventure to think otherwise. "And if it may be so, for anything we are *here* told; then it is plain, we have no ground *here* given us to reckon it was otherwise; and what *other* ground can we have for it? And if we will take the liberty to *supply*, or add to any passage of Scripture, from our own fancies, (*pertinently spoken by our author*,) or traditionary prejudices, we may easily, that way, *wrest to our own destruction* any passages of Scripture whatsoever, even the plainest and most *easy to be understood*." Having thus straitly charged us not to contradict a word of the history of this criminal's former good life, now for the first time published, because no evangelist has writ a particular confutation of it, he proceeds, in p. 89, to offer us a proof of it, from his behaviour on the cross: "We can observe nothing, in the whole of his behaviour, like the *contrition*, sorrow, or fears of a man *conscious* to himself, that, hitherto, he had been going on in a sinful course; and pierced with the *conviction*, that, to this moment, he was in a most dangerous state, but rather like the *confidence* of an *improved saint*, of a man conscious to himself that he was in a good state, had been early converted, and had brought forth *fruits meet for repentance* long ago. Here is no coming trembling with the *jailor*,—no downcast looks with the *publican*."

If one, after reading this modern essay, should look into the gospel-history, must he not be surprised why Luke gives no hint of a difference in the characters of the two thieves, especially seeing the interests of virtue and holiness are so much at stake here; and seeing the circumstances attending the death of Jesus, were likely to be very often considered among Christians? But, then, his surprise will be either quite removed, or else greatly increased, if he shall take time to read over Luke, and the other evangelists, where he will find many incidents related of the life of Jesus, exceedingly confounding to the patrons of virtue and holiness in that age, and withal very encouraging to the more dissolute part of mankind; yea, where he will find such accounts of



Divine grace, and such distributions of Divine favours, as quite break through, and supersedes all the rules of equity and proportion maintained among us. If one of our patrons of virtue were the reader, he would very readily take umbrage at the contrast stated betwixt the Pharisee and Publican, in Luke xviii. 9-14, unless some ingenious commentator were at hand to inform him of some circumstances, omitted in the gospel-history, which yet are not formally and particularly contradicted there. As the publican was in reality a very good sort of man, and that, being of a very scrupulous conscience, he was ready, through his great humility, to call himself a sinner, and ask mercy;—that the Pharisee was a gross hypocrite, a lying slanderer, very covetous, and a great smuggler, so had a great contempt for honest tax-gatherers, and looked on all they took from him as injustice and extortion; that, accordingly, when he was at his prayers, and provoked by the sight of one of these officers of the revenue, he gave vent to his ill-nature, accusing him falsely of the most scandalous vices, and no less falsely ascribing to himself the opposite virtues: that, to enforce all, it could not otherwise have been said in the text, agreeably to nature, and the interests of virtue and holiness, that the publican *went down to his house justified rather than the other*. Thus, by the help of a little dexterity, many difficulties in the gospel history, that have proved very stumbling to the ancient and modern guardians of holiness, might be entirely removed.

All the while, I do most heartily agree with the author of the essay, in affirming, as in p. 7 and 8, "That there is no promise nor instance, in the whole word of God, of that repentance being accepted of him at last, or availing to obtain the happiness of the other world, which comes not till the last moment or hour of life; far less which is purposely deferred till then." I likewise agree with his account of that repentance which as the promise of acceptance with God, in p. 70, "If the wicked *turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if he walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.*"

But to bring our remarks on this essay to a close: Though the preface will not suffer us to suspect the integrity of the author, yet methinks those who are confessedly the guilty part of mankind, have some reason to complain of his want of generosity. If he and his fellows, after having duly qualified themselves, can boldly take their seat as the children of the kingdom, and claim all the blessings thereof, why should he grudge to let fall one crumb to the dogs under the table?

Might not a few lines of the gospel, relating the happy end of one worthless fellow, be suffered to remain in the simple form wherein they were writ, to serve as the dernier resource of poor dying criminals, to whom at first sight they seem to belong?

LET us now attend to the words of the evangelists, Mark xv, 27, 28, *And with him they crucified two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.* Jesus, before he was betrayed, made mention of the same prophecy to his disciples, as yet to be accomplished in him, Luke xxii, 37. Thus we see, that special notice is taken of this memorable circumstance, which stands among many others, foretold of his death, in Is liii, The last words of that chapter run thus: *He hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* Jesus seems to point to the same passage when he says, *The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many.*

As the death of Christ was intended for a ground of hope to men in the most desperate cases; so the circumstances attending his death were wisely adapted to serve that grand purpose, which so well becomes Divine mercy. *The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* If the least shadow of respect to human worth had been shown here, then, nothing but despair had remained for the utterly worthless, the only persons for whose relief the grand remedy was provided.

Had Jesus, at his death, been numbered with men of equal repute with Noah, Daniel, and Job, he had certainly, in all propriety of speech, been numbered with transgressors. But, then, what encouragement had remained for those who are not only self-condemned, but have also forfeited all title to the esteem of their fellow-creatures? What ground of hope had remained for those in the most desperate circumstances, where Divine mercy delights chiefly to interpose?

But happy it was for men, that the Holy One, and the Just, suffered in the character of the worst of mankind. He was numbered with such as all the world agree to call *transgressors*, with such as have always been thought unworthy to live. He was deemed unworthy to live by his own nation, who interceded for and obtained the releasement of Barabbas.

When the Just One was thus numbered with transgressors, and crucified betwixt two of them, who had been led forth with him, so had access to observe what passed on the way,

as well as what happened after they were nailed to the cross, one of the two being given to understand, by what he heard and saw, what for a person he was, who hung crucified betwixt him and his fellow-transgressor; and, on seeing what was done in the green tree, fearing what might befall the dry, so dreading a far greater punishment in the other world than he was presently suffering in this, dissents from, and rebukes his fellow for joining with the Jews, and presents his supplication to Jesus. And thus he shows us what his faith was.

The rebuke runs thus, *Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this person hath done nothing amiss.* He hath done nothing amiss, spoken no blasphemy in calling himself the Son of God, and affirming, that God delighted in him. And it is no objection to this, that he neither seeks to save himself nor us from this condemnation. He is, in this very suffering, pleasing his Father, by doing his will; while he suffers most unjustly from the hands of men, that punishment which is the due reward of our deeds. Dost not thou fear that God whose delight is in him, and whose wrath is pointed against all who oppose him? Though all the world do presently agree with thee in despising him, will this screen thee from the wrath of the Almighty? He is, indeed, a king, as he said, while yet he hath done nothing amiss against Cæsar. Nor is it any objection to his majesty, that he thus suffers death, for by this very path he goes to take possession of his kingdom above with his Father.

Then he addresses himself to Jesus, and pays him the highest worship that mortal can pay to aught that is called God; while he presents to him his last and dying prayer about his eternal concerns, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* Jesus answers him with that majesty and condescension which alone became the Lord of the highest heaven, *Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me, in Paradise.* And thus he approved, ratified, and confirmed the faith of the transgressor.

Let us, then, observe what was the faith of this transgressor, as it appeared in the expression of it. No difference filled his mind, or took place in his thoughts, but that immense one betwixt himself, a sinner of the vilest class, and the perfections of righteousness shining forth in a person of the highest dignity, under the severest trials. This is the proper point of view at which sinful men come to the knowledge of the true God. To this point was Paul, that eminent guardian of virtue and holiness, reduced, when he became a Christian.

And thus he beheld the grace which relieved him to be *exceeding abundant*. After giving a list of sinners, unholy, profane, murderers, whoremongers, &c., he lets us know his own rank, when he points to the gracious truth which relieved him, *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am THE CHIEF*.

It is evident, that he who prayed to Jesus on the cross, saw no difference betwixt himself and his fellow criminal. The above mentioned immense difference alone occupied his mind. And it is remarkable, that, in order to his finding mercy, he is no way concerned to see this difference lessened. As we do not find the publican in the parable envying the excellency of the Pharisee, or wishing to be made like him, that he might be better prepared for mercy: so neither does this criminal pray for any gracious change to be wrought in him, to distinguish him from his wicked companion, that so he might be a more meet object for the compassion of Jesus. His prayer proceeds wholly on the persuasion, that the righteous One was able to befriend in the other world him who had no prospect of retrieving matters in this. And this is the prayer of faith that never yet failed of an answer in peace, or to be attended with a sense of the Divine favour in the conscience of the supplicant. Had this sinner been instructed by such famous preachers as I have seen attending criminals led to execution, he had no doubt first of all prayed for a *new heart*, strength to act faith, or some such requisite to justification.

From this part of sacred history, then, we find that Jesus was not only so numbered with transgressors, as to sustain the character of the *worst*\* of them; but he was also so numbered with them unto death, as that the *worst* of them might be numbered unto life with him. It was necessary that the Saviour should thus be numbered with transgressors, that all the redeemed of the Lord might see the Divine grace in the same point of view. Let every man then choose his own company. Let him who is ashamed of such low company as this, by all means keep his proper distance. Let him follow the ancient and modern patrons of holiness, who

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\* Though in one respect it may be said, that there is a sort of impropriety in using such comparative expressions on this subject; yet, in setting forth the Divine grace in its true light, there is a manifest necessity for using them; because it is constantly imagined among men, that the Deity regards them according to those distinctions by which they regard one another.



will furnish him with a Deity according to his taste. He who hopes to be saved on any other footing than the thief on the cross, or who hopes to stand on more honourable terms with his Maker than he, must be saved by another kind of grace, so by another God, a God who delights in such a character as is highly esteemed among men, and who has no grace to bestow but to such a character.

To show what a vast difference there is betwixt the Divine character, and what is worshiped by the popular preachers, I would have it observed, that such mercy as was shown to the thief on the cross, is characteristic of the true God, and is made use of to exhibit to us the grandest view of the Divine majesty and glory. See that notable prophecy concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, in Ps. cii, 16—21, *When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord. For he looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from Heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.* This is one of those sublime passages on which it would be difficult to give any commentary without defacing it. But I may be bold to say that it is full to my purpose.

These passages of Scripture, we have been considering, may suffice to show, how the saving grace of God, revealed in the gospel, was known and distinguished from all counterfeits, by those whose apprehension of it was approved by the Lord and Saviour.

We may now proceed to take notice of the capital absurdity of the popular doctrine. It leads us to read the New Testament backwards. It sets before us the several effects or fruits of faith, or rather certain operations of its own, under the sacred names of these effects; and then prompts us to work our way to faith, by first attaining or feeling these effects. Hence it is, that we have so many treatises describing to us the previous steps necessary to be taken in order to conversion. Long and dreary indeed is the path which they prescribe to us. So that, while men continue obsequious hearers of this doctrine, they may indeed be ever learning, but they shall never be able to come to the knowledge of the truth.—The writers of these treatises do, in one respect, often resemble

the writers of romances.\* The latter, when, after various difficulties, they have at length got the hero and his damsel married; have generally little more entertainment to give us. The former exhaust their genius in leading the serious soul to the wished for period of what they call conversion, and after that they give us little more than insipid repetition.

The matter stood quite otherwise with the apostles and their converts. The apostles, in their first addresses to men, declared the saving truth. Some believed, others contradicted and blasphemed. The history of the apostolic converts begins with their believing, or coming to the knowledge of the truth. Then the apostolic care of them commenced.— Then we find them separated from the world, and remarkably exposed to their hatred. We find them joined together in a peculiar union and affection among themselves. We find that union and affection marvellously supported in the midst of various kinds of opposition. Every part of their history is new and interesting. By the heavenly light which now shined among them, the corruption of human nature, in its whole alienation from the life of God, was drawn forth, exposed to view, and reproved by the apostles, who carefully watched over them, exhorting them to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; and thus to give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, or to make their calling and election sure. In these interesting matters the far greater part of the apostolic writings is occupied.

The popular preachers reverse the apostolic method; they ply their hearers with the various exhortations by which the apostles nourished and confirmed the faith of believers. And thus they would animate men to work out their own justification before God, by diligently following after righteousness. And, then, what else can the faith be which they are thus wrought up to, but the persuasion, that they are much more righteous and worthy of the Divine favour than others?

I know some people are ready to say, that this breach of order is of no great moment; that it matters not whether faith or works take place first, provided a connection in any shape be still maintained betwixt them. But these are people who have seldom or never thought seriously on the matter, and who content themselves with sounds instead of things.

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\* If the comparison above made be thought to need any apology, I must frankly acknowledge, that I look upon the first-mentioned sort of writings as much more hurtful to mankind than the last.

For it is evident, that the order of the apostolic doctrine cannot be broken without worshipping another God; yea, and meaning quite other things than they did by all the sacred words of the gospel.

THE popular preachers are not insensible, that the absurdity would appear too glaring, should they directly oppose the apostolic order; therefore, instead of plainly establishing the reverse, they choose rather to throw the apostolic order into confusion, and cover it with mist, so as the cheat may not readily be discerned. For they always do their business most successfully in the dark. They so confound the distinction betwixt faith and love, that it is difficult to say what fixed uniform notion they have of either. In words they agree with the apostles, in maintaining, that men are justified by faith, and not by love; but, then, when they come to explain themselves, they hold it necessary that love first perform its office before faith is at liberty to make its conclusion. But stay, I must not say they insist on the previous necessity of love; that would be too flat; they only insist on the necessity of the humility, esteem, desires, longings, and every thing that belongs to love, but its proper name. For both as to faith and love, we shall find that the popular doctrine is all deceitful circumlocution from the one end to the other. Therefore, I am willing to think, that Mr. E. Erskine forgot himself a little when he said, "What is faith, but love trusting and confiding in the beloved object?"\* because it is very seldom that such preachers betray themselves so plainly.

To avoid the absurdity of saying we are justified by aught else but *faith*, they commonly divide faith into as many different acts or motions as will serve all their purposes. Hence we hear of the various acts of faith, direct and reflex. Hence the faith of reliance, affiance, assurance, the act of flying, and the act of trusting, a believing application, appropriation, &c. Mr. Boston, I think, divides saving faith into four acts. And others again choose to assure us, that one single act of faith is sufficient to save our souls forever; but, then, that single act must be properly qualified. In the same view, many epithets are given to faith; as a true, sincere, lively, manly, generous, triumphant faith, &c. Here I am ready to express my wish, that Aspasio had carried his aversion to the terms and phraseology of the popular doctrine much farther than

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\* In a sermon, entitled, *God is love.*

he has done. The dialogues are far from being sufficiently purged of them.

It would be tedious to take particular notice of all these forms of expression. But one thing in the general may be freely said, that where the faith necessary to justification is described, every epithet, word, name, or phrase, prefixed or subjoined to FAITH, not meant as descriptive of the truth believed, but of some good motion, disposition, or exercise of the human soul about it, is intended, and really serves, instead of clearing our way, to blindfold and decoy us; to impose upon us, and make us take brass for gold, and chaff for wheat; to lead us to establish our own, in opposition to the Divine righteousness, even while our mouths and our ears are filled with high sounding words about the latter.—In vain shall we consult catechisms, confessions, and other publicly authorised standards of doctrine, for direction here. These are framed by the wisdom of the scribes, and disputers of this world. We can receive no true light about this matter, but from the fountain-head of true knowledge, the sacred oracles of Divine revelation. Thence it will appear, that justification comes by bare faith. Ask a Christian, What's his faith, the spring of all his hope? and he answers you in a word, The blood of Christ. Ask a proficient in the popular doctrine the same question, and he immediately begins to tell you a long-winded story, how grace enabled him to become a better man than he was, and this he calls *conversion*. Thus we see what a wide difference there is betwixt the false and true grace of God.

WHILE the popular preachers, in conformity to their several acts of faith, distinguish the human heart into the understanding, will, and affections, they address themselves in an especial manner to the will and affections of men, in order to work them up to some ground of hope from thence; for from this quarter their first ray of hope and comfort arises. All serious souls, though labouring under the greatest complaints of impotency, are still supposed to have a will to be better. Have you but the will? say the preachers; Christ will give you power; Christ will do all for you. But, then, what shall be done if the will be averse? Still the preachers are not discouraged, but being determined, like true sons of the spirit of self-dependence, to blow up the pride of men at any rate, they subdivide or multiply the human will, and suppose their hearers to have an inclination to have their will changed and made better. Then they exhort them thus, Put your unwill-



ing will into Christ's hands, and the work is done: for there is no jargon, either so absurd or so impious, but these men will confidently utter, and their hearers will greedily swallow, while the pride of both is so strongly interested.\* In oppo-

\* How fondly these men exercise themselves in tickling the religious pride of their hearers, may be clearly seen in many passages of their writings; of which the following may serve as a specimen. Mr. Boston, in a sermon on Luke xiv, 23, called *Gospel-compulsion*, says, "Nay, is not Christ's hand at the hearts of some just now? Do not some of you find a moving of the iron gate of your heart towards an opening of it to Christ? Have you not felt something within working to compel you to come in? Are not some *almost* in already? Thrust forward. There is no safety till ye be not only *almost*, but altogether Christians." Doctor Doddridge, in a sermon on John vii, 37, called *Christ's Invitation to Thirsty Souls*, taking care to acquaint his audience with the dignity of the preacher, in these words, "My friends, I have a message from God to you," addresses them thus; "Do you, my friends, feel any such holy breathings? Can you adopt these pathetic words of David, [Psal. lxxxiv, 2, and other Psalms,] as expressive of the inward sentiments of your soul? Blessed be God they art not hopeless desires.—I would address myself to those who are now thirsting for the blessings of the gospel.

"I hope, through grace, there are some such amongst you; some whose thirst is excited by what hath now been spoken, and are borrowing the words of David, in a sublimer sense, than that in which they were originally intended; *O that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem.*--You may consider the thirst which you feel as a token for good. The generality of mankind despise these blessings; and why do you desire them? Surely you may consider these desires as of a heavenly original. It is the voice of Christ that is now speaking; it is the Spirit of Christ that is now pleading with your heart; so that I may say to you as was said to the blind man in the gospel, who was so earnestly begging a cure, *Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee.* What can therefore remain, but that you should immediately apply yourselves to him? Go directly and plead the case with him. Prostrate thyself, O humble penitent, prostrate thyself before his throne, and say, Blessed Jesus, thou that knowest all things, knowest that I thirst after the blessings of thy gospel. Thou seest that I most ardently long for the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the influences of thy Spirit, and the glories of thine heavenly kingdom. I am fully persuaded, that, with regard to all these, thou art able to do for me abundantly above all that I can ask or think. And wilt thou not relieve me? wilt thou not give me to drink? Wherefore, then, are thine invitations published in the gospel? wherefore didst thou proclaim those gracious words which have been this day so frequently repeated in thine house? Why does thy spirit even now work upon my heart, and raise there this fervency of desire?—*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*—If but one soul return from the assembly with these sentiments, and these resolutions, all the labours of this day, and many former days, will be abundantly repaid; for that soul will surely be relieved, and God in Christ be glorified and exalted."

And thus proceeds Mr. Willison, in his *Sacramental Directory*, Direct. 10, "O, then, stir up yourselves to take hold of Christ, when he is so near and in your offer: strive earnestly while there is an ark prepared, and a window opened in the side of it, and the hand of mercy put forth

sition to all this vile jargon, the Scripture plainly shows, that all who are relieved by the gospel, so are born of God, are born not of the will of man in any shape wherein that will can be considered. The conveyance of the salutary truth to them for their relief, as much prevents every motion of their will, as did the sending of the Saviour into the world to die for men; yea, as did the Divine gracious purpose before the world was.

THE popular preachers do, indeed, admit something like the Scriptural notion of believing, into a corner of their account of faith, under the title of *the assent* of faith. But, then, it lies in so remote and so dark a corner, as scarcely to be seen. And if it be at all thought of, it is made little or no account of; yea, it is often marked with dishonourable epithets. Hence it is, that we hear some talking of the vanity of an historical and speculative faith; yet, if the gospel-history be true, every one who believes it shall be saved. For is it not enough to distinguish the belief of this history from the credit we give to men, that God himself is the historian, and that the Divine character is stamped on this history, and so clearly shows who is the author? even as we

to pull in shelterless doves that can find no rest elsewhere; I say, strive to come near by the wings of faith; *make your nest* (at least) *beside the hole's mouth*: be not found hovering without, lest the flood wash you off from the sides of the ark, and ye perish miserably.—Plead the communicativeness of his mercy to others.—Plead his compassions towards the finally obstinate and impenitent, such as *Jerusalem*, over which he wept, Luke xix. Lord, did thy heart melt with pity to such; and wilt thou not pity a humbled sinner, that confesseth his sin, and would fain be reconciled to God? Is not mercy the work thou delightest in? Micah vii, 8.—*Lastly*, Labour for a sense of the misery of a Christless state, of your great need of Christ, and of the happiness of being *found in him*; and, in a sense thereof, look to Christ, and make a mint to take hold of him. Stir up yourself to it, and rest yourself on him as you can, and God will help you and communicate strength. He will not fail to notice and encourage an honest mint: Jer. xxx, 21, ‘*Who is this that engageth his heart to approach me?*’ [*not to interrupt the preacher, this is evidently spoken of the Messiah.*] He will pity and help such. Try, O poor soul, if you can get a grip of Christ, especially upon a sacrament-occasion, when you are nearer him than at other times. If you cannot apply Christ to yourselves, and say, He is mine; yet apply yourself to Christ, and say, *I would fain be thine*; yea, I am resolved to be thine. Go forth to Christ with all the faith you can win at: say with the poor man, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*. You must not sit still and do nothing, but use all means in your power; for it is in the use of these that God works faith; hoise up the sails, and wait for the gales.”

Such men are our most renowned promoters of piety! And, seriously speaking, I consider them as the fittest men to have weight and influence among the populace.

distinguish the writings of men by the style, temper, and genius of the writer. And the gospel-history cannot be believed on any other footing. Moreover, where is the profane person who admits, among the speculations which he believes, that notion of Divine grace which the whole gospel is writ to establish, and aside from which it cannot be understood? yea, we may safely affirm, that he who admits no other speculation about the Divine grace, but what arises from that history, is a child of God, and an heir of eternal life. However common a thing the belief of the gospel-history may be supposed to be, yet if we attend to things instead of unmeaning words, and think of the same gospel which the apostles believed and taught, we shall find that there is as much room for Isaiah's complaint now as formerly; *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

Many of the popular preachers are sworn enemies to the belief of the truth as the sole ground of hope. For instance, Mr. E. Erskine says,\* "Christ is offered particularly to every man; there is not a soul hearing me, but, in God's name, I offer Christ unto him as if called by name and surname. Beware, my friends, of a general, doubtsome faith, abjured in our *national covenant, as a branch of Popery*. A general persuasion of the mercy of God in Christ, and of Christ's ability and willingness to save all that come to him, will not do the business: no; devils and reprobates may, and do actually believe it. There must, therefore, of necessity be a persuasion and belief of this, with particular application thereof unto a man's own soul." The doubtsome faith he complains of, is that which admits of a doubt concerning one's own state. Now, a man may have some doubts about this, who is very firmly persuaded of the truth of the gospel; yea, Paul calls upon some whom he himself looked upon as believers, to examine themselves, whether they were in the faith; and he exhorts others, about whom he observed the surest tokens of their being true Christians, to give all diligence to remove every doubt concerning their state; plainly intimating, that they could not warrantably be assured of their happy state by any exercises of mind, without the fruits of faith, or the self-denied works of obedience.

The more we search into the doctrine of the popular preachers, the more will our inquiry resemble Ezekiel's digging through the wall. We shall still see greater abominations. I am sorry to see Aspasio so much carried away

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\* Sermon on Luke ii, 23, called *Christ in the Believer's Arms*.

with their dissimulation. He points out to Theron his danger and remedy in the following manner: "If you fail in *one* point, or in *any* degree, you are guilty of *all*. If your conformity be not *persevering* as well as *perfect*, you incur the penalty, and are abandoned to the curse," unless you find mercy by what Christ hath already done: no; but "UNLESS, renouncing all your *personal* performances, you place all your affiance on a SAVIOUR'S atonement, and a SAVIOUR'S righteousness."\* Now, it is not easy even for one who is assured of the truth of the gospel, to provide himself with a satisfying answer to the query made by Theron near the beginning of *Letter 2*, "Where that firm and joyful *reliance* on CHRIST JESUS, in any degree proportioned to his infinite merits and inviolable promises?" And if I cannot find acceptance with God, but in being conscious of perfect conformity to this new law, then, I am in as great danger as before, whenever I fail in one point, or in any degree; and, unless I be conscious that I have arrived at the degree of affiance or reliance proportioned to Christ's merits, I can never have peace in this way. Again, in *Letter 5*, † Aspasio says, "This righteousness is from *faith to faith*; held forth as it were by an offering God, and apprehended by a believing soul; who, first, gives a firm *assent* to the gospel, then cordially *accepts* its blessings. From a conviction that the doctrine is true, passes to a persuasion that the privileges are his own. When this is effected, a foundation is laid for all happiness; a principle is wrought to produce all holiness." It is largely and fully maintained by Aspasio, elsewhere, that there can be no true holiness till once faith, or this principle,

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\* Vol. 2, p. 304, 305, Letter 1. This good conduct of ours, by which we are said to escape the curse, is more broadly expressed by Mr. Boston, in a sermon on Heb. xi, 23, entitled, *The Best Security against the Day of Wrath*. The doctrinal observation on which the whole sermon turns is expressed thus,

"*Doct.* The believing management of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, is the best security for a sinner against the day of wrath." And this gentleman would gravely persuade us to consider this sermon, which is all of a piece with the leading observation, as a message to us from the Lord. For he closes the sermon with these words; "Thus I have delivered my message to you from the Lord, as that which I judged is God's mind and called to you at this day. I desire to venture myself for time and eternity on this bottom; and it is my request to you, that ye will take this method this day for your security against the day of wrath: and if I should never have another occasion of this nature to speak unto you, I would leave it with you, That this, and this only, is the way to be secured against the day of wrath."

† Vol. 2, pp. 367, 368.



be wrought. Yet are we not led to think of Theron, as advancing in holiness all the way from the time he begins to keep his diary, till he obtains this faith? yea, he is so far advanced in holiness, that Aspasio sees his title clear to every heavenly blessing, long before he has courage to act what is called *faith*, or that without which faith cannot be. Theron's righteousness at bottom lies in his diligence to obtain faith. For faith is all along supposed to be thus acquired. So Aspasio says near the close of Letter 11.\* "Let us, then, be diligent to obtain, and careful to increase faith in Jesus Christ." The gospel-history gives us no instance of an unbeliever diligent to obtain faith, while it gives us many instances of believers careful to maintain and increase their faith, or knowledge of the truth.

In *Dialogue 5*,† Theron says, "If Christ has done all, and we are entitled to his whole merits only by believing, to be saved must be the easiest thing in the world: whereas, the Bible represents Christianity as a sharp *warfare*," &c. I wish Aspasio had told him for answer, that if he attempted to do anything, easy or difficult, under the notion of an act of believing, or any other act, in order to his acceptance with God, he only thereby heaped up more wrath against himself. But let us hear him.

"*Asp.* A *speculative* assent to all the principles of religion, is, I acknowledge a very easy matter. It *may*, it *must* exist, whenever there is a tolerable capacity for reasoning, and a due attention to evidence. But the faith, which far from resting in speculation, exalts the desires; regulates the passions, and refines the whole conversation;—this truly noble and triumphant faith is no such easy acquisition. This is the gift of an infinite benefactor," &c. In the next page, we are told by what exercise this faith is acquired.\* The exer-

\* Vol. 3. p. 194.

† Vol. 1, pp. 205—207.

‡ I have said, *the exercise by which faith is acquired*; because I know not well how to find a better form of expression. The difficulty is this: Aspasio calls this exercise, when first begun, the exercise of faith. Yet this exercise must be continued painfully and assiduously, with many struggles, before it arrives at Christ. or before it attains what is essential to faith. Methinks, however, I may be excused, if I find some difficulty in unravelling distinctly every branch or form of that doctrine, which its authors probably intended should never be unravelled. But perhaps the difficulty may be removed thus, *viz.* by supposing, that the quotation referred to, describes the exercise by which some sort of preliminary faith must labour and struggle before it can assume the form of justifying faith. In this view we may consider Theron as possessed of the pre-

cise of this faith I would not compare to an active gentleman rising from his seat; but rather to a *shipwrecked* mariner, labouring to gain some place of safety.—He espies a large *rock* that rears its head above the boisterous flood; to this he bears away, and to this he approaches; but whirling winds and dashing waves drive him back to an unhappy distance.—Exerting all his strength he advances nearer still, and attempts to climb the desirable eminence; when a sweeping surge interposes, and drenches him again in the rolling deep.—By determined efforts he recovers the space he had lost. Now he fastens on the cliff, and has almost escaped the danger; but there is such numbness in his limbs, that he cannot maintain his hold, and such an impetuous swell in the ocean, that he is once more dislodged, and plunged afresh into the raging billows.—What can he do? His life, his precious life, is at stake. He must renew, still renew his endeavours. And let him not abandon himself to despair. The MASTER sees him amidst all his fruitless toil. Let him cry earnestly, LORD, *save me! I perish!* and He who commandeth the winds and the waves, will be sure to put forth his hand and rescue him from the devouring waters.

“Such, my friend, so *painful*, so *assiduous*, are the struggles of faith, before it can rest on peaceful security on the *Rock of Ages*, CHRIST JESUS.”

My expectations were greatly raised by the beautiful and affecting description of the *royal stag-chace*, in *Dialogue 9*, till I saw that the application issued in Mr. Boston's faith, till I saw the sinner's relief described as coming to him by means of such conflicts and struggles as are represented above, in the case of the shipwrecked mariner, and not like that of the desperate stag, which comes by the royal clemency alone.

As the similitude of the mariner glances at a passage of Scripture, we may here take some notice of that passage. Jesus instructed his apostles, by many miracles, how he would afterward support and encourage them in the course of their public ministry, as is more especially evident from what he says to them on the miraculous draught of fish, and his sending them forth without money and without scrip. So, in his saving Peter when ready to sink, after he had in great confidence of faith begun to walk upon the water, he showed

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liminary faith, as soon as he takes the diary in his hand, and as exercising this faith in all his subsequent labours, till he arrives at the appropriating act. This preliminary faith, then, must be the persuasion, that if he labour and struggle well, he shall succeed the better.

him how he was to be supported unto the end; not by the consciousness of any attainment he had already arrived at, but by what he believed; and that without his constant interposition his faith would fail, or his attention be decoyed away from the truth, as it was at present, by his seeing the wind boisterous, Matt. xiv, 30. Paul, who knew as much of joy and peace in believing as any mortal, fought the good fight of faith to the last, not only against the daily opposition he met with from his own natural propensities, but also against the constant opposition he met with from the popular preachers of his day. And he animates his fellow Christians to the same conflict which they saw and heard of in him. The Christian warfare, then begins where the popular doctrine brings it almost to an end. The apostles wrote no treatises to animate unbelievers in their pious efforts to obtain faith, but they showed much concern to encourage believers in keeping the faith, and in fighting the good fight thereof unto the end.

Accordingly, as Christians were exposed to many temptations, wherein they were apt to waver in their minds, or to call the truth in question, we find the apostles animating them, under these temptations, to the full assurance of faith: not the *faith of assurance*, which our preachers talk of, but the steady and assured belief of the truth. Such as were taught by the apostles to keep the bare truth, and to live by it alone, so came to be conscious that it alone was the spring of their life, by its supporting them in all those circumstances wherein their hearts behoved otherwise to die within them; such, I say, received the additional witness of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, bearing witness with their spirits, that the truth alone was the spring of their joy, and the ruling principle of their lives. Thus they had in themselves an experimental confirmation of the truth, according to the words spoken by Jesus to those who believed on him, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* Thus they went forward unto the full assurance of hope unto the end. Thus they knew their interest in Christ's death by the effect that his death had upon them. Thus they knew that Christ in his death loved them, and gave himself for them. Every one who can say with Paul, *I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. — I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God,* may also safely add, *who loved*

*me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God.*

It is now time to inquire into the reasons why the simple truth believed, is so much set at nought by the popular preachers, and judged unfit to be the sole ground of hope; why now, as formerly, it is esteemed weak and little, even as a grain of mustard-seed, so as men see not what comfort or benefit can arise from it.

It gave no small encouragement to the first believers, who had been pressed with the impossibility of hope on every side, that they had now found a truth by which they *might be justified*. On every other side they beheld certain, inevitable ruin, as knowing that by the works of the law, or by anything that men can do, in obedience to any Divine precept whatsoever, shall no flesh be justified.

The Divine truth affording hope to the vilest transgressor, that he may be justified, that he may escape the curse, and find favour with God, is lightly esteemed, because men imagine a possibility of escape otherwise; or, which comes to the same thing at last, they imagine that something beside the bare truth may contribute more or less toward their escape.

This imagined possibility, and the neglect of the revealed possibility of deliverance, are founded on ignorance of the Divine justice, and contempt of the Divine sovereignty. From these two sources did the ancient Jewish disaffection to the gospel flow. Therefore Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, where he labours to shut up every door of hope but that of faith alone, makes it his business, in an especial manner, to establish and set forth, in the strongest light, these two Divine perfections, and to repel every objection that can arise in the mind of man against them.

The justice and sovereignty of God are pretty openly opposed by all our preachers of best fashion, and who are esteemed to be men of the best sense, as speaking most agreeably to what is called *Nature*; that is, if we attend to the Scripture, most agreeably to human pride. But those who have the greatest ear with the people play with both hands. Their doctrine is double. In formally stating the articles of their creed in opposition to heretics, they seem to acknowledge these Divine perfections, as held forth in Scripture; but, in their addresses to the people, they effectually overthrow them. So that, whatever way they maintain



these perfections, it plainly appears they do not love them; for the main tendency and issue of their doctrine is, to set them aside. Thus they arrive, at last, at the same port with the abovementioned gentlemen of sense and fashion, though with the trouble of much perplexed circumlocution to themselves, and the expense of much anxiety to their hearers. Yet their hearers are encouraged to sustain the expense, by reflecting, that hereby they arrive at a pitch of sanctity, far beyond the followers of those who are called mere legal or moral preachers.

As to the first mentioned of these perfections, the Divine justice, the popular preachers set it aside, while, after they have declared men to be guilty, helpless, and under the curse, they persuade them, that there is not only a *possibility*, but also a *probability* of their escape, by their exerting their utmost endeavours to please God. All their *advices to the unregenerate* proceed upon this plan. Mr. Boston, having hinted several such advices, and expostulated with his hearers upon them, says,\* “These things are within the compass of *natural abilities*, and may be practised where there is *no grace*.” Near the same place, he says, “Ye may and can, if ye please, do many things that would set you in a fair way for help from the Lord Jesus Christ. Ye may go so far on, as to be *not far from the kingdom of God*,† as the *discreet scribe* had done, Mark xii, 34, though (’twould seem) he was destitute of *supernatural abilities*.” Again, near the

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\* See *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, near the end of *State 2*.

† Thus it would seem, a man may discreetly go so very near the kingdom of God, as to need only to be helped by the hand over the threshold. And, no doubt, we must think it would scarcely be discreet, to send a man back again disappointed, who had been at the trouble of travelling the far greater part of the way. But there is a mistake here. The person above referred to is, in the sacred text, neither called a *discreet scribe*, nor is it said that he had gone so far on, as not to be far from the kingdom of God. The words of Mark run thus, *And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.* Jesus often put the question or propounded the matter in hand, in such a manner to his adversaries, as to extort discreet answers from them. A man may be very near the kingdom of God in point of argument, who is very far from it in every other respect. The scribes and Pharisees, who maintained the necessity of obedience to the law, wanted only one step to the kingdom of God; they needed only to know where that obedience was to be found: nevertheless, the publicans and harlots went into the kingdom of God before them. They who, in answer to Jesus, said that the Messiah was the son of David, wanted only one step or two more, that is, to know that Jesus was he, and to understand how the Messiah was both David’s son and lord.

same place, "If success *may be*, the trial *should be*. If in a wreck at sea, all the sailors and passengers had betaken themselves, each to a broken board for safety, and one of them should see all the rest perish, notwithstanding of their utmost endeavours to save themselves, yet the very *possibility* of escaping by that means would determine that one still to do his best with his board.—(2.) 'Tis probable this course may succeed. God is good and merciful." etc.

As Theron's conversion evidently proceeds upon the same plan, I need not spend time in adducing quotations; but I cannot forbear taking notice of Aspasio's words, in vol. 1, p. 23: "Is any one convinced of *guilt*, as provoking Heaven and ruining the soul?—Let him ask *Reason* to point out a means of reconciliation, and a refuge of safety. Reason hesitates, as she replies, *The Deity*, may, *perhaps*, accept our supplications, and grant forgiveness. But the Scriptures leave us not to the *sad uncertainty* of conjecture. They speak the language of clear assurance. God has set forth a propitiation; he *does* forgive our iniquities; he *will* remember our sins no more."

Reason is here said to hesitate in her reply, because she only asserts a possibility of safety. Had Aspasio said, Let the guilty person ask his pride, and it will whisper to him, "The Deity, may, perhaps accept our supplications and grant forgiveness;" I had frankly agreed with him. What Aspasio admits for *reason*, is indeed very agreeable to the first reasoning against revelation, *Ye shall not surely die*, or it may be otherwise. He appears here very modest, and loath to offend the dignity of *Reason*, while he admits her suggestion, that the Deity may relent at our cries. But why did he not show the same complaisance to the sacred truth? What provoked him to interpose the boldest negative against any manner of advantage, arising from the bare persuasion of it, by confidently saying, *No, surely?* The answer is plain: He had already given the prize to *Reason*, so nothing remained for the truth.

Thus far, then, I understand and agree with him. So long as any man hearkens to his reason, whispering to him that God may, in any event, or on any consideration whatsoever, abate the rigour of his law; I freely own he can reap no manner of advantage from the bare persuasion of the truth of the gospel. He may indeed be a very proper disciple for the popular preachers; but the gospel relieves only the desperate, even those who are at an utter impossibility of hope from every other quarter. And to all such it proves indeed

a very comfortable refreshment; and the more so, that it opens a door of hope, without invalidating our natural notions in the least. For these must always be preserved in force.—Yea, if these be set aside, no revelation can evidence itself to us as coming from the God who made us. If, then, nature can teach us that God may be gracious, so as to forgive sin, it must at the same time teach us, that he may be just in so doing. Justice, with the greatest profusion of kindness in that channel, is our primary notion of the Divine character; and had we not departed from our duty, there had been no occasion for pardoning mercy to appear, as any part of the character of our Almighty Lawgiver and Judge. I insist upon it, then, that from whatever source we learn that God may be gracious in forgiving sin, we must also learn how he may be just in so doing. Now, this is the very place which the Scripture assigns for the atonement. Paul assures us at large, that it was exhibited for this very purpose, to declare the justice of God, *that he might be just*, in justifying the ungodly and receiving them into favour.

It must be in conformity to the abovementioned rational possibility, that the note at the foot of p. 202, vol. 2, in complaisance to the ancient and modern philosophers, leaves it as a question undecided, Whether those who, during this life, know not God, or if they know him, glorify him not as God, “shall obtain mercy? or which of them shall be objects of Divine clemency?” though the Scripture expressly declares, that *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God*; and though it be no less evident from the Scripture, that *all whom God will have to be saved, he will have to come to the knowledge of the truth*.

Whatever people may choose to mean by *reason*, this one thing we may safely affirm, that the proper distinction betwixt man and other animals, lies in his natural knowledge of God and his law. The written law is the public authentic standard of that knowledge. To love God and our neighbour as it directs, will be approved by every conscience of man round the globe at first hearing. The more improved, then, or the more perfect any man's natural knowledge is, the nearer will it come to the authentic standard. Now, what did the written law serve for in the consciences of those who understood it best? Paul tells us, *By the law is the knowledge of sin.—The law worketh wrath*. Therefore, the more perfect any man's natural knowledge of God is, the more miserable

must he find himself, or, in other words, the more just sense or feeling he must have of his real condition.

If, then, we might be allowed once more to use so much freedom with words, as to call that knowledge which distinguishes men from brutes by the name of *reason*, we must say, that the more justly one reasons, the more unhappy he finds himself; we must lay it down for a maxim, that to reason justly, is to despair.\*

Before we leave this topic, it may be proper to observe that many noted preachers, pretending to enlarge our ideas of the wisdom and power of God, plainly discover their own ignorance of his justice, while they tell us that God, if he had pleased, might have devised some other method of taking away sin than by the sacrifice of his Son. On this it may suffice to say, that had there been such a possibility in the Deity, it had without all peradventure taken place, in answer to the supplication of Jesus: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.—O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*†

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\* Philosophers themselves are very sensible of the force of what is above maintained, as appears from their common complaint of the weakness of what they call *reason*, when opposed to the strong propensity in our nature to dread some invisible power. They have, indeed, very solid ground for their complaint, for daily experience shows them, that nature at last overcomes art. They are sensible that the presumptions of pride, however artfully devised, however ingeniously adjusted, are, upon many occasions, not to mention the last and most important one, found too weak to resist, too light to overbalance the natural language of conscience, or the voice of God within them.

On this occasion, I cannot forbear acknowledging, that when I read the writings of philosophers, it gives me some satisfaction to find, that even they, by their utmost efforts, have not been able wholly to unlearn that knowledge which the Deity has taught the human race, and by which he has distinguished it from every other species of animals. Thus it is evident, that even they are entitled to a share of that honour which the Scriptures calls us to pay to all men.

† I shall here take notice of this passage, which exhibits the highest view of the unparalleled obedience and submission of Jesus Christ; and the rather, because his behaviour on this occasion has been thought by many to stand in need of something very like an apology; as, (*Dial. vol. 1, p. 135,*) “that his sufferings were so great, so terrible, that his nature, being *human*, could not but *recoil* a little, and be *startled* at their approach.”

These prayers are referred to in Heb. v. 7, where it is said of Christ, *when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his reverence* [or piety]. In these prayers, he offered up the perfection of obedience in full confidence of acceptance. The more holy any person is, or the more fervently he loves God, and delights in his favour, so



HAVING briefly pointed at some of the methods by which the popular preachers set aside the *Divine justice*, so as to render the sacred truth of little or no value in the eyes of men, let us next observe how they set themselves in opposition to the *Divine sovereignty*.—And we shall find, that for every jewel they rob from the crown of the Most High, they plant a feather in the crest of human pride.

They are disaffected to the simple belief of the gospel as the sole ground of hope, because it leaves a man even in the full assurance of faith, or when the truth is most present to his thoughts, entirely at the mercy of God for his salvation; or because it leads him to the greatest reverence for, and submission to the Divine sovereignty, without having any claim upon God whatsoever, or finding any reason why God should regard him more than those who perish. Hence it is, that in leading their hearers to faith, they constantly instruct them how to qualify themselves, so as they may be in a condition to advance some claim upon the Deity, and treat with him on some rule of equity; or so as they may find some reason why he should regard them more than others, and, accordingly, grant the favours they desire of him. They maintain, indeed, that men can obtain no benefit from the Deity but in the way of grace; yet, it is evident, that grace obtained in the way they direct is improperly so called, at least it is very different from the apostolic notion of the Divine grace.

Paul, when speaking of the sovereignty of the Divine choice of men to salvation, as proceeding upon grace, in opposition to every notion of desert in those who are chosen, distinguishes that grace in the following manner: *And if by grace,*

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much the greater aversion and reluctance he must have to his displeasure, or the hiding of his face; or, to say the same thing in other words, the less any man loves God, the less disquiet will he feel at the want of the sense of his favour. Jesus Christ loved the Father with a perfect heart, and, therefore, he had the utmost insupportable aversion to his displeasure when he felt it. This was death to him. So when he began to be sorrowful, and very heavy, on the hiding of the Father's face from him, he signified to his disciples that he knew this sorrow would kill him; *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death*: yet to that misery, to which he was as averse as he was holy, he submitted, for the glory of his Father and the salvation of his people. Here, then, we see manifested such perfection of love to, or delight in God, and withal such perfect and unparalleled submission to his will, as equally became a divine person. And his aversion is expressed in no stronger terms than were necessary to show the greatness of his submission. Both are strongly marked to us in these words; *Not my will, but thine be done*. All the words, then, which Jesus uttered in his agony, equally conspire to manifest a disposition truly divine, and that he who uttered them was a divine person.

*then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no work.* If this one text were well understood, the whole body of the popular doctrine would fall to the ground at once. Here we see how different the Divine choice is from that of men, who choose what is best and reject what is worst. God in blessing men, or choosing them to blessedness, has no regard to any distinction among them. All the objects of his favour are such as deserved equally to be rejected. According to the apostle's reasoning, when God blesses any man of grace, he has no regard to any work, requisite, or motion of his will, by which he excels another; for if he had, then the grace thus said to be bestowed would be no more grace, but rather the respect due to worth, or the reward belonging to the work. Again, if God chooses or blesses any man on account of any work or good motion by which he excels others, then it is plain grace cannot take place here. For if we should suppose it did, then work is no more work; or we lose entirely the proper notion of working, and its connection with reward. In like manner the same apostle, Rom. iv, 4—6, says, *Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.*

If, then, we say with the apostle, that the faith of him who worketh not is counted for righteousness, we cannot affirm with Aspasio, "That faith is a work exerted by the human mind, is equally certain;"\* unless we should understand the Apostle to mean, that righteousness is imputed to men, not working after the Jewish manner, but working according to the directions of Christian teachers, exerting the acts of faith, and acquiring the requisites described by them. I know Aspasio is ready to tell me that grace, or the gift of righteousness, is the cause of justification, and the ground of comfort to him that exerts the act of faith. But what does this amount to? It only leads us to say, that grace and comfort are bestowed on him who worketh. Thus all the notions of grace and work given us in the Scripture are entirely confounded.

No doctrine in Scripture wears a more amiable and inviting aspect to the self-condemned, than that of the Divine sovereignty, as described by Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, especially, chap. ix. This removes every cause of despair

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\* Vol. 2, p. 62.

to the most wretched of mankind. For who can be led to despair by the view of any deficiency about himself whatever, who knows that none but the utterly deficient are chosen of God to salvation? As no doctrine is more encouraging than this to the miserable, so none is more provoking to the sons of pride, who want to stand upon their distinctions before God, and are not yet reduced so low as to be entirely at mercy for their salvation. Though this doctrine is not yet erased out of the standards of either of our national churches, yet it is generally opposed, and held in great contempt both by clergy and laity, as well as by the dissenters. Many declaimers about the Divine benevolence, with open mouth, show their spite against the Divine goodness preached by Paul. Many zealous disputers against Deists and infidels, with great arrogance renounce the Sovereign of the universe. And if we observe the artifices of the popular preachers, we shall find them likewise denying **THE GOD THAT IS ABOVE**. Yet this hated article of the sovereignty of the Divine choice, will ever be held most sacred by all who love the ancient gospel. To them it is highly acceptable, because they know that there was no occasion for such sovereignty to appear, but that grace might be shown to the worthless. They know that otherwise all mankind, without distinction, had perished according to every rule of equity.

The popular preachers are greatly disgusted at this doctrine, because, according to their own style, "here is no visible ground for faith to rest upon." Here no man's pride is flattered; no man can find any ground to presume that the Deity regards him more than others. Therefore, while they are busy in stimulating their hearers to the exercise of faith, they are at great pains to keep this doctrine as far removed from their thoughts as possible. But when once the hearers, by their assistance, have prepared some ground for faith to rest upon, then they are freely allowed to solace themselves with the doctrine of election, because they have now acquired some reason why God in his choice should respect them more than others.

This is a very nice part of the popular doctrine. Here the preacher finds use for all his artifice, and is obliged to employ his utmost dexterity in shifting hands. Here, to throw a veil over the eyes of the people, they distinguish betwixt the *word, promise, call, or testimony*, and the *purpose* of God; as if this last wore a more forbidding aspect than the former; whereas, it is very evident from the Scripture, that the Divine word, promise, call, or testimony, leaves it

as much a secret who shall be saved, as the doctrine of the Divine purpose or election does. Yea, so idle and ill-placed is their distinction here, that we find the Scripture commonly intimating the Divine purpose of making a distinction among mankind, in the very bosom of that testimony which must be believed for justification. When we read in the New Testament such words as these, *And thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins;* do we not see a distinction among mankind, according to grace, plainly intimated in this summary of the faith? And it would be easy to produce from the Scripture many other summaries of the faith intimating the same distinction. In a word, so closely is the doctrine of election connected with what men believe for righteousness, that there is no disjoining of them, nor can the one be understood from the other.

The preachers, speaking of election, represent the Deity as keeping secret his gracious intentions as to particular persons, and yet, at the same time, revealing his gracious intentions to the same persons in his word and promise. And while they are busy prompting their hearers to exert the appropriating act of faith, they show no small fear lest the devil tempt them to think of election; and, accordingly, are careful to guard them strongly on that hand. Let us hear Mr. Ralph Erskine, who preaches in the same spirit with his brother Ebenezer. In a sermon on 2 Cor. v, 18, called, *The Fountain Head of all Blessings*, he says, p. 38, "2. But what ground have I to think he is reconciled to me? *I answer*, If the word of reconciliation be sent to you, upon that ground you may believe that he is reconciled to you. Now, he hath committed to us the word of reconciliation, and charged us to preach the gospel of reconciliation to every creature, to every soul among you; and he that hath obliged us to proclaim to you how he is reconciled in Christ, and hath all things to give in and through him, he obliges you to believe that he is reconciled to you."——

"3. But how can this be, seeing he hath not a secret purpose of reconciliation to all, and, therefore perhaps, not to me? *Ans.* O! what a malicious devil is tempting thy unbelieving heart to look to what God designs, before you look to what he declares, to look to his purpose, before you look to his promise? How can you see his purpose but in the glass of his promise? How can you know his heart but by his word! But in the glass of his promise you may see his purpose of grace to you, for the promise is to you. And, in his word of reconciliation, you may see his reconciled heart toward



you, for to you is the word of salvation sent, to you is the word of reconciliation sent. And if thou, man, woman, lass, lad, canst believe that his kind word is to thee, and thee in particular, then thou shalt see, that his kind heart is toward thee, and thee particularly."

Mr. Ebenezer, in his sermon on Luke ii, 28, called, *Christ in the Believer's Arms*, says, p. 14, "I do not say, that the first language of faith is that Christ died for me, or I was elected from eternity. No; but the language of faith is, God offers a slain and crucified Saviour to me, and I take the slain Christ for my Saviour; and in my taking or embracing of him as offered, I have ground to conclude that I was elected, and that he died for me in particular, and not before. I shall only add, that this appropriating act doth inseparably attend the knowledge and assent before mentioned, and that they are all jointly comprised in the general nature of saving faith, which I take up as an act of the whole soul, without restricting it to any one faculty, or distinction as to priority, or posteriority of time." It were easy, you know, to produce many quotations to the same purpose, but these may suffice.

If we require how God's gracious purpose, or design, is signified to any person in the word of promise, Mr. Boston, and the two brothers abovementioned, have another artifice in readiness to amuse us with. They tell us, "that God hath made a *grant* or *deed of gift* of Christ and all his benefits to sinners of mankind, especially to the hearers of the gospel, or more especially to those who are members of (what they call) the visible church. But, when we inquire into this again, we find it turns out to be a gift of benefits to multitudes who are never benefited thereby. In such manner do they proceed, venting their own fancies about the Deity, and trifling with mankind in the most sacred matters.

I proceed now to take notice of another notable artifice, by which they set aside the Divine sovereignty. They urge the hearer to believe, that Christ is as *willing* to save him as he is *able*. This, at first view, seems somewhat plausible; and the hearer is led to think it would be impious to move any objection. But here it must be considered, that so soon as any man knows that Christ is willing to save him, he knows that he shall infallibly be saved, seeing it is simply impossible that the Divine will can be frustrated. Here the preachers, who seldom fail to find some subterfuge or other, are ready to extricate themselves, by giving us to understand that Christ is willing to save him, whose will is previously well disposed to accept of him in all his offices, so is ready

to obey all his commandments. Thus the Divine willingness to save him, which the hearer is called to believe, and which is displayed before him, with many high-sounding words of Divine grace, turns out to no more account than the above-mentioned grant or deed of gift. And it might, with equal propriety, be said, that there is a grant of life made in the law, and that the Divine willingness to bless men is therein expressed, Keep the commandments and thou shalt live.

In *Dialogue* 16, Aspasio addresses his friend thus: "Have you not sometimes, Theron, been overtaken by the dark and tempestuous night? When chilled with cold, and almost drowned in the rain, you arrived late at the house of some valued friend, was you not *willing* to gain admittance? Perhaps you thought every moment an hour till the hospitable door opened, till you exchanged the dismal gloom, and the driving storm, for the cheerful light, and the amiable company within.—The adored Immanuel professes himself *equally* willing to come unto you, who hearken to his voice and consent to his overtures; equally willing to make his abode with you, to manifest his glories in you, and communicate his merits to you." When I first read this passage in company, one of your fondest readers, who sat by, and who had not been able to refrain from tears of satisfaction at a variety of the foregoing pages, on hearing the words now quoted, interrupted with some vehemence, saying: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."

LET us now observe what faith is approved of in Scripture, and what respect is had to the Divine sovereignty therein. It is acknowledged, that as the miracles of healing were signs of Christ's power to save his people from their sins, so the faith of those who were healed, serves as a pattern of believing to the saving of the soul. Now, we see what faith Jesus called for in the two blind men who followed him, Matt. ix, 28. When he said unto them, "Believe ye that I can do this?" upon their simply answering, "Yea, Lord," we find him approving their faith, in v. 29. "Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you." The like approbation is given to the faith of the leper, which is expressed in these words, Matt. viii, 2, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. For Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, "I will, be thou clean.

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." The leper, like the two blind men, was fully persuaded that Christ was able to relieve him. Yet as he had no claim upon him, he referred his request entirely to his sovereign pleasure. In the full assurance of faith he was at Christ's mercy, who was no way obliged to apply his healing power to him. And by this faith he was healed; for Christ said, "I will, be thou clean." But to him that said, Mark ix, 22, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us;" Jesus answered, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." This man knew that Jesus, and his disciples likewise, had cast out devils, and cured many; but as he brought his son to his disciples, and they could not cure him, he did not know if Christ's power extended to this grievous case. So the defect of his faith lay in his doubting Christ's ability, as Christ's answer plainly intimates. Thus, in the sense now explained, I am ready to own, that this man's faith was deficient for want of *particular application* to his own case, his own present necessity; were it not, that I hate the shadow of distinctions coined by the popular preachers. For who can doubt the all-sufficiency of Christ to save him, in the worst condition wherein he can find himself, without doubting the common salvation, swerving from the common faith, and calling in question Christ's ability to save to the uttermost?

The same faith, with that of the leper, appears in the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and in that of the thief on the cross, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The same faith appeared in the centurion, who addressed Jesus thus, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed;" having said before, "Lord, I am not worthy." On this occasion, Jesus utters these remarkable words: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here it is plainly intimated, that many of the idolatrous Gentiles, who were afar off, and aliens from God, should be introduced into his heavenly kingdom by the like faith, bringing all who have it into submission to the Divine sovereignty; while those who imagined they had any claim upon God, or nearer relation to him than others, so had

their faith vitiated, by a fatal mistake contained in the bosom of it, should be rejected.

The faith approved by Jesus, well corresponds with the grace by which men are saved. When the world was ripe for condemnation, God sent his Son, not to condemn, but to save. Sovereign grace interposed, providing a righteousness for the guilty world. And it reigns by that righteousness preventing the will of men unto their salvation. Faith answers to the grace revealed, as the impression to the seal. When once the gift of righteousness is made known to any man, the character of God therein manifested is ratified and ascertained in his heart. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the record in himself,—the record that God gave of his Son." In the promise to Abraham, that he should be a father of many nations, when it was impossible, according to nature, that he could be a father, God proposed himself as able to raise the dead, and call into being things that were not. So Abraham's faith is described as (*κατεναντι*) "answerable to him whom he believed, God quickening the dead, and calling those things which be not as though they were." In like manner, all his children in the faith believe the Divine word for righteousness, without perceiving any shadow or symptom of it about themselves, without feeling or being conscious of anything about themselves to concur with the Divine word, to make out their righteousness, or bring them nearer to it, or any way make them fitter than others for justification.

To set aside the sovereignty of Divine grace, and lead us deceitfully to establish our own righteousness, the popular doctrine has in readiness two artifices, serving to confound our notion of works, and their connection with reward. By the first we are led to do so many things, which we are taught to consider as of a dubious or middle nature betwixt *works* and *no works*. By the second we are taught to think, that, supposing these things to be works, yet they are so wrought as not to be entitled to reward.

As to the first of these, Aspasio says in *Dialogue* 10,\* "Christ performed whatever was required by the covenant of works, both before it was violated and after it had been transgressed. But neither *repentance* nor *faith* were comprehended in this institution." But may not men establish their own righteousness in the way of acting faith and

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\* Vol. 2, p. 59.



repentance, as well as any other way? And will not that law which Christ came to fulfil, the law which requires love to God with all the heart, condemn all who, by their unbelief, make God a liar; and all who "after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?" Does not the Spirit of God convince all whom he brings to the knowledge of the truth of sin, because they believe not on Christ? in fine, is there anything contrary to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, not condemned by the Divine law? See Paul's first Epistle to Timothy, first chapter.

I have no concern with the distinction betwixt the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, on which our systems are formed; as it serves to set aside, obscure, and confound the capital distinction set before us in the apostolic writings, betwixt the old and new covenant, or betwixt the covenant ratified by the blood of bulls and goats, and the new covenant in Christ's blood: which is the same with the distinction betwixt *flesh* and *spirit*. The Scripture seems to make sacrificing, or the shedding of blood, necessary in the covenants God makes with men. But this is not a place for enlarging on this subject. It may suffice at present to say, that in the New Testament, the obedience of Christ, with its effects is contrasted with the sin of Adam and its effects, and that the new covenant is contrasted only with the old one made with Israel.

As a proof how much the scriptural distinctions are set aside to give place to those framed by the wisdom of the scribe, it may be observed, that these covenants, which, Paul expressly calls two, and in many respects opposes to each other, are boldly affirmed to be but two dispensations of one and the same covenant, by many Christian teachers who are very fond of the abovementioned systematical distinction. By this means they have in a remarkable manner taken away the key of knowledge, and misled many in the understanding of the Scriptures. What strange use has been made of the systematical distinction, which has been adopted to the setting aside and confounding of the scriptural one, may be seen in a book much esteemed by many popular preachers, called, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which is largely supplied with notes by a well known preacher, who takes the name of *Philaletes Irenæus*.

As I have mentioned this book, I shall take this occasion to observe, that the doctrine contained in it was a good many

years ago condemned by the general assembly of the church of Scotland, to the no small satisfaction of the more open enemies of the gospel; with whom I have no intention of taking part while I oppose the popular doctrine, of which this book may perhaps be considered as one of the most refined systems. I am sensible, that many despisers of the popular doctrine are men whose religion consists chiefly in pronouncing handsomely the words virtue and benevolence, candour and decorum, and in throwing out some fashionable reflections against the narrow way of thinking, that is, the *narrow way* commended by Jesus of Nazareth to his disciples. And thus, at an easy rate, they gain the reputation of men of good sense and enlarged sentiments. They are likewise friends to the social virtues, I mean such of them as promote good fellowship, and may be subservient to their reputation and worldly interest. But if we want to see those virtues, whose exercise requires self-denial, we must look for them among people of the narrow way of thinking. Yea, if we compare the friends of the popular doctrine with their fashionable antagonists, we shall find the former much more remarkable for the practice of morality and decency of character than the latter. So that the charge of licentiousness, as commonly laid by the latter against the doctrine of the former, is evidently invidious and unjust.

I am ready to agree, then, with the author of a late *Essay on Justification*, who, to show the falsehood of this charge, appeals to the lives of those commonly called the *stricter sort*. In which class, I think, he comprehends all who maintain the necessity of imputed righteousness to justification, however much they differ about faith. Though this author has undertaken the defence of the popular doctrine in general, and it must be owned, reasons justly against his fashionable adversaries; yet if we observe his private sentiments, which are sufficiently hinted, we shall find him very unpopular in his own notion of faith. For he seems to have the same notion of it with the apostles. If this author shall proceed to study the Scriptures, and observe mankind, keeping a steady eye on the first principle from which he sets out, consequently less apprehensive of being "ensnared and exposed to censure," he will probably find more adversaries than he is presently aware of.

I PROCEED to consider the second artifice used to confound our notion of works, and their connection with reward. The popular doctrine, in order to avoid saying, that justification is

procured by our works or endeavours, tells us, that all the qualifications necessary to the appropriating act of faith, are bestowed on men, and wrought in them, by the Spirit of God, and so are properly to be considered as his works, and not theirs: that, accordingly, they in whom these qualifications are wrought, must not be supposed to be thereby entitled to any reward. But if we look into the Scripture, must we not say, that all the good works which shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just, are produced by the influence of the Divine Spirit dwelling in the hearts of those who believe? Yet such is the connection betwixt every good work and its reward, that, according to the Scripture, the justice of God, not to say his grace, is concerned to make it good: Heb. vi, 10, *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.* Jesus did not account the question unreasonable, when his disciples said, Matt. xix, 27, *Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?* But he gave them a very satisfying answer. And, Mark ix, 41, he says, "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." Justice, as well as grace, will appear in the last judgment; then due regard will be paid to every man's works. But in the justification of sinners, God has no respect to any man as better than another. He considers men, when he commends his love to them, as ungodly and without strength, that is, without any will to be better. And all who find mercy, are brought to view themselves in the same point of light, wherein God beheld men when he gave his Son to die for them. They do not find themselves prepared, or made fitter than others for mercy, by any work of the Divine Spirit on their minds; but they find their first taste of comfort by hearing of him, *who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.*

However much the qualifications held necessary to introduce saving faith, are on some occasions denied to be proper works, or entitled to reward, yet we find the person, who is seriously exercised in attaining them, often commended on account of them, and encouraged to draw no small comfort from them. In *Dialogue 15*,\* on Theron's expressing his sense of guilt, his friend replies, "I am truly glad, that we are sensible of our demerit. Here our recovery begins." I knew a devout person, who, on hearing of the death of a per-

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\* Vol. 3, p. 250.

sonal enemy, with some emotion, broke forth into these words: "Truly I am sorry for it!—But how glad am I that I feel myself sorry? By this I know that I have forgiven him." How easily do people get into a habit of imposing on themselves? and in nothing more readily than as to their convictions. In the same Dialogue, p. 140, Theron is alarmed with the account of the man who was found without a wedding-garment. His friend replies, "The man without a wedding-garment, denotes the specious *superficial* professor, who is called *by CHRIST's name*, but has never *put on Christ Jesus* by faith.—Shall I tell more plainly whom this character represents? You yourself, my dear Theron, was some months' ago in the state of this unhappy creature, when you trusted in yourself, and thought highly of your own, thought meanly of your Saviour's righteousness.

"I congratulate my friend on his happy deliverance from so dangerous a condition." In the same dialogue, p. 253, Theron says, "Thus much I may venture to profess in my own behalf, that I long for this blessing—I pray for this blessing; but I cannot see my title to this comprehensive and inestimable blessing clear." Aspasio replies, "I behold it perfectly clear and ascertained by your own confession," &c.—Instead of quoting any more of Aspasio's words at present, I shall produce a passage to the same purpose from *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.\* *Neophytus* says, "And truly, sir, you have so declared and set forth Christ's disposition toward poor sinners, and so answered all my doubts and objections, that I am now verily persuaded that Christ is *willing to entertain me*; and surely I *am willing to come unto him*, and receive him; but, alas! I want power."

*Evangelista* replies, "But tell me truly, are you resolved to put forth all your power to believe, and so to take Christ?" *Neophytus*. Truly, sir, methinks my resolution is much like the resolution of the four lepers which sat at the gate of Samaria; for as they said—2 Kings vii, 4, even so say I in mine heart, If I go back to the covenant of works to seek justification thereby, I shall die there; and if I sit still and seek it no way, I shall die also. Now, therefore, though I be somewhat fearful, yet am I resolved to go unto Christ; and if I perish, I perish.

"*Evangelista*. Why, now I tell you, the match is made; Christ is yours, and you are his; this day is salvation come

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\* Twelfth edition, p. 203. et. seq. chap. 2, § 3, 5.



to your house, (your soul I mean;) for what, though you have not that power to come *so fast* to Christ, and to lay *such firm hold* on him as you desire? yet coming with such a resolution to take Christ as you do, you need not care for power to do it, inasmuch as Christ will enable you to do it. Yet, let me tell you to your comfort, that such a resolution shall never go to hell; nay, I will say more, if any soul have room in heaven, such a soul shall; for God cannot find in his heart to damn such a one. I might, then, with as much true confidence say unto you, as faithful John Careless said to godly John Bradford, hearken, O heavens, and thou, O earth give ear, and bear me witness at the great day, that I do here faithfully and truly declare the Lord's message unto his dear servant, and singularly beloved John Bradford, saying, John Bradford, thou man so specially beloved of God, I do pronounce and testify unto thee, in the word and name of the Lord Jehovah, that all thy sins, whatsoever they be, though never so many, grievous, or great, be fully and freely pardoned, released, and forgiven thee, by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, the only Lord and sweet Saviour, in whom thou dost undoubtedly believe. As truly as the Lord liveth, he will not have thee die the death; but, hath verily purposed, determined, and decreed, that thou shalt live with him forever.

“*Neophytus*. O sir, if I have as good warrant to apply this saying to myself, as sweet Mr. Bradford had to himself, then I am a happy man.

“*Evangelista*. I tell you from *Christ*, and under the hand of the Spirit, that your person is accepted, your sins are done away, and you shall be saved; and, if an angel from heaven should tell you otherwise, let him be accursed. Therefore, you may (without doubt) conclude, that you are a happy man,” &c.\*

Here we have represented to us, in a lively manner, to what extravagant heights spiritual pride will sometimes

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\* Perhaps, by some such example as this, Aspasio has been emboldened to address the yet diffident Theron in the following manner: “This you do, Theron: [*fly to Christ*;] I know you do. Therefore, as surely as God is true, as certainly as God exists, they [*the blessings*] are all your own. I would humbly, yet boldly, apply to my friend, what the great JEHOVAH speaks by the prophet: *As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doth.* I appeal to all perfections, for the truth of this sacred engagement; and let every one of my attributes witness against me, if I am worse than my word.” Vol. 3, p. 305.

elevate the popular preachers. And here, likewise, we plainly see, that their ground of acceptance with God, or first spring of good hope, is the very same with that of their antagonists, the fashionable preachers, to wit, the *pious resolve* we took notice of before. This is the key held forth on all hands, as powerful to open for men the gates of heaven, and shut those of hell. However, a devout wish is often allowed to serve in its stead.

Moreover, the popular doctrine supposes, that unbelievers may be seriously engaged in praying for the Holy Spirit, to help them to faith, and exhorts them accordingly; which is as absurd as to suppose that a man may be desirous of being influenced by the spirit of a truth, which, at present, he neither believes nor loves. For I reckon it must be granted, that no man loves the gospel before he believes it; and, likewise, that the Spirit of God acts as the soul, sense, or meaning of the words, wherein the gospel is delivered.

Much has been said and written in defence of supernatural grace, or the agency of the Divine Spirit influencing the hearts of men, in opposition to those reasoners who doubt of or deny any such influence: and many things have been said on this head, serving to give us false notions of the Divine grace and spirit.—This much the Scripture will support us in saying, that when any man is influenced by the Holy Spirit, some point of knowledge is conveyed to his mind; he learns something of the truth of the gospel which he knew not before: or what he knew before, is seasonably brought to his remembrance; or his mind is kept steady in the persuasion of the known truth, his love to it cherished, and his hope enlivened. The apostles said, God hath given to us the *spirit of power and of love, and of a sound [or sober] mind*. So that, whatever they affirmed, whatever they practised under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they could give a sober and solid reason for it. If they confidently declared their faith, they had the clearest evidence to produce; if they fervently expressed their love, they had the most amiable objects to describe; if they joyfully made mention of their hope, they had the grandest enjoyments in prospect.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, as also the Spirit of grace. He speaks and breathes only the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. When a man, then, comes to know the gospel, or to receive this Spirit, he thinks of no other grace but what appeared in Christ's tasting death for men; no other truth, but what was manifest in Christ, the end of the law for righteousness. This differs not a little

from what the popular doctrine leads us to think of; namely, *the truth of grace in the heart*. When our systems describe faith to us, as a saving grace bestowed on us, by which we make use of Christ for salvation, are we not led to think of some grace necessary to our salvation, beside what appeared when Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for the sins of men?

If we consider faith as appearing in the possession of it, we find the apostles accounting the influence of the Holy Spirit necessary to enable a man to make such a profession of the faith, as was to be admitted by Christians: *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*. As soon, then, as it appeared by any man's profession, that he had heard and believed what the apostles preached, it appeared at the same time that he was influenced by the Holy Spirit.

There is no separating the agency of the Holy Spirit from the knowledge of the truth. To know the truth is life eternal; and this life is begun and supported by the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, all who resist the truth, and do not admit its evidence, are expressly said to resist the Holy Ghost. We ought not, then, to imagine, with the popular preachers, that the gospel can in any respect be considered as a dead letter, or destitute of Divine power. For being the voice of God, it is unchangeably powerful to save all who believe it, and to destroy all who oppose it. Believers are said to grieve the Holy Spirit, when they neglect to hearken to the words of the gospel, and their consciences are answerably grieved, when they are brought to repentance.

Jesus Christ, speaking of the Spirit, says, *When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself. He shall glorify me*. And in another place, *He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*. When we hear one describing to us how he first obtained peace with God, if we find him taking pains to inform us of the influences of grace he felt in his heart, and the operations of the Spirit leading him on to conversion, We may safely say, This is a spirit that speaks of himself; this is not the true grace of God. So we can be at no loss to see what sort of conversion he has undergone. If we hear another telling us, that, after manifold pious labours, as he thought, he found that in them all he was only doing the abominable thing that God hates; that he could never find true rest, till he heard that Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God; we may safely say,

This man speaks by the influence of the Holy Ghost. And though we cannot speak to him in the style wherein Evangelista addresses Neophytus; yet we may warrantably commend him to God, and to the word of his grace which he has professed; assuring him, that that word is able to save him, if it abide in him, if he continue to love and obey it from the heart; otherwise, he shall have his part with hypocrites and unbelievers: even as Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* But I must reserve what I have to say of the influence of the gospel on them that believe it to another letter.

I MIGHT now consider Aspasio's use of similitudes in describing his faith; and the rather, because people's minds are often more readily swayed by these, than by any other kind of reasoning. Not to be tedious, I shall only take some general notice of the *shipwrecked mariner*, labouring hard to gain the wished for rock;\* and of the *summer-house*, to which the two friends found it necessary to betake themselves for shelter from the storm, as being sensible, that, otherwise, their knowing where it was could be of no service to them.† The popular preachers use many similitudes to the same purpose. They seem to forget that Christ is in heaven, and we on the earth, by their manner of urging us to take hold of, betake ourselves to him, and close with him. They represent Christ, indeed, as condescending greatly, and stooping very far down; but still they leave distance enough to employ the utmost activity of the hearer. They seem to forget, that the only way wherein we can receive benefit from Christ, is by the report concerning him conveyed to our ears. And how shall we lay hold on a report but by holding it true? If we believe it not, we let it go for a falsehood. Besides, how can we lay hold on any truth till its evidence take hold on us?

Their way of speaking does indeed proceed from a very natural principle in man's heart. They cannot understand how a guilty person can be justified without contributing something thereto. Paul supposes, that men professing Christianity with their mouths, would be apt to say in their hearts, "Who shall ascend into Heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep?"

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\* Vol. 1, p. 207.

† Vol. 3, p. 301.



(that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead;") that they would be apt to say in their hearts something importing, that Christ had not already come down from Heaven to fulfil all righteousness, or that he has not already ascended, in testimony of his having finished his work; and so be ready still to cry for powers from above to help them to do something in this matter, be it called closing with Christ, or by any other name. In opposition to all this, the Apostle in the same place declares, that the word by which men are saved, is very nigh to every one who holds it true; yea, so nigh, that it is in the heart of him who believes it, and in the mouth of him who confesses it. He also tells us what that word is: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Whenever our preachers find *the heart* made mention of in any text, they immediately dream of *heart-work*. So in this text, they oppose the belief of the heart to some speculative faith, which they lodge in the head, or to the assent of the understanding; whereas, the Apostle states no such opposition, but only distinguishes betwixt the confession of the mouth and the belief of the heart; and supposes, what very ordinarily happens, that what a man confesses with his mouth, may differ from what he secretly says in his heart.

Moreover, our preachers, in their use of similitudes, seem to forget that man is happy or miserable according to his knowledge, or what he is conscious of. He is miserable, and filled with great perplexity, when he knows that he has sinned, and is persuaded that there is no losing of the connection betwixt sin and its wages. He must, then, be greatly relieved from his perplexity, when he comes to know that he may be justified, and yet that connection remain in its full force. He, then, to whom this knowledge is conveyed, finds immediately a covert from the *storm*, and his feet set on a *rock*. His relief prevents all his endeavours.

But if we should take these similitudes to refer to the Christian race, wherein all that believe are called to run; then I own there is some propriety in them. He that believes, on hearing the voice of Christ saying, "It is I, be not afraid," will be ready to reply, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do? Bid me come unto thee upon the water;" I am bound to give obedience at all hazards. If now we understand by the *storm* the wrath that is to come, the believer, knowing that Christ hath done enough to deliver him from it, loves him, takes hold of him, or flies to him, in obeying his commands,

and frequenting every mean of correspondence with him, according to the word that Jesus left with his disciples, while he should be absent from them: "If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Accordingly, we find Barnabas exhorted those at Antioch, in whom he saw the grace of God, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. The consequence of which was, they assembled together in the appointed church order, and denied themselves in sending relief to their brethren in Judea. Such were the acts of faith among those who were first called Christians. Here is room for every pious wish, purpose, and resolve, for the whole exercise of godliness both in mind and body. See what effect the knowledge of Christ had on Paul, and what was his steady purpose: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press forward to the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

LET us next observe what use the preachers make of the Scriptures in support of their acts of faith.—As Paul had reason to complain of many in his time who corrupted the word of God, so may we find many now who tarnish almost every text they breathe upon. And I am sorry to find Aspasio unwarily adopting their glosses in too many instances. In *Dialogue* 16, vol. 3, p. 277, he addresses his friend thus, "Since you are sensible of your impotence, beware of the *contrary* extreme. Because you cannot by your own strength exercise faith, let not this occasion a tame resignation of yourself to infidelity. You must endeavour, diligently endeavour, to believe; and wait and pray for the Divine SPIRIT. Though

it is his office to testify of CHRIST, and bring near the REDEEMER'S righteousness; yet his influences are not to supersede, but to encourage our own efforts. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" here is our duty: "for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do;" here is our encouragement. And O! what a glorious encouragement, to have the arms of omnipotence stretched out for our support and succour!

You was once, Theron, a zealous advocate for good works. Now you seem to have abandoned your clients. Remember, my dear friend, what our Lord Jesus Christ says, "This is the work of GOD," of all works most acceptable and most honourable to the Divine Majesty, "that you believe on him whom he hath sent."

"*Ther.* The true belief according to your notion, Aspasio, is so refined and exalted a virtue, that I very much question whether I shall ever be able to attain it.

"*Asp.* If you are unable to attain it, is the Lord unable to give it? *Our sufficiency* for this, and every good work, is not in ourselves, but in GOD. And to him difficulties are easy. Before him mountains are a plain.—You will please to remember, that sinners are said to *believe*, not through their own ability, but through the aids of *grace*." Is it not surprising, to see men daily finding fault with the Jewish teachers for interpreting the Old Testament in favour of justification by works, and yet at the same time gravely employed themselves in thus commenting on the New? As there are two texts made mention of here, which are constantly used in sermons to the same purpose, we may take some particular notice of them.—Paul reminding the Philippians of the character of Jesus Christ, exhorts them thus, chap. ii, 12, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence; work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke," &c.

The application of any words in this passage, to acts of faith in order to justification, is so foreign to the whole context, yea, to the whole epistle, that I am half ashamed to offer any confutation to it. Does not Paul consider them as having already experienced consolation in Christ, the comfort of love, and the fellowship of the Spirit? Is he not commending their obedience to the gospel, and encouraging them to go

forward as they had begun? Was not that salvation which comes by faith promoted in them, while their faith wrought by love? While they grew in love, did they not enjoy more of the comfort thereof? While they grew in likeness of temper to Christ, did not their consolation by him abound? Paul tells them that their patient obedience was to them an evident token of salvation, and that of God, as well as of perdition to their adversaries. And he animates them to steadfastness, by the same argument that gave birth to their obedience; "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do," (*υπερ της ευδοκίας*) *because of the good pleasure*; because he is well pleased in his beloved Son. This is the grand persuasive to obedience so often urged in the New Testament, now in more copious, than in more concise terms.—Thus, the same Apostle prays for the Thessalonians, whose faith already grew exceedingly, and whose charity abounded, *that God would fulfil among them* "all the good pleasure of goodness, and the work of faith with power."—The work or effect of faith resembles the good pleasure of Divine goodness which is revealed and believed. So the Apostle prays, that the grand argument might ever be present with them and have its full effect among them; that, like what they believed, they might be full of all goodness, abounding in the fruits of righteousness. By this argument God worketh in them that believe, both to will and to do, not anything in order to justification, but all those things wherein their salvation consists, and is evidenced.

The Apostle, taking notice of the works of love among the Hebrews, says, "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation." Better than what? even better than the highest things that could be talked of in the way of illumination, which might take place, and yet not accompany salvation; yea, which might be experienced by those who might, notwithstanding, fall away irrecoverably.

Moreover, in the beginning of the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul declares himself confident, that he who had already begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. As these words are constantly used in sermons to the same purpose as those in chap. ii, it may be proper to quote the passage; chap. i, 3, to 9, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, (always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy,) for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you,



will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch, as both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye are all partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all, in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more," &c. Hence it is evident, that the good work begun in them was the work of that charity, which never faileth, appearing among them, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth, in their liberal and constant (κοινωνία) fellowship or contribution for the gospel; and more especially in their care of the Apostle himself, who was then a prisoner for its sake, and at a great distance from them. So he prays that their love might still abound.

Where this work or effect of faith, this ministering love appears, there, we may say, the grace of God is bestowed on men; "We do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that," &c. Where this saving grace appears, there we may say the grace of God is known in truth; even the grace that appeared in Christ's death. Did we attend more to the Scriptures, we should give less heed to what we hear in sermons about saving grace.

Let us now consider the other text mentioned by Aspasio, John vi, 28—30. The Jews inquired, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered, and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." The Jews were plainly inquiring how they might be qualified to do the works God, require in his law, in order to justification. The answer of Jesus plainly imports, that they would become possessed of the whole work God required, in knowing that God sent him to work it, without their working less or more. For if we could separate from *believing*, the idea of some confused laborious exercise, which has been affixed to it, the answer of Jesus would readily sound thus to us: This is the work of God, to know that he hath sent me to work it.\* His answer was, at least,

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\* If common prejudices have hindered some from attending to the natural and easy sense here given of Christ's memorable answer to the Jews, about the ground of acceptance with God, it might at least be expected, that a tender regard to the Scriptures should have led them to consider it as a difficult text, which they did not well understand; rather than to give it a meaning quite opposite to the whole tenor of his discourse on that occasion, yea, of all his other discourses; and also the

better understood by the Jews than it is commonly among us. They had no notion of any difficulty in believing what they understood; but they did not understand who Jesus was, nor what he was working. So their reply to Jesus is thus set before us, in v. 30, "They said, therefore, unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe **THEE**? what dost thou **WORK**?" Accordingly, the whole reasoning at large turns on, who he was, and what he was to work.—The case was, our jargon about *acts of faith* was not then invented. And it would still appear as ridiculous as ever on any subject but religion. If a friend of mine should see me cheerful, on hearing something new, and I should tell him I was comforted by an act of faith, would he not say I trifled with him, and readily ask what good news I had heard, that he might partake in my satisfaction?

Faith, with its effects, is in Scripture often signified by one expression, and accordingly connected with salvation; as when it is said "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now, though we cannot say that a believer is saved on account of his prayers, yet we may safely say, that he is saved on account of what he believes, and by which he is encouraged to pray. It is easy to see love and hope expressed in all the prayers of faith recorded in the Scripture; yet it would be absurd to infer from thence, that prayer, love, and hope, or any other effect of that knowledge which is faith, are requisites in order to justification; for if we agree with the apostles, we must still maintain, that justification comes by faith and not by works, not by any thing we do in obedience to any law whatsoever.

The observation just now made, contains the substance of what I have to say against the use the popular doctrine makes of the Scripture, in describing faith. The Scripture uses several expressions equivalent to *believing*, and several others which include and presuppose faith, and so describe it with its effects. It is not my business to distinguish these expressions in the many passages where they occur; but this much may be said in the general, that if by any of them more

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writings of his apostles, who certainly understood his doctrine better than any modern commentator. Does not Paul say, *To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*? Yea, does he not constantly oppose faith to works, to all works whatsoever, in this matter? Is it then a fair way of reconciling the Scriptures to talk to us of some ambiguous work, exerted by the human mind, in the matter of justification? Let us either have works properly so called, or no works at all.

be understood than the simple knowledge or persuasion of the truth, then something more than faith is understood, something more than is necessary to justification.

The Scripture points forth the common misery of men by various images, as of thirst, hunger, nakedness, &c. It describes them as labouring, heavy laden, blind, weak, &c. Many preachers are fond to extract, out of one or other of these expressions, some distinguishing qualification, to which they may apply the promises; especially, if they can find any of these expressions likewise used in Scripture, to point forth the fervency of love, wherewith the promise of blessedness is indeed connected. For instance, the common unhappiness of men occasioned by sin, is set forth under the notion of *thirst*. All men are labouring to find something to quench this, some one way, some another. If the popular preachers find men disposed to quench it, in following their directions, they freely apply the promises to them, and pronounce them blessed. And they suppose they are encouraged so to do, because Jesus says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Whereas, those spoken of by Jesus, are plainly classed with the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, and sufferers for his sake, whose reward in Heaven is great. The thirst, then, which Jesus here speaks of, is no other than the noble purpose expressed by Paul, which was formerly cited from Philippians, chap. iii. We cannot, then, imitate our preachers here, without manifestly punning on the Scripture.

The popular doctrine takes the promises made to those who believe and obey the gospel, and applies them to such as are carefully acquiring the requisites to faith; such as, Rev. iii, 20, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Now, Jesus, the great shepherd, distinguishes his sheep from others, by their hearing his voice and following him. And (Luke xii, 33—37,) calling his disciples to lay up their treasure in heaven, by giving to the poor, he adds, "let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." Instead of all this, the preachers incline to talk to us about



some "opening of the door of the heart," which neither they nor their hearers well understand, and which neither benefits the opener nor any body else.

If the Scripture point forth the freedom of Divine grace, to the setting aside of all human distinctions, in such language as this, If any man will come after me;—If any man will be my disciple;—Let him that heareth say, Come;—And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely; our preachers immediately put an emphasis of their own, a very impertinent one too, on the expression will,\* and, accordingly, go about to limit the Divine grace to the better disposed part of mankind. But it would be endless to trace them in all their glosses on the sacred Scripture. In a word, when they read the various effects of faith recorded in Scripture, they persuade their hearers to labour to attain some shadow of these in their hearts, and then to work out faith as a prop to them all.—They lead men to begin their fabric at the top, and proceed building downward to the foundation. And, indeed, the more seriously we consider the popular doctrine, we shall find the more reason to conclude it to be a castle in the air.

YET, reflecting how readily their glosses are adopted in the Dialogues, I am content to consider a few more of them. If the Scripture describe believers as pilgrims and strangers on the earth, as running the Christian race, denying themselves for the sake of the heavenly inheritance, and, accordingly, flying for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them; our preachers, ever mindful of their acts of faith, are ready to exhort us to put forth the acts of flying to Christ, and laying hold on him, in order to our justification. If Barnabas exhorts those in whom he saw the grace of God, with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord, after the example of the believers who were said to be added to the Lord, when they

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\* The deceit and falsehood of all such glosses on the Scripture will readily appear to us, if we can only attend to the meaning of one plain passage, wherein Jesus addresses the woman of Samaria thus: *If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* The knowledge here spoken of is saving faith. And this knowledge, which was never yet acquired by human endeavours, never yet sought, or in the remotest manner wished for by any unbeliever, is the only spring of all willing, wishing, desiring, asking, of every motion of the heart that is agreeable to God, and attended with a sense of his favour. This knowledge influencing the mind, is, in Scripture, called the *new heart, the right spirit, new man, &c.*



were added to the society of his disciples, keeping his commands? then we are told, that justifying faith is cleaving to Christ. Aspasio says, (vol. 2, p. 68,) "Faith is styled a receiving of Christ: As many as received him, to them gave he power, or granted the privilege, to become the sons of God." He might have likewise quoted the words immediately following, even to them that believe on his name. If, then, Aspasio means no more by receiving but believing, I am ready to agree with him: for I can easily understand how a man may be said to receive a testimony, when he admits the truth of it; or how he refuses it, when he rejects it as false. But Aspasio tells us in this page, that it is the office of faith, "to take and use the inestimable gift." If in this, or any other part of the New Testament, more be meant by *receiving Christ*, than by knowing him, or believing on him, then I am ready to show, that more than *faith* is meant, namely, faith with its fruits and effects.

In the next page, Aspasio says, "Faith is represented as laying hold on God our Saviour, leaning upon our Beloved, cleaving to the Lord." It is somewhat strange to find descriptions of faith, drawn to us from passages where there is not the least mention of it. The first of these three acts of faith, refers to Is. xxvii, 5, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me." Aspasio ought, before he made use of this text, first to have inquired, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? For the context, as it stands in our English Bible, seems to point rather to the Messiah than to any other. The words immediately following are, "And he shall make peace with me. He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud," &c.—The second refers to Cant. viii, 5, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" The use made of this text needs, I think, no remark.—The third refers to the exhortation of Barnabas to the believers at Antioch, which we have considered already. Thus, the whole Bible has been ransacked for almost every expression of activity, in order to describe that faith, which yet is said "not to contribute its quota," or to do nothing toward our justification. Was ever any subject so deeply buried in ambiguity as this!

But the ambiguity seems most difficult to be shaken off from those expressions which point more directly to the operations of the mind, and have least of the metaphor in them, as trusting, relying, &c. All these expressions have respect to the goodness and excellency of what is believed, and serve to

express our attachment to it on that account. For let me be ever so firmly persuaded of bad news; this persuasion or faith may well be the foundation of grief, fear, aversion, &c.; but it can never be the foundation of trust, joyful expectation, or reliance. If a testimony persuades me of the reality of excellent things, utterly unknown to me before, and assures me of good things to come; this persuasion or faith may justly be called, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It may be called the *ελεγχος*, the argument, evidence, proof, or conviction of invisible things; and the *ὑπόστασις*, the substantial ground, or solid foundation of hope. The faith of the gospel is, indeed, the basis of trust, courage, confidence, boasting, and glorying; the centre of esteem, desire, gratitude, and love. It is the foundation and centre of every vigorous and every kindly affection of the mind, of every happy and every grateful sentiment. So soon as men believe the truth, hope is the benefit they receive by it. And love or grateful affection immediately becomes their natural propensity toward what gives them happiness, as well as their indispensably commanded duty.

All this is agreeable to the Scripture, which, speaking of the revealed character of God, says, Psal. ix, 10, *They that know thy name will put their trust in thee*; even as the natural knowledge of God in the mind of unbelievers, fills them with fear, distrust, and alienation. If one approaching to a frozen lake or river, over which he has occasion to pass, tells me, that he has been assured by good information, that the ice was sufficiently strong to support him, and yet, after all, proves timorous, and averse to make the trial, by venturing his person freely upon it, I plainly perceive he has no faith in the report he heard; because he does not trust in it; or, which is the same thing, he cannot trust, rely, confide in, or venture himself on the ice.

Accordingly, if one tells me, that he believes the gospel, and yet proves averse to risk his interest or reputation in the world for the sake of it, I immediately perceive, that, whatever he speaks with his mouth, he does not in his heart believe the gospel, because he puts no trust in it. Paul directs Timothy to give the following charge to such rich men as professed to believe the gospel. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to

come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." From this, and many like passages, we may easily see what the Scripture means by trusting, relying, leaning, waiting, cleaving to, laying hold on, and many other expressions, which our popular preachers, as averse to the self-denied obedience, as to the simple belief of the truth, have thought fit to press into their service for describing their acts of faith. If we would give a summary description of their faith, we must say, it is a wish, or a guess, or a mixture of both; or, still more comprehensively, it is anything, every thing, or nothing.

Perhaps it has been to relieve his brethren out of their perplexity and confusion about faith, that Mr. Jones, in his late exposition of the church catechism, has generously coined a new distinction, and acquainted his readers, that "faith and belief are two very different principles." If his brethren would only adopt this distinction, we might, in all time coming, be at no loss to distinguish betwixt actors of faith and believers of the gospel.

THE dexterity of our popular preachers, in handling the Scriptures about faith, to hide from our eyes the saving truth, and its genuine effects, bears no small resemblance to the critical skill exercised by a more fashionable sort of preachers, to rob us of the truth itself, and show us that all the passages which speak of the redemption of men by Jesus Christ, have really very little or no meaning at all. Such words as these, either in Greek or English, *ει εις υπερ παντων απεθανεν, αρα δι παντες απεθανον*, *If one died for all, then all have died*, would to common understandings, import the same as, *If one hath suffered or been punished for all, then all in effect have suffered, or been punished; or, to take in the idea of debt, if one hath made full payment for twenty insolvent debtors, then the twenty have made payment.* Here the idea of vicarious suffering, or vicarious payment, would readily present itself to vulgar minds. But our doctors of refined genius, and skilled in criticism, are ready to tell us, that no such idea must be entertained, either from this or a thousand other passages to the same purpose. For why, the word *vicarious* is not to be found in the whole Scripture. And, if it were to be found, we may be sure they would next tell us, that vicarious suffering did by no means import one's suffering *instead* of another.

If the Scripture describe the sufferings of Christ, by all the expressions used to describe the sufferings of those who are marked out as objects of the Divine displeasure; if it

point him forth as bearing iniquity, smitten of God, put to grief by him, forsaken of him, having his face hid from him, wounded and bruised by him, and receiving the cup of mortal sorrow from him; if it speak of him as bearing sins his own self in his own body, of iniquity being laid on him, and of his suffering for sins, the just for the unjust: our doctors are ready to tell us, that his suffering thus for men does by no means import his being punished for them; and that there is a great difference between suffering pain for sin, and being punished for it.

Now, though some learned gentleman should suffer pain in the next world for perverting the Scriptures in this, who, but people of a vulgar way of thinking, would imagine, that thereby they were punished for it; perhaps it might appear in some third world, that they were only suffering pain, and not punishment. Yea, though it should appear that they were to suffer forever, the question might remain, whether or not they were punished? In like manner, though the Scripture speak of one redeeming many from the curse of the law by being made a curse for them, we cannot, according to the mind of our doctors, say, that the curse of the law imports the wrath of God, the punishment of sin, or the reverse of his blessing. Yea, it would seem, that, to please them, we must say, that neither the curse nor the blessing of God import, either his inflicting punishment on men, or his imparting happiness to them. In short, if we would enter into the spirit of their writings, or read them with any satisfaction, we must have a new dictionary for all the notable words of the New Testament.

But stay, it will be said, better have a very perplexed meaning, or even none at all to the Scriptures, than a bad one; and that these gentlemen critics are all along influenced by the best of motives, a concern for the Divine character, the quiet of men's consciences, and the honour of reason. Well, how does this appear? They would have us to understand from reason, and revelation, at any rate, must agree, that God is, to a certain degree, merciful as well as just; that is, disposed to pardon less sins, and to punish greater ones; or to pardon the less and punish the more guilty offenders: that as all men are acknowledged to be sinners, if all sins were punished, there would be no room for mercy; and if all sins were pardoned, there would be no room for justice to appear: therefore, that both these divine perfections may appear, it is necessary that the one occasionally give place to the other, according as what wise men judge proper objects



for either present themselves. "For a good and merciful being must, as such, pardon some offences. And when a man by repentance ceases to be what he was, *viz.* an object of punishment, and becomes what he ought to be, *viz.* a good man; surely such a one is an object of mercy. Are not men to be encouraged to repent, as well as to be deterred from offending? Let the presumptuous and obstinate suffer." Here, for once, I am ready to agree with our monopolizers of reason, in affirming, that such a penitent as is here described shall never be miserable, yea, shall never die; and I have the Divine oath to support me in this affirmation.

But I have been told, what I presume most individuals, not excepting our reasoners, incline to think for their own sakes, that there is no man so bad but he has some good quality, and no man so good but he has some bad one. Therefore, methinks, the half just and half merciful being above described, who cannot show mercy without setting aside justice, nor justice without suspending the exercise of mercy, ought, in order to show these two half perfections to all the proper objects, first to punish every one for all his bad actions, and then reward him for the remainder of good ones. But, then, if there should be found any among mankind, who find themselves destitute of every recommendation to the Divine favour, such I apprehend would be glad to hear of a greater God than this; and who, being less limited in the exercise of his mercy, might be capable of showing compassion to those who have no good qualities at all.

These gentlemen are at a great deal of pains to show us from the Scriptures, what we had known though they had never been written, *viz.* that God is essentially kind to the righteous, and averse to the wicked. But they will not allow us to say, that by an atonement God is *placated* or *appeased* for sin; though the Scripture declares him to be *pacified* for sin, and that his anger is turned away from the same person against whom he was wroth; and though it clearly shows, in all this, that with God there is no variability, neither shadow of turning. They tell us, that "guilt is personal, and cannot, therefore, be transferred or imputed to the innocent. And to punish the innocent for the guilty, is as incomptable with justice as with mercy or goodness. The innocent person may be willing to suffer for the guilty; but is it, therefore, just to punish him? *Volenti nulla injuria*—true; he has no right to complain; but have you a right to punish him because he will not complain?"\*

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\* See Monthly Review, for June, 1756.

Thus men reason about the Deity as about their fellow: *Have you a right—!* They can think of the Most High as obliged with them to love his neighbour as himself! Let them declare if they can who is the neighbour of the Deity! He gave no right to the judges, or even kings of Israel, to punish the children for the parents' crimes; but he claimed it as his own right, and held it thus, "All souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. Hath not the potter power over the clay? and, who art thou, O man, that repliest against God!" And now, when they are combating the apostolic account of Christ's death, in their replying against God; this perhaps may lead some, who have received the doctrine of atonement by tradition from the first reformers, and revered it as the *good old cause*, to consider seriously on what footing they hold it; and, accordingly, may draw off their attention from the laboured descriptions of faith, by which that doctrine is daily undermined. No religious controversy can turn upon a more interesting hinge than, Is there an atonement or not? And such teachers as profess regard to it, will be much better employed in satisfying themselves and others that they hold it on good ground, than in giving out ambiguous descriptions of heart-work. Besides, they have this advantage above its ancient friends, that they have adversaries to deal with, who profess readiness to join with them in appealing to the Scriptures.

Our Christian opposers of the atonement say, "God was always good, merciful, just, kind. Christ did not *cause* or make these attributes." Thus, they insinuate, as if the friends of the atonement maintained, that it made some change in the Deity, or gave birth to some new Divine attributes; or, in other words, that the Deity began to exist about the beginning of the Christian æra. Paul, speaking of the exhibition of Christ, be it for an atonement, or in any other character, assigns this as the great end of it, "That God **MIGHT BE JUST**, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Can these gentlemen imagine, that Paul thought the Deity less just, or less in any attribute, before this exhibition, than after? or, how came they to imagine that any friend of the atonement ever thought so?

They allow that Christ died; but they have not yet satisfied us, how a person perfect in every virtue, without any stain of sin, came to endure the severest sufferings, even mortal sorrow, from the hand of God, and to be delivered, by his determinate counsel, to suffer a painful and ignominious

death from the hands of men. They tell us, indeed, that "the prophecies concerning the Messiah could not otherwise be fulfilled." But this does not mend the matter in the least. This is only such an apology as a Pagan would make for his Jupiter, That he was obliged to act as he did, for so it was written in the book of fate. But in this case we must inquire, how it came thus to be written in the book of fate, and who wrote it there? If there be a God who governs the world, he must be invariably just. It is incumbent, then, upon those who zealously assert the Divine justice, and will not allow it to be consistent therewith to punish the innocent, to show how it became God to make a righteous person suffer pain, and to continue his sufferings, while praying most earnestly, that if it were possible, or consistent with his will, they might pass from him; and I may add, how it became God to make him suffer, what, to all observers, bare the appearance of punishment; yea, what appeared to be so by his own lamenting cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Though the gentlemen of this class may not be fully agreed about the adapting of every part of Scripture to their scheme of redemption; yet he who would have his mind quite disentangled from all notions of the necessity of atonement or vicarious punishment, that he may stand before his Maker on the footing of a good man, who has ceased to be an object of punishment, and all this without running the risk of the odious name of an infidel, may with great satisfaction read Dr. Sykes, whom I choose the rather to mention, as he is latest on the field, and has consulted the Scriptures in a particular manner on this subject.

This gentleman says, "Punishment for sin is certainly a proper method of deterring men from sin. But where is Christ ever said to be *punished*? where is he said to suffer *vicarious punishment*? Now, if Christ be never said to be *punished*, or to be *punished for others*; that doctrine can never be said to be a Scripture doctrine, which is not to be expressed in Scripture words. All that is here contended for, is, that the Scriptures never say that God inflicted *punishment*, or even *sufferings* on Christ, in order to, or with a view of *detering men from sin*."

Now, it would be to no purpose to remind this writer of the words of Jesus, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children; for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" For why, the word *deter* is not to be found in all this passage. And,

though it can easily be proved, that by the *green tree* and the *dry*, the Jews understood the righteous and the wicked, down from Ezekiel's time; yet, there is no express mention made of an *innocent* person here; and though there were, the Doctor is ready to show the reasoning of Jesus concerning the green tree and the dry, to be very improper and inconclusive, by the following argument: "And, indeed, it would seem a strange method of proceeding, to *punish*, or to make an *innocent* man *suffer*, in order to deter *sinner*s from sin. It is not agreeable to the common notions of either *punishment* or *justice*. And, perhaps, the direct contrary to what is usually inferred, may with equal justice be *inferred*, viz. that God's *punishing* an *innocent* person, implies his displeasure with *innocency*, or else that he acts *arbitrarily*, without regard to either right or wrong."

The apostles and first Christians were, indeed, so far of the Doctor's mind, that they considered the death of Christ as a very *strange* and *uncommon* event. They never heard of the like before, and they well knew they would never see the like again. Yea, they represent it as that which would be matter of wonder and praise eternally in the mansions of the blessed. For here they beheld that miracle which the Doctor has no notion of, the perfection of justice and the perfection of mercy shining together; and instead of impairing or darkening, illustrating each other. So that while they marvelled at this grand event, they were far from deducing his inference. So true is it, that what proves rich food to some, is poison to others; or, to use the apostolic phrase, what proves the savour of life to some, proves the savour of death to others.

Meanwhile I willingly join our author in opposing those who "have asserted and maintained, that it was Christ who rendered *repentance* of the *efficacy* which it has;" or rather, which they have falsely ascribed to it, through their ignorance of, and disaffection to both repentance and the atonement. It is meet that the arts of these trimmers should be exposed by both the friends and the enemies of the atonement. Accordingly our author's question is very pertinent, "How often does the expression occur of God's *sending* his Son; and is there once intimated any such effect as the making our *repentance accepted unto everlasting life*, either by his life or death? Surely no friend to the atonement will offer to affirm, that any such intimation is made. All its true friends will readily join in affirming, that Christ came to render impenitent sinners accepted unto everlasting life by the works which he himself wrought; and thus, by the discovery of preventing



goodness, to lead them to repentance. But, then, it will be said, this does not agree with our natural notions. And our author is ready to maintain, that, "as to revelation, there is not one single text but what agrees with our natural notions."

Here one may be ready to inquire, what do the enemies of the atonement mean by their natural notions? Not to dip far into this question at present, methinks we may have a view of some notions very natural to them from one of their number, who is much respected by his fellows, I mean the author of *The Church of England, Tried by Herself*, who calls himself *a real friend to truth and the gospel*. This gentleman, having, when he entered into the ministry, subscribed and done every thing the church required, before he was sufficiently acquainted with the doctrines established in the articles, liturgy, &c., and upon due examination, seeing cause to differ from them in several points, finds himself reduced to such a strait, "that he must necessarily offend, either against *the church*, or against *truth* and his own conscience. And what a sad *dilemma* must a man be under, when he can neither *speak* what he thinks truth with *safety*, nor be *silent* without offence?" This he represents as the *hard case of the thinking part* of the clergy, and accordingly prays for relief, by a review of the articles, liturgy, &c.

The authors of the Critical Review, for May, 1756, express their sympathy with this gentleman, for whom they see no near prospect of relief, say "In the meanwhile the writer may sit down with a quiet conscience, and enjoy the noblest satisfaction which a human heart can feel, the satisfaction of having discharged his duty to God and his fellow-creatures, and acquitted himself in the task he undertook, like a man of honour, religion, and virtue." But how or where shall he *sit down*? Shall he sit down quietly, without either eating his loaf or repeating his liturgy? or may he with a quiet conscience speak what he thinks, and boldly preach against the articles and liturgy, in connection with which he got his living, and persist in receiving the wages of iniquity, and eating the bread of perjury, as having sufficiently exonerated his conscience, by openly declaring the sad dilemma into which his superiors have brought him, and wherein they still retain him? I have heard of a clergyman in Scotland, who in the like dilemma, resolved himself thus: "By my faith I must live." Thus might the thinking part of smugglers, after openly protesting against the multiplicity of taxes, with a quiet conscience, pursue their lucrative schemes; honestly declaring, that if they could find any other business, equally gainful, without perjury, they would choose it rather.

What occasions the sad dilemma is this, the thinking part of the clergy lay it down as a fundamental maxim, That their religion must be subservient to their living and interest in the world. All their natural notions serve to support this maxim, whereas, the dictates of conscience prove very often unnaturally troublesome. The consequence is, a character must be found for the Deity, agreeable to their natural notions. And revelation, so far as it speaks sense, must agree: for they are ready to show how many absurd and unnatural consequences would follow on ascribing to him any other character.

“He’s like themselves, or how could he be good?  
And they blaspheme, who blacker schemes suppose.”

HAVING gone thus far among the remoter allies of our popular preachers, I shall proceed only a little further, and then return. The medium of modern orthodoxy, may, I think, be found in a late “Remonstrance against Lord Viscount Bolingbroke’s philosophical religion.” The author, who studies to express himself with more than ordinary precision, speaks thus, in p. 162, “That a vicarious punishment at least is necessary to vindicate the Divine justice, was the opinion of all those who offered sacrifice; and it is for the sake of such a punishment that Christians believe, that on certain secondary conditions sins are pardonable.” These secondary conditions we may safely presume, are much the same with the primary ones of the forementioned gentlemen; and though they are not introduced to prove directly, that the gospel is fabulous; yet, to all who admit them, it is easy to see, that the gospel can be of no more benefit than fable or fiction. But I have no occasion to censure this author, for thus he himself proceeds in the same page. Great must their guilt be, and strong their disbelief of the justice, truth, goodness, and mercy of God, who treat the gospel as a fable and fiction; dreadful must their apprehensions be on every surmise of God’s vindictive justice.”

Methinks our writers who frustrate the doctrine of redemption by clogging it with conditions, and those who flatly oppose it by their critical skill, and great acquaintance with the secrets of nature and reason, instead of exposing, as they do, their absurdity to the observation of common readers, would do well to follow the example given them by Mr. Hutchinson, who hath taken care to entrench himself so deeply among new-framed ideas to Hebrew words, as to make the approaches of his adversaries at least somewhat difficult and tedious. This gentleman, by one stroke of criticism on the Hebrew

word for **LEST**, in Gen. iii, 22, hath presumed to frustrate the atonement, and overthrow the sovereignty of the Most High, and is very confident that he hath put an end to all disputes on that score.\* Now, the number of those who read Hebrew, is but small in comparison with those who have some knowledge of their mother-tongue; and I may add, even in comparison with those who can make a shift to read some sentences in the Greek New Testament. If, then, those learned distinguishers who would comfort us with faith† instead of truth, and those who would comfort us with a Messiah suffering pain, but not punishment for our sins, would go down with Mr. Hutchinson into the bottom of a mine, and thence looking upward through optics of their own making, spy figures in the clouds, or conceive new ideas to all Hebrew words having any relation to *faith* or *redemption*, and then publish their discoveries; methinks by this means they might secure their absurdity for some time, at least, from the observation of ordinary readers.

Or, if this method be too troublesome, they might, in order to compromise matters with unbelievers, at whose increase they are much afflicted, chime in with the *Rational Christian*, author of a late "*Dissertation, proving the light of the gospel is the light of nature, or that true Christianity is rational religion only;*" who says, "My intention is, to make appear by Scripture, that the light of God's word or gospel is in all men; that this is that eternal life and universal light held forth by Jesus Christ and his disciples; and those who believe and obey his doctrine, Spirit, or nature, are said to have Christ within them. And all the doctrines of the gospel must be built on, and coincide with this fundamental law and light of nature. What does not, is not of God. Christ was called *the Light of the World*, and *the Word*, and *Spirit of God*, be-

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\* Dr Sykes hath given us a criticism no less ingenious on the Greek word for *robbery*, Phil. ii, 6, in order to undermine the dignity of that person by whom the atonement was made.

† One may indulge me in treating these men with some freedom, when I tell him, that they have given a false direction to a pen, from which I received, and from which I hoped more satisfaction than from any other in England; a pen that seemed far better fitted for drawing out fair the great lines of Divine truth, than for copying the mazes of self-seeking men.

I shall likewise take this occasion to say, that though I acknowledge several of the reflections made against Mr. Hutchinson and his followers by their adversaries to be just; yet I am apt to think, that not a few of their adversaries, mistaking them for real friends to the atonement, by observing some kind of zeal for it, or rather a noise about it in their writings, bear them no good will on that account.

cause he preached that light, that word, that spirit; as Anaxagoras was called the *mind*, because he taught that a mind governed the world. And as Christ's doctrine manifested God and his laws to men, so his disciples called the manifestation of God to men by the name *Jesus* and *Christ*. The outward Christ must die, and all our dependence on him must go away, that the internal and spiritual Messiah, the mystical Jesus, intellectual light, and Divine understanding, may arise and shine in our souls. All things concerning Jesus Christ without, are but an allegory of Jesus Christ in the soul."

Here is a notable foundation for a coalition of religious parties. And if our avowed unbelievers would only condescend to clothe their own sentiments with some words and names borrowed from the religion of their country, they also might gain the reputation of good Christians. In this quotation, we may see the substance of what is at bottom meant and aimed at by many preachers of different classes, as well as by freethinkers: if we only set aside the adventitious tenets and forms of expression which various parties adopt, in order to give some peculiar dignity or distinguishing importance to their several schemes.

I only propose these hints to our learned distinguishers for their own credit and conveniency, as it is highly probable they will never be able to procure, by the force of reasoning, such a general compliance with any of their particular systems, as has been formerly brought about by another kind of force. Meantime, they are very welcome, for my part, to take their own course. They may well do undesigned service, it is far beyond their power to do the least hurt to the kingdom of Christ.

If we inquire what moves them to take so much pains to oppose the notion of atonement or vicarious punishment, or, when it is admitted, to frustrate it by secondary conditions; some of them will be apt to reply, That they are moved with concern for the support of piety, and that they are jealous for the interests of morality. They are very careful of the honour of the gospel, and they would so explain it, as that it should be no way exposed to any of those objections formerly made against Paul's doctrine. When one observes how general the pious resentment against the doctrine of atonement is, he would be apt to imagine, that perfect love to righteousness, and hatred to sin, reigned in the breasts of all, except the few fools who believe it.

In Bayle's dictionary, in the article JAPAN, we are inform-



ed of the like zeal shown by Father Possevin, a Jesuit, against the idolatrous Japanese, who laid no small stress on their atonement. "The last fault he censures is, that the laws of Japan declare, that by the mere invocation of Namau-midabut, or by crying *Forenguelio*, men expiate all sorts of sins without any need of repentance. The Japanese (continues he) make no mention of satisfactory pains or good works. They pretended that these things are injurious to the merit of Xaca and Amida, who have been sufficiently afflicted for the crimes of men, and have fully expiated them by their sufferings. This doctrine opens the way to sin;" for, &c. Yet the same article produces other testimonies, to show that those, here censured by the Jesuit for making no mention of *satisfactory* pains or good works, were nevertheless at uncommon pains to enforce the practice of morality; and that they made one of the three principal sects of the Japanese. It is natural on this occasion to resume the old question, Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? Yet, if we turn our eyes to the New Testament, we may well say, A greater than Xaca and Amida is here! But, leaving these general reflections, let us return to our controversy about faith.

PERHAPS it will now be inquired, Are no rules to be observed, no means to be used, no works to be exerted by the human mind or body, in order to justification? The answer is ready: Yes, very many. And they may be thus shortly summed up: Be perfect, keep the commandments, and thou shalt live. The obligation of the law is eternal, so can never be loosed. But perhaps another state of the question will be demanded, and that faith should be more directly respected therein. Well, then, let it stand thus: Ought not a man to be at pains to attain to the persuasion, that all the pains he takes are good for nothing, except to enhance his guilt? Here, methinks, we are landed at downright absurdity. For who will labour in the hopes of being convinced that all his labour is to no purpose, unless to his hurt? Who will travel an hundred miles, in the hopes of being persuaded at the journey's end of his folly in attempting to travel at all? Yet on some such principle we must travel, and that too with much fatigue, and in the midst of many perplexities, if we will be conducted by the popular doctrine.

The question, then, will still remain, How is faith obtained? This I would answer by putting another question, How have the most remarkable discoveries that have served most

for the accommodation of human life been obtained? Has not that Providence, which continually watches over the life of man, prevented human skill and industry in giving the first hint of these? I have been told, that the polar direction of the magnet obtruded itself on the first discoverer, when he was in quest of no such thing, being occupied in some very different inquiry. Do we not owe our knowledge of the salutary virtue of the Jesuit's bark, and many other medicines, to the Divine Providence preventing human sagacity? Has not the chymist been often surprised with useful discoveries when at his wit's end, and when he thought all his labour and expense lost?

If, then, it evidently appears, by the frequent and remarkable escapes and deliverances of unwary men, by the daily preservation of all, and the many unexpected comforts provided for their lives that God hath not left him without witness, even in the common course of nature, must we not think, that, in the distribution of supernatural favours, it well becomes Divine grace to appear in a distinguished manner? There it is meet that the arm of the Lord should be revealed. Accordingly, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." No man can account for his being privileged with the knowledge of the simple truth, while he observes many of quicker understanding than himself remaining in their opposition to it. But he can give a very good account of what comforts him. He has in readiness a solid and sober reason to give for his hope; even as he who has providentially been surprised with some valuable discovery in any branch of art, cannot tell why he was the first discoverer, but he can give a good reason for his subsequent practice founded upon it, as having a clear notion of what has been discovered to him.

Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, toward the close of chap. x, informs us how faith comes. He tells us, *It comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* He then leads us to observe, what in fact took place among Jews and Gentiles, as to the belief of the gospel, that many of the latter, who were living in the grossest ignorance of God, readily came to the knowledge of it; while the bulk of the former, notwithstanding their many and great advantages, continued in their opposition. As many questions might arise in the minds of men about the surprising event, the Apostle prevents, and silences them, by the only answer that could

be given to them. He examines if any reason or excuse for the unbelief of the Jews, could be drawn from their labouring under any disadvantage or incapacity in comparison with others; and if, on the other hand, there was any favourable symptom in the case of the Gentiles, that promised the gospel any better reception among them. So he moves the following question on the case of the Jews, who obeyed not, so did not believe the truth: *But I say, have they not heard?* In answer to this he maintains, that the sacred oracles, compared to the heavenly luminaries, had extended their influence to all parts of the earth where the Jews were dispersed: *Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.*

But, then, some men may reap not benefit from what they hear, by reason of their being more unlearned or more dull of apprehension than others. Accordingly, the next question runs thus, *But I say, Did not Israel know?* To this a two-fold answer is given, the one from Moses, and the other from Isaiah. In the first the Spirit of prophecy intimates, that, in sacred learning, the Jews would far excel the Gentiles, who, in comparison with them, are described as having no wisdom, and as unworthy to be accounted a people; yet declares, that these fools would obtain the right hand of them as to the true knowledge of God, and access to his favour, and so provoke them to jealousy. In the second it is declared, that this knowledge, with its attendant blessings, would be bestowed on them that were no way in quest of it. The two answers run thus: "First, Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Though the Jews then eagerly studied the Scriptures, and had all the knowledge of them that the utmost of human zeal and sagacity could lead them to, yet all their knowledge only prompted them the more to gainsay and disobey the great scope and end of the law and the prophets.\*

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\* The like may be seen in our own time. I shall just point at a recent instance. In a late *Harmony of the Four Gospels*, we can easily see the abilities of the commentator, and of the critic: but at the same time we find all these abilities employed to hide from our eyes the grand purpose for which the four gospels were written; to set aside the grand peculiarity of the Divine grace, by insinuating suppositions and deceitful glosses on the facts and sayings wherein that grace most eminently

The design of the passage is plainly to show, that faith comes not by any human endeavours, or the use of any means, even under the greatest advantages that men can enjoy, but of that same sovereign good pleasure which provided the grand thing believed. Paul himself, while, with great heaviness of heart, he declares the rejection of his brethren who believed not, and considers them as anathematized, or accursed from Christ, is far from glorying over any of them. For in the bosom of the sentence wherein he bewails them, he declares, that had he been left to his own former wish and choice,† he had remained in that dreadful condition wherein he now perceives them to be. All his former zeal and knowledge served to attach him to what he saw his brethren now with regret persisting in.

As the Christian teachers, for the most part, differ from the Jewish only in style, so the directions given by both have the same effect on the mind of the hearer; for it is much the same whether he be prompted to exert acts of faith, or do the works of the law, in order to justification. The very nature of his exercise in either case must serve greatly to disaffect his mind to the saving truth, which shows that all his endeavours can only serve to aggravate his guilt.

Still it must be said, that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This is the only mean which God makes use of for making men wise unto salvation. And his sovereignty appears not a little in the conveyance of his word to nations and particular persons. The gospel is called μαρτυριον ιδιου καιροϋ, a testimony exhibited in his own times.

shines. I have already given an instance of the author's manner of treating the *facts*, in a former quotation concerning the thief on the cross. For his manner of treating the *sayings*, see how he comments on Matt. chap. xi, near the close, particularly this saying, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*; and this other, *Come unto me, all ye that labour, &c.*

\* Κομ. ix, 3 Η γορευ γαρ αυτος εγω αναθεμα ειναι απο του Χριστου: *For I myself was wishing to be an anathema from Christ.* Let these words be read as a parenthesis, and then Paul's lamentation over the Jews will run easily thus: *I have great sorrow, and continual heaviness in my heart, ( ) for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh.* Thus Paul, in the bosom of his lamentation, gives the reason of it, *viz.* That he beheld with sorrow his kinsman anathematized from Christ: for the reason of his sorrow is no where else intimated in the passage. And he intimates it in such a manner, as to show that he is far from glorying over them;—that he was as deeply guilty as any of them;—and that it was in no respect owing to his wish or choice, that he was now happily delivered from that dismal condition wherein he with sorrow beholds them involved.



Now it shines in one region, and leaves another in darkness : then it takes its residence in the latter, and forsakes the former ; and thus takes its course through all nations in different ages, as the lightning shining from under one part of heaven to the other. Wherever God purposes to save men of any nation, thither he sends his gospel in his proper time. Paul and Silas essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not. And they were directed by a heavenly vision to go into Macedonia, where the word of the Lord had free course and was glorified. Paul met with great opposition when he came to Corinth, but the Lord encouraged him to continue there: *For (said he) I have much people in this city.*

In Christian countries, the people are generally taught to make the same use of the Scripture as the bulk of the Jews did ; that is, to learn how they may work the works of God in order to justification. Yet it is a great blessing to mankind to have the Scripture among them. By means of it, God will bring to the knowledge of the truth all whom he intends to save, in spite of all the arts of the teachers. And when any diligent votary of the popular doctrine, is overcome by the evidence of the sacred truth, he will find himself, like Paul, happily delivered from that path wherein his former zealous wish and choice led him to walk.

I would be far from refusing even to the popular preachers themselves, what they so much grudge to others, the benefit of the one instance of an hardened sinner's finding mercy at last : for I know no sinners more hardened, none greater destroyers of mankind than they. Now, let us suppose, that one of these, after having spent half a century in perverting the gospel to the ruin of himself and his hearers, is busily employed in studying, for the usual entertainment of his audience, to accommodate some part of the gospel to his favourite scheme.—The text proves too hard for him.—He is diffculted.—He is perplexed.—He sweats in vain.—It will not do.—The glory and excellency of the work of Christ, which he had been all his life labouring to throw a veil over, arises in his view in full opposition to all the heartwork he had been preaching up.—He is ashamed and confounded, yet filled with wonder at the glorious exchange.—He comes forth to his congregation, acquaints them in the fulness of his heart, That he and they had hitherto been walking in the broad way to destruction, the blind leading the blind, &c. What must be the effect ? No less than such a revolution as happened in the synagogue of Nazareth. Yea, if the laws and

manners of the country allowed, I dare say the devout people would tear him in pieces, if they did not conclude he had gone distracted.

I shall close this letter with observing, that though the intricacies of error be endless, yet nothing is more simple than the gospel; and its simplicity is one great reason why it is so much despised.

I am, &c.

#### POSTSCRIPT.

THAT we may have the fewer points to attend to in the next letter, I would here subjoin, by way of postscript to this, some reflections on the *assurance* or *appropriation* said to be essential to saving faith.

While various terms and distinctions are coined by popular preachers on this subject, great neglect is shown to a very plain and obvious distinction, which Paul makes betwixt the *assurance of faith*, and the *assurance of hope*.

The expression used by the Apostle is *plerophory*. Our translators render it sometimes *assurance*, and sometimes *full assurance*. I am content with either; but would incline to use a single expression, as our translators have found themselves obliged to do in 1 Thess. i, 5; where, to avoid the impropriety of saying *much full assurance*, they have contented themselves with saying *much assurance*. At any rate, the Apostle's expression is plainly opposed to all doubting; yet that assurance may be deemed greatest which has the greatest trials to withstand.

There is this remarkable difference betwixt the assurance of faith and the assurance of hope, that when men first become possessed of the former, they obtain it without their using any endeavours in search of it; for it comes to them unsent for, as it did to the Thessalonians; whereas, the assurance of hope is enjoyed only by those who give all diligence to obtain it.

The first of these was called for in a man's first profession of the faith, upon his first hearing the gospel, in order to his being acknowledged for a Christian. So Philip said to the Eunuch desiring baptism, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayst." To which the Eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This same assurance was professed by the apostles. For when Jesus called upon them to profess their faith, they said, "We believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the

living God." However insignificant this faith be now reckoned, yet Jesus declared that flesh and blood had not revealed it, but the heavenly Father. And the apostles have assured us, that all who agreed with them in this had equally precious faith with them. The assurance of faith is likewise necessary to the drawing near to God in his worship. See Heb. x, 22.

The assurance of hope again, is an enjoyment proposed to them who believed and had already begun the Christian race, which they were called to follow after, and give all diligence to obtain, in the work and labour of love, shown to the name or revealed character of God, in ministering to the saints. The assurance of hope, then, holds pace, first and last, with the work and labour of love. If love cools, hope languishes. If the former is fervent, the latter is joyful. There was no Christian, however eminent, in the days of the apostles, but needed the exhortation, to give all diligence for maintaining and confirming the assurance of hope; even as there was no Christian so far advanced, but he still needed to attend to the exhortation, "Follow after charity."

Among those who professed the gospel, so were acknowledged for Christians, the apostles made it highly criminal, for any man to re-examine the faith, or call in question the truth; yet they often called on men to examine themselves, and to be very cautious how they concluded that their state was changed; yea, that they ought not to conclude they were Christians on the same grounds by which others were bound to love them as such, seeing every man is best acquainted with the spring or motive of his own actions. It was a crime in their followers to examine the faith, but their duty to examine whether they were in the faith. No man, then, can be charged with the sin of disbelieving the gospel, for doubting if he be a good Christian, if Christ died for him, or if he be one of the elect; all of these having the same import. For his chief hazard lies on the other side, seeing self-conceit naturally leads every man to judge too favourably of himself. Yea, we find the apostles ready to quash the confidence of those who were too ready to conclude their state was changed, by such awful sentences as this: *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Now, it ought to be attended to, that no professor of the faith can form a proper judgment of his state, merely by "poring on his own heart," and examining whether his religious thoughts be of the right kind or not: for if he is not engaged

in the practice of the peculiar precepts of Christianity, or in doing those works which are the proper fruits of faith, he has no occasion for self-examination, as there is in that case no room for any doubt concerning his state. But as men may be engaged in the practice of the same works from very different motives, of which every man's own conscience is best judge, a field is hereby opened for self-examination. And it must be owned, that it is much easier for one to form a proper judgment of his motives of action, or the springs of his habitual practice, than of those thoughts which have no immediate connection with the correspondent works: for men very readily deceive and impose upon themselves, as to the mere thoughts or impressions that pass through their hearts. And nothing is more common than to hear men, on whose practice the gospel has very little or no influence, expressing excellent sentiments, and talking freely of the good impressions that have been made on their hearts.

There is another thing to be considered with regard to *assurance*. The apostles frequently declare their assurance of faith and of hope in the same passage. While they express their faith in Christ, they are, at the same time, confident of their interest in him. This joint assurance they sometimes express in fellowship with all who follow their footsteps, and often in language plainly distinguishing the apostles themselves from other professors of the faith. In John's first epistle, the apostles are often distinguished. It begins with what was peculiar to them. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life," &c. And it proceeds thus, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.—And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, &c.—We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death, &c.—We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us, &c.—Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, &c.—And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life: and this life is in his Son.—We know that we are of God," &c.

Jesus Christ said to his apostles, before he left the world, John xiv, 15—18, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another



Comforter, that he may abide with you forever: even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." Jesus Christ declares, that the Holy Spirit already dwelt with his apostles, as the Spirit of truth, even as the soul and meaning of what they confessed, when they said, *We believe and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* This Spirit, who was soon to be sent as the Comforter, he says, the world cannot receive; because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, as being ignorant of, and disaffected to the truth whereof he is the Spirit. But to his apostles he says, *Ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you;* that is, ye know him, because ye know the truth whereof he is the Spirit. He already dwelleth with you as the Spirit of truth, and shall hereafter be in you as the Comforter. The Spirit, as the Comforter, was not given till Jesus was glorified. Moreover, the promise of the Comforter is only to Christ's friends, doing whatsoever he commands, and patiently bearing the hatred of the world on his account.

The Spirit of the truth is at first found of them that seek him not, when men, in the course of their alienation from God, are surprised and overcome by the evidence of the truth. The same Spirit, acting as the Comforter, is given only to those who are already the friends of Christ, obeying his commands, to assure them that they are his friends. To this purpose Paul says, Gal. iv, 6, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

<sup>1</sup> THE Holy Spirit, then, acts a twofold part, as he breathes in the gospel. He reconciles enemies, and he comforts friends. And in either case, he speaks not of himself, but he glorifies Christ.\*

In the former case, he acts as the soul of that truth, which

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\* To what is above said, it may be added, that he never speaks one word or sentence to any particular person, beyond what is written in the Scripture. Nor does he ever apply to any person's case, any written sentence, unsuitably to the genuine scope of all the Scriptures. And who can think it incredible, that God should thus correspond with men? May not the Deity correspond with men by means of the words of a written book now, as well as he did by various other signs of old? Yea, nothing is more common, than for men to communicate their temper and spirit to each other by speech or writing.

opens at once a door of reconciliation for the most wicked of mankind, and has no respect to any difference or distinction among them. In the latter case, he acts as the soul of those consolatory friendly sayings, which Christ left behind him on the earth, before he ascended to heaven, and by which he proposed to correspond with his friends in his absence from them. So that when men are led, by love to the bare truth, to glory in it alone before God and men, to suffer patiently the loss of all things for its sake; yea, when they are cast off at all hands, hated of all men for the sake of Christ's name, the Holy Spirit encourages them to endure to the end. He brings to their remembrance the consolatory words which Christ left for the comfort of his friends; and, speaking in the person of Christ, says, *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you, &c.* And thus he acts as the Comforter, according to the promise of Christ, who said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

The apostles assure us, from their own experience, that Christ did not fail to make good his promise: For, say they, as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And they assure all believers, that the same consolation shall be enjoyed by them, in the enduring of the same sufferings.

Many, by means of some motions they say they have found in their hearts, are fond to advance their claim to the same consolation with the apostles, while yet they feel no inclination to walk in their footsteps. Many are proud to join in the triumph, who have no taste for the warfare. The apostles found it necessary to repel the too forward pretensions of many such men, even in their own days. What, then, shall we say of those pretenders to the apostolic consolation, whose very profession of Christianity, instead of being any loss to them, spreads their reputation for piety, and procures them esteem and reverence from the world?

In latter times, not a few have, from the hand of church-authority, supported by secular power, endured the same sufferings which the apostles met with from the Jews and Romans, and accordingly enjoyed the same consolation. It was very natural for such of them as were writers, to commend the faith, which thus wrought by love, and was accordingly crowned with remarkable consolation, in opposition to the dead, fruitless, and comfortless faith of their adversaries.

What if some of these, who, in the course of their suffering

for Christ, were assured of their being his friends, having their eye chiefly on what they then experienced, unwarily supposed, that this assurance was in the nature of saving faith? What if, after having, at the risk of all that was dear to them in the world, maintained the work of Christ to be the sole requisite to justification, in proceeding to discourse of faith, they often chose to consider it as a principle of life and action; and accordingly studied to distinguish it from counterfeits, by describing it in connection with its genuine fruits and effects, in order to guide professors of the faith in their self-examination?—And what if, not having their eye at once on all the arts by which the truth might be undermined, they did not, on every occasion, sufficiently attend to all the apostolic distinctions about faith? What is to be inferred from hence? I say. Shall we say, that these friends of Christ would have approved that assurance of an interest in him, which men now pretend to acquire by some heartwork, in a full consistency with their worldly ease and reputation?

Would we not consult their true honour more, in presuming, that, had their lives been prolonged, they would have proceeded as they began, searching the Scriptures, and thence arming themselves, on the right and left hand, against the various arts by which they saw the truth opposed or undermined? Yea, may we not presume, that it would have moved their indignation, to see men more forward to adopt and reverence their mistakes and inadvertencies, than to imitate the spirit and temper which breathed in their lives? It is no new thing to see the memory of men, who have been for some time dead, through various mistakes and prejudices held in veneration by the genuine offspring of those who undervalued and opposed them when alive.

The doctrine of justification by the works of Christ alone, did indeed lead many to fellowship with the apostles in the same sufferings and joy. But zeal for this doctrine was soon cooled in the minds of many who professed it, by being joined together with another kind of zeal, very different from it.—Some eminent teachers of this doctrine, led by such mistakes about the kingdom of God as Jesus timeously checked in his disciples, grew fond of drawing some form of their doctrine over kingdoms and states. And we know, that all zeal for national reformation, if successful, naturally tends to the worldly advantage and honour of the chief promoters thereof; and so to dazzle their eyes with the prospect of something else, than fellowship with Christ in reward of his sufferings.

By the time that the famous controversy with Arminius arose, it appears, that many were in readiness to take part with that learned opposer of the truth. And it would seem, there were but few who opposed him on the same footing with Gomarus, who was chiefly concerned about the ground of acceptance with God, as he understood it to be affected by that controversy. The greater part of disputants chose to make the controversy turn upon another hinge, contending about grace and freewill, and what influence these had in the conversion of a sinner. It may be maintained by some, that conversion is carried on by grace assisting nature, and by others, that this matter is conducted wholly by irresistible grace; and yet both sides may be equally disaffected to that doctrine, which maintains the work finished by Christ on the cross, to be the only requisite to justification. The controversy about grace and freewill, as managed by many on both sides, has as little to do with the revealed ground of acceptance with God, as the philosophical dispute about liberty and necessity. And I may add, that while many Christian teachers maintain, that no man can be eminently virtuous without Divine energy, they say no more than heathen philosophers have said before them.

But as I would judge it highly impertinent, so it is far from being my design, to burden our plea with the weight of any names, however venerable, but those of the apostles; by whose decision alone we must all be tried. I only mention this controversy, in order to introduce what I have said before: That

“The consequence of this change of the Arminian controversy, from that way wherein Gomarus held it was a great alteration in the strain of preaching amongst the most zealous Calvinists. For in place of free justification by God’s grace, through the redemption that is in Christ’s blood, much insisted on by the reformers against the Roman Church, even as it had been before by the apostles against the Jews and Judaizing Christians, labouring more in setting forth the revealed righteousness to be believed against every thing opposed to it, than in any descriptions of the exercise of the mind and heart in believing; they now began to insist much more in their sermons on free electing grace, but especially on the efficacious power of that grace in the conversion of the elect, working unfeigned faith in them, and turning them to God in a sincere repentance; and when this took the place of the answer of a good conscience toward God by Christ’s resurrection, as the spring of Christian religion, it was attended



with large descriptions, how a man should find himself under the operation of that free and efficacious grace, calling him effectually, regenerating, and converting him to receive Christ by a true faith, and to repentance unto life; while the things set forth in these descriptions were not things accompanying salvation, like the work and labour of love, the fruit of faith in the blood of the Son of God shed for the remission of sins. The effect of this strain of doctrine, upon them that hearken to it, was, their seeking peace with God, and rest to their consciences, by what they might feel in themselves, the motions of their hearts, and the exercises of their souls, in compliance with the call to faith and repentance, under that efficacious operation of grace, which they hoped to find in using those means, whereby they supposed it to be conveyed: or if they could persuade themselves that they had found it, then they looked on themselves as already converted, and in a state of favour with God; comforting themselves against the fears of losing the Divine favour again, by the inamissibility of grace, or the perseverance of the saints.

“But, however different this be from the doctrine of Arminius, concerning electing and converting grace and perseverance; yet it comes to the very same thing with him at last, as to the grand point of the justification of a sinner before God. For whether the Pharisee in the parable, opposing himself to the publican, as more fit for acceptance, did thank God in whole, or in part, for what he was in distinction from him and other sinners; yet his confidence in coming before him for acceptance, was in what he found himself to be, and in what he did, either by the necessary assistance of God’s common grace, or by the efficacious operation of his special grace, working all in him irresistibly. How opposite to this is the publican’s way of coming before God, finding nothing about himself but what makes him the object of the Divine abhorrence, and having no better thing to say of himself, than that he is a sinner, and so a meet object for the Divine mercy and grace, justifying freely through the propitiation for sin, set forth to declare the Divine justice in justifying the ungodly? He has no other ground of confidence but that, in appearing before God, nor anything else to encourage him to hope for his favour and acceptance with him. And so his address to God is in these words: *God be propitious to me a sinner. Now, he went down to his house justified rather than the other.*”

LET us now make some comparison betwixt the assurance

of the Divine favour enjoyed by the first Christians, and that assurance which is contended for by moderns. The former proceeded on the joy which men found in the simple truth, while they obeyed it from the heart, and patiently suffered for it. The Holy Spirit, whom God gives to them who obey him, assured their hearts, that their joy was not the joy of the hypocrite, but the beginning of eternal life. And thus their joy was made full. Their love was perfected by the highest enjoyment it was capable of in this mortal state; and perfect love, says the Apostle John, casteth out fear. The modern assurance again proceeds on this principle, That the simple truth believed, affords no joy nor comfort. The simple truth is represented as comfortless, in order to show the necessity of this assurance.

Yet, however lightly some talk of the bare persuasion of the truth, every man who has been thoroughly pinched with the impossibility of hope on every other side, will find therein a refreshment to his mind, far superior to all the comforts he ever tasted in life before. Will the news of a plenteous importation of corn, in the time of famine, give joy to many ready to perish, and revive even the poorest with the hope that they may be fed? will it give new life to those suffering shipwreck, to hear that relief is hastening to them? will the inhabitants of any city rejoice, in hearing that a great and liberal prince is to take his residence among them? are men greatly comforted on many such occasions in life, while yet no man knows certainly but his present day may be his last? and shall it give no joy to rebels against the Sovereign of the universe, to hear that it is found consistent with the honour of all the laws of his kingdom, and the highest glory of the Sovereign, to admit even the most obnoxious among them to be his friends and favourites? Surely it will; and surely so it has done in all ages. Many, on hearing this, have become quite ashamed of their former rebellion; have been led to love the Sovereign, and encouraged to do those things that are well pleasing in his sight, and have accordingly known what it was to stand in his presence, and have their joy made full in beholding the light of his countenance.

Let us now see what this modern assurance is, that would look out of countenance the comfort arising from the bare persuasion of the truth. If we attend to the description of it given by its friends, we shall find it turn out to be a doubtful, fearful, and diffident assurance. Its friends, indeed, often dress it out to us in a very bold attitude, and mark *assurance* on its front. But we must remember, that here, as almost every

where else, their doctrine is double; for when they come to their secondary or more particular description of it, it is found to be inwardly full of doubts, fears, and diffidence. And however diffident the convert be, he is still supposed to be possessed of some degree of assurance, provided he blame himself for the want of it. As Paul said of his popular antagonists, *Neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh;* so it may be said in this case, Neither do they who boast of this assurance, enjoy the favour of God; but they would hereby allure men, that they may glory in having them for their followers.

When we look into the professions of this assurance, which are set before us as genuine patterns of it, we shall be greatly disappointed, if we expect to find in them anything like certainty, as to the great point aimed at. The convert must have some preacher or devout friend to draw the assured conclusion for him: yea, it would seem it is scarce thought sufficiently modest or decent for him to draw it boldly himself. And indeed his conscience, while it retains any feeling, must be a great check to his presumption. However, people are generally ready enough to support one another by mutual flattery in this case. The profession of Neophytus, formerly quoted, ends thus: "Now, therefore, though I be somewhat fearful, yet am I resolved to go unto Christ; and if I perish, I perish." Theron likewise complains to the last of his remissness and inactivity to draw the desired conclusion and say, "O that I may arise, and with the Divine assistance shake off this stupor of unbelief!" &c. The boasted assurance, then, as it appears in the approved professions of it, turns out to be a timid resolve, joined with a fond conjecture; or we may say, it amounts to a fond presumptuous wish, greatly embarrassed with doubts and difficulties. However, the teachers are ready not only to sympathize with such converts in their remissness to believe, but also to assure them in the strongest terms of their eternal salvation, because they find them willing to do their best.

Yet we are not to imagine, that these converts, in consequence of all this, proceed, leading their lives under an assurance or sense of the Divine favour. Yea, the teachers, well knowing that in fact the case stands far otherwise, have various expedients in readiness to keep them from being discouraged under the disappointment. They distinguish betwixt the assurance of faith, and the assurance of sense, &c. But the most notable expedient is their doctrine of *desertions*;

according to which, one of their converts may live for many years together under a certain kind of assurance, that he is a child and favourite of God, and yet continue all the while without any sense of his favour. For, according to their manner of allusion to the Scripture, he may continue twenty years betwixt one Bethel-visit and another; yea, he may die without enjoying a second. However, he always meant well; and so he is pronounced happy. What a monstrous scene of iniquity is the popular doctrine! what a blessing were it to many to be undeceived about it!

I shall end this postscript with observing, that when the popular preachers can find no other way of showing their contempt of the simple belief of the truth, as the sole requisite to justification, they call it the *faith of devils*. Yet, however keen the intended reproach be, it can have weight with none, but those who are swayed by sound instead of sense. For, according to the Scripture, the same truth which saves Christ's people, torments the devils. So we find them saying, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" They believe, they hate, and yet they tremble at that truth which Christ's people believe, love, and find salvation in. With them are ranked all those of mankind, who know as much of the truth as inclines them to hate and pervert it, but not so much as to make them love and obey it from the heart: for as to all those it must be said, that the spirit which conducts them blinds their minds, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Yet so much of the evidence of the truth shines into the hearts of many, as to furnish matter of condemnation to them, for their loving darkness rather than the light. In this view the same truth is the savour of life unto life unto some, and of death unto death unto others. In this view the same truth is the object of contempt and chagrin to some, and of love and joy to others. Moreover, according to the Apostle James, let a man make ever so sound a profession of the faith, and talk of ever so many illuminations and experiences, if we find him seeking to pass these upon us as proofs of his being a Christian, without showing his faith in the works of love commanded by Jesus Christ, we may safely repel his confidence, by telling him, *The devils also believe*. We ought, then, to keep our eye on the Scripture, when we hear the popular preachers charging others with the faith of devils and reprobates, lest in agreeing with them, we be found despising the most holy faith, and at the same time obnoxious



to the awful censure of the Apostle James; for their acts of faith serve equally to set aside the precious faith of the apostles, and the works of love, by which that faith is evidenced and perfected.

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## LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

IT is time that I should now, in my turn, contend for acts of faith properly so called; I mean those works which Jesus Christ, in his new commandment, enjoins all who believe on him for righteousness, and by which he would have them known to one another, and to all men for his disciples. And I the rather hope for your favourable attention on this subject, as I have some reason to presume that you have got your bias to the popular doctrine, more from a certain air of piety running through some books, than by observing the avowed temper and conduct of those who are most influenced by it.

We are now, then, to consider faith as a principle of life and action. And here we must carefully distinguish betwixt all works by which men would pretend to acquire faith, and those which faith produces: for if we will contend, that justification comes by faith without works, and that there is no acceptable working but what follows upon this, and yet maintain that faith is acquired by works, we undoubtedly reason in a circle; and the justification thus obtained may justly wear the motto, *Sequiturque sequentem*.\* And, however seriously and devoutly we may be occupied in this kind of reasoning, it is evident that we are employed in nothing else but solemn trick and dissimulation; unless it may be pled in our behalf, that we are imposing on ourselves by the same means by which we impose upon others.

Men are justified by the knowledge of a righteousness finished in the days of Tiberius; and this knowledge operates upon them, and leads them to work righteousness. "If ye know" says the Apostle John, "that he is righteous, ye know

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\* It follows its followers.

that every one that doth righteousness is born of him." Faith is not acquired, but is obtained as Peter says, (*τοῖς λαχοῦσι*) *to them who have OBTAINED BY LOT like precious faith with us.* Of two criminals justly condemned to die, if one escapes by a favourable throw of the dice, and the other dies for his crime, we see mercy in the deliverance of the former, and no injustice in the death of the latter. Two men may be employed with equal diligence in studying the Scripture, and with equal seriousness in praying for Divine assistance; the one may come to know the truth, and the other may grope in the dark all his lifetime. But he who comes to know it, plainly perceives that he has found what he was not seeking after. He plainly sees, that, instead of having taken "the direct and certain way to obtain substantial comfort," his most serious devotion was pointed in direct opposition to what now comforts him: so the new knowledge he has got, sets him to work on another plan, and furnishes him with quite other employment than he was formerly engaged in. God brings men to the faith, without any willing or doing of theirs; yet he continues to work in them by the faith, both to will and to do. Unbelievers obtain faith without working. Believers work together with God.

The sacred truth, which the apostles declared as the import of the ancient prophecies, implied not only that Christ was to be preached unto the Gentiles, and believed on in the world; but also that men would obey him, and accordingly have their joy made full; and so, by way of earnest and foretaste, receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. In both these respects the Holy Spirit bears witness unto the truth. He bears witness to the truth when he persuades men to believe it; and he bears witness to its genuine effects, when he comforts them who obey it. When the apostles found the gospel believed by any of mankind, they saw the arm of the Lord revealed and glorified God on that account; because they knew it was above nature for any man to take in the notion of Divine grace reigning through righteousness to save the worthless, or of God appearing just in justifying the ungodly. Again, we find it greatly increased their delight, and filled their hearts with thanksgiving to God, when they found men joyfully practising the works of self-denied love. In both these respects, then, the gospel daily receives fresh confirmation in the eyes of all who see it believed and obeyed. Thus the word of life is held forth in the world for the mutual confirmation and encouragement of them that believe, and for awakening the attention of unbelievers; serving as a

mean of Divine appointment to lead some to the faith, and to render others inexcusable.

THE change made upon a man by the belief of the gospel, may be thus illustrated. When Lazarus was revived to the enjoyment of this mortal life, neither his will nor his power were concerned in the obtaining of life. Yet his life could no otherwise be continued and enjoyed, but in his voluntary exercise of it. As soon as he revived, the principle of self-preservation, with all its hopes and fears, behooved immediately to be set in motion. No sooner was he possessed of life, than the active love of it behooved to take place. Accordingly, no sooner does any man know the grace of God in truth than love to it takes place in his heart. Love is the activity of that life which a man obtains by faith; for faith worketh by love. No man, then, however sound his profession of the faith may be, can enjoy that life which lies in God's favour, further than he loves God and keeps his commandments. Let a man talk like an angel about the things of God, if he wants this love, he is nothing.

The change made upon a man by the gospel, is called *repentance unto life*. The gospel is always held forth as the great persuasive argument to lead men to repentance. So the Evangelist Matthew informs us, that John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, began to preach, saying, *Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Mark declares the same thing in fewer words, *Repent ye, and believe the gospel*. Peter, preaching the gospel to the Jews, says, *Repent ye therefore*. And Paul declares, that God now commandeth all men every where to repent by the same argument. And he tells us, that the scope of all his preaching was, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. Repentance, then, is the change of a man's mind to love the truth, which always carries in it a sense of shame and regret at his former opposition to it. And he who knows the truth, so as to love it, will daily find occasion for repentance, and so of having his attachment to the truth increased, as finding his daily comfort depending upon it.

Thus he will be more and more set free from the service of sin, and engaged in that of righteousness. And it may be added here, that no man can be assured that his sins are forgiven him, but in as far as he is freed from the service of sin, and led to work righteousness. For we must still maintain, that the favour of God can only be enjoyed in studying to do those things which are well pleasing in his sight. I cannot



pretend to give a similitude that will answer this case in all respects, yet, we may say, if a man of low condition is by a royal patent ennobled, and entitled to a place in the politest assemblies, he cannot enjoy the pleasure of his promotion, but in as far as he loves and studies to learn the manners suitable to his rank and new company. If he delights in the honour conferred upon him, he will naturally be anxious to improve his manners; he will regret his former low breeding, he will readily be touched with shame at finding it so naturally recur upon him, and be sorry at the difficulty he feels in throwing it off; nor will his satisfaction be complete, till his manners are formed.

MOREOVER, this change gets likewise the name of *self-denial*, which is commonly joined with other expressions, importing the prospect and pursuit of supernatural happiness; as when Jesus calls men to deny themselves and follow him; or when he says, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it; or, He that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." In the common course of the world, we often see men change the objects of their fond pursuit, and their conduct in life in many respects greatly influenced, in consequence of some fresh intelligence or new sentiment they have occasionally received. But the change we speak of will be best viewed, as contrasted with its opposite, the fall of man.

For if human nature was at first depraved by impious falsehood, what can be more proper for restoring it than Divine truth? Man had originally a natural sense of dignity, as being made to enjoy dominion, in subjection to and friendship with his Creator. He forfeited his dignity, when his sense of it was corrupted, or when he entertained such a notion of it as emboldened him to throw off his allegiance. That sense of dignity, then, which still remains with men, and encourages them in disobeying the Divine law, as well as despising the gospel, is deceitful, being founded on a lie, even the lie originally instilled, and constantly cherished in human nature by the father of falsehood. This lie is the root of all ungodliness and inhumanity; the root of all disobedience to God, and of all the mutual hatred and variance among men. Every man imagines, there is at bottom some excellency about his own self, on account of which he thinks it would be a reflection against the goodness of the Deity, to conclude



that misery should be the certain consequence of his following the bent of his inclinations.

This lie works by pride, even as faith works by love.—Pride, with all its subservient passions, is the exercise of that life which men live in opposition to God. Every man cherishes his favourite lie, as the dearer half of himself, and hates every ray of light that tends to undeceive him about it; yea, the very principle of self-preservation leads him to do so; for this lie being the hinge of his pride, so the very centre of his life, he cannot part with it, but at the rate of falling headlong into despair and death.

The gospel alone can comfortably undeceive men, and effectually cut the sinews of their pride, by bringing them a report concerning foreign worth, sufficient to entitle them to a much more glorious life than that which was forfeited by transgression. He, then, who knows the gospel, so as to love it, may well be said to deny himself, and to lose or hate his former life, and to receive the beginning of a better from an unexpected quarter.

But as our constitution was framed for the enjoyment of no other than the forfeited life, and as the life which comes by faith is supernatural, so the Spirit of grace, which bestows it by the words of the gospel, must continue to support it against the natural bias. Hence arises the opposition betwixt nature depraved and grace, betwixt the earthly and the heavenly life, or betwixt the flesh and the spirit, which Paul describes from his own experience, Rom. vii. Here he makes a distinction in some sort as betwixt two persons. Yet he plainly places his proper self, on the side of the supernatural life, which he preferred, inclining to speak of it in the first person, and of the other in the third: which last he in the strongest manner, denies to be life, and accordingly he groans to be delivered from it, as opposing his true happiness.

The life-giving truth lays the only proper foundation among men for that love which is the fulfilling of the law, enjoined in these words, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. For it teaches every one to renounce his favourite distinction, by which he secretly claims the superiority over his neighbour. It furnishes all who believe with one common sense of foreign worth, one common source of life and joy, so leads them to boast and glory only in that which abolishes all differences among them. Thus it teaches them to delight in one another on account of that which is common to them all, by which the pride of none of them can be flattered, and which gives the precedence to none of them above another.

Thus each is taught to love another as himself. Herein lies the exercise of self-denied love.

The Lord's supper shows the unity of Christ's people, and serves as a notable occasion for their enjoying the comfort of love. A company of Christ's disciples must come together to this ordinance, finding nothing, any of them, to recommend him to God, but the sacrifice of Christ. If any of them come to it, not to say hating his brother, but secretly imagining he has anything to give him the preference in God's favour, beyond any of his fellows; or, on the other hand, envying any of them as better qualified than himself, so repining at his own deficiency, he cannot enjoy the comfort of love. He labours under a mistake about the foundation of unity, and the common source of joy.

Self-denied love is best to be seen in Jesus Christ, the spring and pattern of it to all his people. He, having a full and just sense of his natural dignity as God over all, condescended to forego the consideration of his dignity, so as to suffer the extremity of infamy and pain, in the character of the most worthless and most obnoxious, yea, from the hands of such; and what crowns all, that he might raise such to the highest dignity and blessedness for ever! Here is self-denial unparalleled. Here all the glory of the blessed God is manifested. When sinful men come to the knowledge of the truth, so to enter upon the world of realities, they are indeed taught to deny themselves. But what mighty self-denial is this? Why, they are taught to see things as they really are, to deny an untruth, to part with a favourite lie, to renounce a pernicious falsehood. They are called to fellowship with the Son of the Highest, by his voice addressing them thus, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." Yet the Son of God is pleased to call it self-denial in us thus to learn of him. He is pleased to call it conformity to and imitation of himself, and to connect with it a great reward in heaven. What a great value does he put on our condescension, if it deserve to be called so, how little we on his!

THE change made on men by the gospel is likewise called *conversion, regeneration, new creation, or the new creature*; "putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man; walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit," &c. But whatever name be given in Scripture to this change, no man can warrantably say, he has undergone it on account of any impressions or motions whatsoever he has found in his heart; for great illuminations may take place, and yet not accompany

salvation. Yea, even as to all the genuine effects and proofs of faith, we must still say with Peter, "If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things, is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall," &c. Jesus, who had connected blessedness with the good profession his disciples had made of the faith, afterwards, on the appearance of their pride, addresses them in this manner: *Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Therefore, they who have made the best profession of the faith, are still to be called to repentance, still to be put in mind of the necessity of conversion. The apostles themselves could have no further evidence that they belonged to Christ, than as they were daily influenced by the same temper of mind that appeared in him.

When once the saving truth is admitted in the conscience of any man, it becomes, as it were, a new *instinct* in him, encouraging him to draw near to God, providing him with an answer to the condemning voice of the law, which haunted his conscience before, and opposing the natural pride of his heart, in the exercise of which he formerly lived. By this instinct, he is led to desire the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby. And he arrives at the proper consciousness and enjoyment of life, when he comes to full age, "and by reason of use, has his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. All the exhortations, commands, and institutions of the gospel, are directed to consciences endued with this instinct, and are, in a peculiar manner, adapted for the service thereof. So the Apostle John, recommending the new commandment of mutual love among Christians, says, I have not written unto you, because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. The whole Christian church order was framed for cherishing this instinct. By this Christians know and love one another. And it is their business, in all their assemblies, to fortify one another in the knowledge and love of the truth, in opposition to every lie, or lest any of them be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The truth of the gospel is always the great argument on which every call to working and doing proceeds. Here, then, let all the passages of Scripture which call for any activity on

our part, have their force. And let us no more be blindfolded with the notion of some ambiguous endeavouring and working, or labouring to exert acts, which are denied to be proper works required by the Divine law. Here, I say, let all these commands have their full and proper force; "Strive to enter in at the straight gate, &c. Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, &c. Work out your own salvation," &c. The apostles deduce every motive to obedience from the truth. If they call men to liberality in almsgiving, they remind them of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, became poor, that we through his poverty might be enriched. If they exhort them to mutual forgiveness, they remind them of the Divine forgiveness for Christ's sake. In short, they enforce their exhortations to every deed of self-denied love, by some consideration drawn from the Divine love, as manifested in Christ Jesus.

If there were no counterfeits of the truth, so neither of faith; and if every man spoke as he thought, then so soon as any man made the Christian profession, he might be assured of his eternal salvation; seeing it must still stand true, that "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." But the case is far otherwise: therefore every man must examine himself, and prove his own work, that he may have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in the friendly esteem which his brother is bound to have for him.

Men may be employed in the same actions, professing the same principles, and yet be influenced by very different motives. Paul says, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him?" that is, however narrowly I may observe the conduct of another man, I may be mistaken about his secret intention and leading design.

Every man's own conscience is best judge of the secret spring of his actions. Now, the Apostle John, speaking of obedience to the new commandment of love, says, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God;" that is, if, notwithstanding our natural bias against the gospel, with its remaining effects giving us daily disquiet, our heart condemn us not as destitute of love to that truth which the world hates, then have we confidence toward God, even as much confidence as the testimony of our own conscience can give us. For we are here supposed to judge of ourselves, not by the good opinion others have of us, but by the sober verdict of our own conscience in the sight of God. Such a testimony of one's own conscience must give no small confidence. Yet this is but one witness, and needs to be supported.



For in this case one may be liable to doubts, lest even his own conscience should be partial in his favour.

Here, then, the Spirit of the truth, who never fails to bear witness to the genuine effects thereof, gives his testimony as a second witness supporting the former. Thus Paul, after he had said, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" adds, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." And this he does, by shedding abroad in the heart such an abundant sense of the Divine love, as leaves no room for, so casts out, the anxious fear of coming short of life everlasting. Thus that love to the truth, which formerly wrought in the way of painful desire, attended with many fears, is perfected by being crowned with the highest enjoyment it is capable of in this mortal state. So this "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; whereas, he that feareth is not made perfect in love."

Jesus Christ, who loved his father with a perfect heart, even while sorrowful unto death, received the highest proof of his being the beloved Son of God, when being exalted at the Father's right hand, and being made most blessed with the sense of his love, he experienced fulness of joy in his presence. The report of this draws them who believe it to love him, and suffer for his sake. To such Jesus Christ promised fellowship with him in his fulness of joy; John xv, 10, 11; "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Now, they who partake of this joy, receive the highest evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the beloved Son of God. They know, that he is the Christ, or anointed with the oil of joy and gladness, by partaking with him in the same anointing. Thus, their faith is greatly confirmed, or rather perfected, by a kind of presence of its object; thus their love is joyfully inflamed; and thus they obtain the assurance of hope, by having in themselves an experimental foretaste of what will be their eternal enjoyment. The assurance of faith, then, arises from the evidence carried in the Divine testimony to the consciences of the ungodly; the assurance of hope arises from experience in the hearts of them that love God, and keep his commandments.

THE difference betwixt faith and experience is often pointed out in the New Testament; John viii, 31, 32, "Then said

Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They already believed, so had that assured knowledge of the truth which arises from the evidence of report or testimony. But Jesus gives them to understand, that in their continuing in his word, it would be manifest they were his disciples indeed; and they should receive an experimental knowledge of the truth, by enjoying the freedom of children in the family of God. Jesus Christ calls all who believe on him to follow him in patient suffering for his sake, and he promises to comfort them in so doing. Speaking of the comforts he will bestow, he says, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

It is evident, then, that they who, depending on the promise of Christ, run all hazards for his sake, and accordingly enjoy the promised comfort, must, by means of this experience, have their joy and confidence in the truth greatly enlarged. They now find by experience the truth of what they formerly believed on testimony. They know their connection with Christ, and so have the assured hope of reigning together with him.

Paul, declaring how Christians rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and even glory in tribulations, describes the matter thus: "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." When Abraham believed God, and that which he believed was imputed to him for righteousness, he had the assurance of faith, before it was put to the great trial of offering up his son. But in this trial he obtained a kind of sight of what he believed and hoped for. He saw the day of Christ, and was glad. He saw in a figure, the death and resurrection of Christ. So the Apostle James says, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." The same Apostle likewise says, "The trying of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

The assurance of hope, then, is founded on experience of

the love of God, and always holds pace with it; even as that experience is founded on the self-denied labour of charity, and always holds pace with it; and I may add, even as the self-denied labour of charity is founded on the simple belief of the truth, and always holds pace with it. So that, if either more or less than the simple truth of the gospel be admitted in the heart of any man as the ground of acceptance with God, if either more or less than the bare persuasion of the truth be admitted as requisite to justification, the whole superstructure of the Christian practice and consolation is effectually undermined and overthrown. Neither more nor less than the bare persuasion of the truth can give birth to the genuine works of love; and to these alone the Holy Ghost bears witness as the Comforter.

The Scripture always maintains the connection of these things. So Paul, "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." The simple truth alone can quiet the sense of guilt, and furnish a man with the answer of a good conscience toward God, or give that perfection of the conscience which the same Apostle says could not be obtained by the legal sacrifices. And thus alone the heart is purified from evil affections, and fitted for abounding in the work of charity. They alone, who being led by the evidence of the truth to submit to it, so had their hearts purified, not only by a taste of forgiveness for past offences, but also by the prospect of greater objects for interesting their affections than those which influence worldly lusts: they alone, I say, were fit to perceive the force of the apostolic exhortations to abound in charity. So Peter says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

The greatest saints on earth, when disquieted with the sense of guilt, or fear of condemnation, can no otherwise find relief, but by the same truth that relieved them at first when sitting in darkness, and under the shadow of death: even the same truth that relieved the thief on the cross. When Paul was in distress of mind, he heard nothing from Jesus Christ to relieve him, but these words, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And by these words he was relieved effectually. When John, in the Isle Patmos, was ready to die for fear, on having a vision of the Divine glory, Jesus Christ did not comfort him by reminding him of his apostolic labours, of his being the

beloved disciple, nor of his presently suffering banishment for his sake; but he said unto him, "Fear not: I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore," &c. He encouraged him, by reminding him of the same truth which encourages the worst of mankind when they first understand it.

The greatest saint cannot be relieved from the pain occasioned by the conviction of sin, by imagining there is anything about him on account of which it becomes God more readily to forgive him than the most profane of mankind. Yea, nothing can be more opposite to every degree of religious pride, than the assurance of hope itself; for it proceeds on the consciousness of loving from the heart that very truth which asserts the Divine sovereignty in the strongest manner, and sets at nought every distinction on account of which any one of mankind can glory over another.

No man, then, by enjoying the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, can find any ground for being less afraid of sinning, or of its consequences, than he was before; for he no sooner indulges an evil affection, or any thought opposite to charity, than he loses that enjoyment. Paul supposes that men who have tasted of this enjoyment, may, by indulging the passions opposite to charity, grieve the Holy Spirit, and so lose that enjoyment. So he says, Eph. iv, 30, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." They who thus grieve the Holy Spirit, must find mercy and forgiveness in the same way as at the first. And their love must be left to work in the way of painful desire and fear, till it be again crowned with enjoyment and so perfected.

No confessor of the Christian faith can find any ground in the Scripture to think, with the popular doctrine, that his sins are less displeasing to God than those of other men; that they expose him less to the Divine wrath, or make him less obnoxious to the curse of that law which saith, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." If any man imagines, on account of some acts of faith he has exerted, that his sins expose him only to some fatherly chastisements in this life, and not to the curse of the Divine law, and the wrath to come, he is ignorant both of the gospel and of the true God. A believer can find ease to his guilty conscience only by that truth which relieves the most openly profane. If he seek it any other way, he ceases to be a believer; or rather it appears he never was one, however just a title he had to the name from others.



The language of Christians runs thus: "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us hold the grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." Not according to the jargon of the popular doctrine, "A God out of Christ is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity," or those deemed the unconverted. For Christians are at full liberty to deny that there is any such God, as also the *Absolute God* much talked of in sermons.

The assurance of hope is obtained by means very opposite to those prescribed by the popular doctrine for the improvement of its votaries. When the saving truth first shines into the hearts of men, the effect is suitable to the Divine promise, Jer. xxxii, 40, *I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.* This fear dwelling in their hearts, checks and recalls them when ready to be utterly led away by their former evil inclinations. They are preserved from falling away, by the fear of falling away. Paul says to the Hebrews, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."—Yea, he says of himself, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached the gospel to others, I myself should be a cast-away." Thus they that believe come to be settled in the assurance of hope. Accordingly, Peter prays for the Christians he writes to, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

From the passages of Scripture we have been considering, it is evident, that to have the Holy Spirit, as the Comforter, and earnest of the heavenly inheritance, is an attainment far beyond any influences of the Spirit that are common to those who believe for a time, and those who believe to the saving of the soul; yea, beyond the regenerating work of the Spirit by which men are at first brought to the knowledge of the truth, and taught to love it. So it must be distinguished from any joy or spiritual delight which necessarily attends the obtaining of faith, or its beginning to work by love; because it presupposes the work and labour of love, and the testimony of our conscience, that love is the spring of our work and labour.—Hence, also, we see, that it is vain and absurd to call men to be assured of their being the children of God, when they are not enjoying his Spirit as the Comforter, and much more so when their faith is not working by love.—It is likewise evident, that it cannot further appear that any man

has known the grace of God in truth, than he is led by that knowledge to give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.—It is also plain, that the promise of the Spirit, as the Comforter, is common to all those who follow the faith and practice of the apostles, even as it was uniformly enjoyed by all who walked in their footsteps at the beginning.

Before we go further, the substance of what has been said may be thus shortly summed up. The gospel presents a faithful testimony to be believed, exhibiting an amiable object to be loved, and good things to come to be hoped for. Faith, then, respects the truth of the testimony, love what is amiable in it, and hope the good things in prospect.—Faith comes by the evidence of testimony, and the assurance of hope through faith working by love, to which the Holy Spirit never fails to bear witness as the Comforter.

WE may now proceed to observe, that every claim to peculiar relation to God, that rests not on the Spirit bearing witness as the Comforter to the work and labour of love, serves not only to slacken our diligence in that work and labour, but also to feed our natural pride, which may be more exquisitely gratified in the religious way than in any other; and so to strengthen our inclinations to all the lusts of the world. Men may make as many bold assertions, and urge as many confident questions as they please, in favour of any such claim; but it is very easy to find an answer to them. In *Dial.* 14, vol. 2, p. 270, Aspasio, speaking of his appropriating faith, says,—“Then let me ask, Will this *alienate* your affections from your ALMIGHTY BENEFACITOR! Will this *irritate* evil concupiscence, or send you to carnal gratifications in quest of happiness? Quite the reverse. When this faith is wrought in your heart, nothing will be so powerful to produce holy love and willing obedience; to exalt your desires, and enable you to overcome the world.”

Here I will take the liberty to say in my turn, **QUITE THE REVERSE.** And, accordingly, the case will appear if we attend to matter of fact. The experiment has already been tried in the most advantageous manner; and the effects are recorded for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Were not the Jews very confident of their peculiar relation to God as his children, and full of the fondest expectations from their Messiah? But what was the result? Jesus tells us, *Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.* The appropriating claim was in some degree common to the whole nation, but it was much

improved and carried to a great height by the leaders in devotion, who looked on the more ignorant and profane part of the people as accursed. The more refined appropriation served indeed to form many such eminent characters as the world admire; yea, generally speaking, its votaries were justly respected for having greater regularity of life than their fashionable opponents, the philosophical reasoners, and accordingly had the designation of the *strictest sect*. Yet so the fact turned out; the more men excelled in this way, they proved the more hardened enemies to the true God, and the eternal happiness of mankind.

We may easily see their appropriation imitated in its several degrees in our own age. Is there any sentiment more commonly indulged among us, than, when we think on the wide extent of Pagan darkness, Jewish obstinacy, the delusions of Mahomet, and superstitions of Popery, to reflect with no small self-applause that we are Christians\* and Protestants; so at least in some better terms with the Deity than multitudes of our deluded fellow-creatures, whom we look down upon with a sort of contemptuous pity? Moreover, what an important sound do we hear, when one acquaints us, that he has the honour to be a member or minister of the Church of England, by law established, or of some other church reformed after the best pattern?

But, more particularly, it is common with popular preachers to encourage their hearers to make the more refined appropriation, by reminding them, that they have already some peculiar relation to God, as having been devoted to him in

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\* In the zealous opposition shown to the Jew-bill, it evidently appeared how much we are influenced by the national pride of our Christian character, and that we have thoroughly imbibed the same temper of mind for which the Jews were remarkable in the days of the apostles. But why should this good Christian nation be so much disgusted at Jews, seeing we differ from them only in a few circumstances about time and place? Our leading sentiments and theirs at this day are much the same, as the great majority of pulpits throughout the island can weekly bear witness: let the doctrine delivered from them be only compared with the printed sermon given us last year by Isaac Netto, the Jewish Doctor. Yea, the Jews to this day, notwithstanding the many rubs and disappointments they have met with, still persist in exerting as vigorously as the most forward among us their appropriating acts. I shall only quote a few words from the prayer at the close of the sermon now mentioned. "Take away fear from our hearts, and instead thereof, inspire us with confidence; for thou art our God, our Saviour, and our strength; from thee alone we expect our salvation: that we may offer thee, as a sacrifice, tears of devotion, tears of gratitude, tears of joy and pleasure, drawn from the fountain of salvation."



baptism. They likewise declare, that God hath made a grant of Christ and his benefits more especially to the members of what they call the *visible church*. The people, especially in Scotland, are likewise called to believe, that their land is married to God, and that they are related to God by means of some covenant, which their fathers dictated and swore to, and to which it is confidently supposed the Deity agreed. However, they who can by any means get their hearts wrought up to exert the appropriating act of faith, have by far the ascendant above all others. And the next considerable distinction is betwixt serious souls who are aiming at it, and those who are careless or profane. To the former many comfortable things are said, and the latter are abandoned to mere mercy, as worthless wretches.

Many preachers recommend it as an improvement of their appropriating acts, to put them into form by personal covenanting; and, as a further improvement, not a few exhort the people to join in some shadow of national covenanting, in imitation of the persecuting engagements entered into in the last century. And, indeed, what else were these engagements or covenants, but public appropriating acts of faith? Thus we see how naturally the appropriating acts issue in Spanish or Portuguese acts of faith; yea, they seldom fail to do so when they meet with the much wished for concurrence of men of power and influence. Thus we see that men may, in the height of what they reckon pious devotion, devote themselves to work wickedness in the name of the Lord. And men called Christian have shown themselves abundantly forward to imitate the Jews in this kind of zeal.

But perhaps some will contend, that the Jewish appropriation was not so well founded as our modern imitations of it; and that there is a great difference betwixt reformed orthodox Christians and presumptuous stiff-necked Jews. Yet, if we will attend to the Scriptures, particularly Paul's epistles, we shall find, that the Jewish plea had the advantage much every way. And we shall likewise find, that the sad effect it had upon them, is often set before professors of Christianity for their admonition. Their appropriation was the great spring of all their pride, of all their disaffection to the true gospel, and all their ruin. In like manner, the great corruption of Christianity took place, by its professors zealously imitating the Jews.

But let us see how the plea of the Jews was founded. Paul acquaints us with the grounds of it, while he bewails the effect it had upon them: "I have great heaviness and



continual sorrow in my heart—for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” And he dwells much on the Jewish plea, especially in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, in order to repress the religious pride of professors of Christianity, which he considers as having far less ground to proceed upon than that of the Jews.

The same Apostle likewise reads an awful lesson to the Corinthians, from the more ancient history of his nation. “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these were our examples,” &c. Then, after narrating several of their provocations and punishments, he adds, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. If any fond of nice distinctions shall still insist, that this way of reasoning, from the case of ancient Jews to that of zealous Christians, is not conclusive, and that the cases are not parallel; I shall only say that the reasoning is Paul’s, that the parallel is of his drawing, and that it is solemnly urged home on the consciences of those who had at least as good a title to the Christian name as any can now pretend to.

I SHALL now take notice of a most extraordinary answer given by Aspasio, in *Dialogue* 16, vol. 3, p. 311, to those “who advise us to prove our title to comfort by genuine marks of conversion, and teach us on this column to fix the capital of assurance.” He says, “I would rather propose a question than advance objections. Is not this somewhat like placing the dome of a cathedral upon the stalk of a tulip?” A daring question indeed! Here I make free to propose another in my turn. Is not this somewhat very like talking profanely? And dares the devout Aspasio thus approach so

near to ridiculing the work of the Holy Ghost, as the Comforter, which God hath promised to them that obey him? Who taught him, with such levity and gaiety of expression, to disjoin those things which are so solemnly and inseparably connected throughout the whole New Testament? One would have thought, that his vivacity might have been checked by his friend's reply, reminding him of the apostolic language and practice, which he well says is "left upon record as a pattern for all posterity to copy," *We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* But instead of giving a serious hearing to this weighty argument, he turns it aside, by telling us, that the Apostle's reasoning here is like the form of an inverted cone. "Observe, Theron, the process of the Apostle's reasoning. It is like the form of an inverted cone; where you have first the point, and from thence proceed to the base. So the sacred writer begins with the less, and ascends to the greater proof. He says in one of the following verses, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life,* not merely for sinners, but *for us* in particular.—Here, you see, is assurance by the direct act of faith."

Before we consider the last cited text, it will be proper to observe, how well the former one cited by Theron tallies with the words of Jesus, recorded by the same Apostle in his gospel, John v, 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Here we see how men pass from death unto life. John declares how they come to know this; while plainly pointing at the words of Jesus, he says, "We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." By this proof, men come to know, that the joy they had upon their first believing, was not the joy of the hypocrite, or of those who believe only for a while, but was indeed the beginning of eternal life; and so their joy is made full. By this they came to know that it was the genuine truth of God, and not any human counterfeit or corruption of it, which they at first believed. They know that they have not mistaken the truth, nor believed in vain, as many do, who, on their first profession, make full as promising an appearance as those who believe to the saving of the soul. Thus they receive an additional knowledge and certainty about the truth, in the way of experience, by perceiving that it works effectually in them, producing its genuine effects.

Let us now consider the passage which Aspasio compares to an inverted cone, only premising this much, that as there is more in Christianity than can be seen by the eyes of men inspecting each other, the apostles sustain themselves not only as the standard of the true profession of Christianity, as far as men can observe it in one another's words and actions, but also as witnesses, from their own certain experience, that the comforts promised in the gospel to believers, invariably attend the genuine practice of it. Accordingly, as often as the apostles speak of their interest in Christ and life eternal, or use any language to that effect, we shall find that they either speak of themselves separately, or in conjunction with those only who are possessed of the same unfeigned faith and love with them.

The passage runs thus, 1 John iii, 13, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Which, agreeably to the scope of the whole epistle, may be thus paraphrased at large. "Be not surprised, my brethren, at the contemptible figure you make in the eyes of the wise and devout world. As your brotherhood is not framed to promote any of those ends which they admire, but, on the contrary, serves to gall them in the tenderest part, by undermining all the grounds of boasting which they hold most sacred, it must always appear as despicable to them as did the character of Jesus Christ, the foundation and bond of your union. Your mutual affection for his name's sake, must always provoke the world in like manner, as his name did from the beginning. Marvel not, then, at their hatred, nor be disconcerted at any insults, or other sufferings, you meet with from thence, so as to be thereby shaken or cooled in your love to, or esteem for one another; but rather consider what we, the apostles, by whose ministry ye received the gospel, can assure you of for your encouragement. We ourselves have trod the path we recommend to you, and have found it successful. In obeying Christ's new commandment, we have experienced the promised consolation. And thus *we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* And this enjoyment is no way peculiar to us, but is common to all who are influenced by the same love. We, then, as the chosen pat-

terns to all Christians of the genuine influence and effects of the gospel, as well as the authorized speakers of it, assure you from our own experience, that in obeying the truth we know that we have eternal life. And this we do to encourage you to follow us, and prevent your being imposed upon by any deceivers making high pretensions to friendship with God.—For though all Christians walking in our footsteps enjoy the same consolation with us, yet ye cannot with equal certainty believe any man giving an account of his experience as ye can believe us; for ye know that our testimony is true. And the pretensions of all Christians must still be tried and examined by our standard; and, after all, by this standard must every Christian examine himself. For we are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Now, if any man among you, however eminent in his profession otherwise, *loveth not his brother*, he *abideth in death*. If he love not the brotherhood, or any one of them, for the truth's sake dwelling in them, so be influenced by the aversion which the world bears to them on that account, he is yet a stranger to life eternal: “for whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. But hereby we, who love the brethren, perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” We, who are conscious of the effects and enjoy the fruits of the atonement, know that God first loved us, and had a peculiar regard to us in providing the atonement; so first and last, from that atonement, arises all our knowledge and experience of the love of God. And while we thus perceive God's love to us, in providing the atonement for us, we find our encouragement, as well as obligation, to proceed as we have begun to imitate his love, greatly enforced. We have the most endearing and cogent reason to judge, that *we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*”

The simple belief of the truth, is the only spring of all true holiness, of all love and obedience to God. He who, perceiving the Divine love to sinners of all sorts, without distinction, manifested in the atonement, is thereby led to love the atonement, and the Divine character appearing there, and so to enjoy the promised comfort resulting thence to the obedient, comes at the same time to know his particular interest in the atonement. And thus by happily experiencing the truth of the gospel, he is greatly encouraged to go forward in that course into which he was at first introduced by the evidence of truth appearing to him in the report of the gospel. So he



labours neither first nor last to acquire any requisite to justification ; but all his labour proceeds on the persuasion, that the atonement itself is the sole and all-sufficient requisite to justification. He is likewise sensible, that the atonement is the sole spring of all his self-denied love, and of all the present comfort, as well as future reward connected with it ; so he knows that all his holiness, as well as all his happiness, comes entirely of that grace which provided the atonement, and thus he understands how grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

The merchant who, being encouraged by some credible intelligence Providence has favoured him with from an unexpected quarter, sets out at all hazards on some new branch of traffic, will be greatly animated to proceed, when he finds his labours crowned with success ; and he will always reflect with satisfaction on the happy occasion that first gave him the advantageous hint. But as to all earthly things, it must be owned, that the best founded hopes are often frustrated by accidents, which no human foresight can prevent. And here the excellency of the gospel stands distinguished ; for he who so knows the bare report thereof, as to love it and run all risks upon it, shall in no wise lose his reward. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but he shall not be disappointed.

Before we go further, I would take this occasion to say, that the passages in the Dialogues which appear to me to deserve the greatest censure, are those two, which, in a very confident manner deny, the one, the comfort attending the simple belief of the gospel, and the other, the additional comfort attending self-denied obedience to it. Both these passages are within a few pages of each other, in *Dialogue* 16, vol. 3. The former, in p. 301, puts the strong negative, *No surely*, against any manner of advantage arising to us from the bare persuasion of the truth of the gospel. The latter, in p. 311, compares that assurance of our interest in Christ, which the Scripture every where rests on obedience to his laws, to placing the dome of a cathedral upon the stalk of a tulip. And all this is done in order to rest, I cannot say our comfort, but a good opinion of our state, on what is neither faith nor obedience. For, according to the popular doctrine, men living for a course of years together in unbelief, consequently neither loving the gospel nor enjoying the comfort of it, are allowed to consider themselves all the while as regenerate, provided they have once in their lifetime exerted a certain act.

I SHALL now take some notice of a treatise, highly esteemed by the votaries of the popular doctrine, I mean *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, wrote by Mr. Marshall. I have seen lately, in a third edition of the Dialogues, a very ample commendation of this book, which I cannot quote here at present, not having that edition of the Dialogues beside me. But, if I rightly remember, it is commended as inferior to no book but the Bible. It is divided into fourteen directions.—And one may have a pretty good view of the whole, by looking over *the contents* at the front of the book. This author supposes his unconverted reader, when beginning to be concerned about religion, to propose for his end such an obedience to the Divine law, as may be acceptable to God; and, in order to conduct him in a right manner to this end, he directs him to make use of Christ as the means by which he may be qualified for performing acceptable obedience, and so obtain the desired end. According to this author, then, Christ is not the end of the law for righteousness, but the best means one can make use of for enabling him to perform that righteousness which is the end of the law.

In *Direction 1*, p. 2, *third Edition, Edinburgh, 1733*, he says, “Take notice further, that the *law*, which is your *mark*, is exceeding broad, Psal. cxix, 96.” And after speaking of the extent of the law, he says, “This spiritual universal obedience is the great end, to the attainment whereof I am directing you. And that you may not reject mine enterprise as impossible, observe, that the most that I promise is no more than an acceptable performance of these duties of the law, such as our gracious merciful God will certainly delight in, and be pleased with, during our state of imperfection of holiness, and all happiness in the world to come.” Would not one imagine he were hearing Mr. Locke just now? but to go on with our author, p. 6, “The *second* thing contained in this introductory direction, is the necessity of learning the powerful and effectual means, whereby this great and excellent end may be accomplished, and of making this the *first* work to be done, *before* we can expect success in any attempt for the attainment of it.

“This is an advertisement, very needful because many are apt to skip over the lesson concerning the means, (that will fill up this whole treatise,) as superfluous and useless. When once they know the nature and excellency of the duties of the law, they account nothing wanting but diligent performances; and they rush blindly upon immediate practice, making more haste than good speed.”—p. 7, “That you may not stumble

at the threshold of a religious life, by this common oversight. I shall endeavour to make you sensible, that it is *not* enough for you to know the *matter* and *reason* of your duty; but that you are also to learn the *powerful* and *effectual means* of performance, before you can successfully apply yourselves to immediate practice."

Accordingly, the well disposed reader is led forward to his desired end, in consequence of the same good dispositions that led him to use the means. But why all this round about course?" Why should we seek to repress any man's impetuosity to fulfil the law, who already knows the matter and reason of his duty, and is already acquainted with the nature and excellency of the duties of the law? Why should we retard his course, by entangling him in a labyrinth about the use of means, seeing he may die before he has learned to use them aright, and so never reach his desired end? Methinks it would be much better to direct him to study Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii, where he will find, that all well-disposed persons have as much security for their happiness, as the Divine oath can give. As for the gospel, it was only intended to relieve those ill-disposed people who despair of ever doing anything to render them acceptable to God by any assistance whatsoever. It was never intended to be an auxiliary to those good people who are desirous to give acceptable obedience to the Divine law. All such, wherever they are, shall undoubtedly be happy, without having any occasion to trouble their heads about the gospel. The gospel was never intended to make void the law in any respect; yea, it establishes the law on all sides in the strongest manner.

Let us now observe the use of means to which our author directs. *Direct.* 11, p. 208, "Endeavour *diligently* to perform the great work of *believing* on Christ, in a *right manner*, without *any delay*." Page 209, "The first thing in the present *direction*, is to *put you upon the performance* of this great work of believing on Christ, and to *guide you* therein. For you are to consider distinctly four things contained in it.

"1. The first is, you are to *make it your diligent endeavour* to perform the great work of *believing* on Christ.—Even those who are convinced, that believing on Christ is a duty necessary to salvation, do neglect all diligent endeavours to perform it; either because they account, that it is a motion of the heart which may be easily performed at any time, without any labour or diligent endeavour; or, on the contrary, because they account it as difficult as all the works of the law, and utterly impossible for them to perform, by their most diligent

endeavours, except the Spirit of God work it in them by his mighty power." Page 212, "2. Believing on Christ is a work that will require diligent endeavour and labour for the performance of it. We must labour to enter into that rest." Pag. 215, "3. Though we cannot possibly perform this great work in a right manner, until the Spirit of God work faith in our hearts by his mighty power; yet it is necessary that we should endeavour it, and that before we can find the Spirit of God working faith effectually in us, or giving strength to believe."

Let us next observe our author's account of faith, p. 180, "Let it be well observed, that the reason why we are to assure ourselves in our faith, that God freely giveth Christ and his salvation to us particularly, is not because it is a truth before we believe it; but because it becometh a certain truth when we believe it; and because it will never be true, except we do, in some measure, persuade and assure ourselves that it is so. We have no absolute promise or declaration in Scripture that God certainly will, or doth give Christ and his salvation to any one of us in particular; neither do we know it to be true already, by Scripture, or sense, or reason, before we assure ourselves absolutely of it; yea, we are without Christ's salvation at present, in a state of sin and misery, under the curse and wrath of God. Only I shall prove, that we are bound, by the command of God, thus to assure ourselves; and the Scripture doth sufficiently warrant us, that we shall not deceive ourselves in believing a lie, but according to our faith, so shall it be to us, Matt. ix, 29. This is a strange kind of assurance, far different from other ordinary kinds; and therefore no wonder, if it be found weak and imperfect, and difficult to be obtained, and it be assaulted with many doubtings. We are constrained to believe other things, on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no; so that we cannot deny our assent without rebelling against the light of our senses, and reason, or conscience. But here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by any evidence of the thing, but we must work it out in ourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and thereby we bring our own thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Here is the great whirlpool of the popular doctrine! Here is the grand secret of manufacturing truth without evidence! But this quotation is of so extraordinary a nature, that, in comparison with it, all remarks upon it must appear extremely insipid.

When we have thus, according to our author, wrought ourselves into a new state, or, as is supposed, out of a state of nature



into a state of grace, by the curious labour here described, we are then, and not till then, qualified for the practice of holiness. For, according to him, there is no practice of holiness but what proceeds from the persuasion of our state being changed. This persuasion is his faith. And by this we receive qualifications necessary for obedience according to *direct. 2*, p. 15. "Several endowments and qualifications are necessary to enable us for the immediate practice of the law; particularly, we must have an inclination and propensity of our hearts thereunto; and, therefore, we must be well persuaded of our reconciliation with God, and of our future enjoyment of everlasting heavenly happiness, and of sufficient strength, both to will and perform all duties acceptably, until we come to the enjoyment of that happiness." We must not imagine, for anything here said, that the serious reader, before he attains to that happy change of state, which is the truth affirmed in their faith, is quite destitute of love to God in every sense; for, as the popular doctrine is every where double, provided an unconverted person has a good inclination and propensity to get the better of his bad inclination and propensity, and to use all proper means for that end, he is in a very promising way. And when once he is supposed to be, in some measure, successful, then the happy change is made. He may then believe with all freedom. He is then qualified to do works properly good in all senses, without any ambiguity.

But let us further hear our author himself making this faith, or persuasion of our state being changed, the principle of all holiness. *Direct. 12*, p. 274, 275, "Christ himself walked in a constant persuasion of his excellent state: he set the Lord always before him, and was persuaded, that because God was at *his right hand*, he should not be moved, Psal. xvi, 8. How should it be rationally expected, that a man should act according to his new state without assurance that he is in it?" &c.

How foreign to the Scripture is this kind of reasoning.—The first Christians were indeed taught to serve God, by having the same Spirit of faith that was in Christ, that is, believing the same truth which he believed. They were persuaded of the dignity and excellent state of Christ, not their own. The worthiness of the Lamb that was slain, was the sole ground of all their confidence toward God, the sole spring of all their obedience and all their consolation. But if we hearken to this author, we must set out in the service of God from the confidence of our being in a better state than other men. We must set out from the bare persuasion, that

God hath assisted us in producing certain good motions in our hearts, by which we have acquired an excellency above others. Thus our obedience is not influenced by what God hath testified concerning his Son, but by a persuasion that we are better than other people. Accordingly our author censures the ignorance of those who would make a holy life to spring only from what is believed on testimony. Page 251, "Some, says he, make no more of *living and walking by faith*, than merely a stirring up, and encouraging ourselves to our duty by such principles as we believe." Whereas he would have us animated thus, p. 273, "Stir up and strengthen yourself to perform the duties of holiness, by a firm persuasion of your enjoyment of Jesus Christ, and all spiritual and everlasting benefits through him." And to doubt about this, is with him the great sin of unbelief.\* He makes no account of the grand things testified of Christ, as any way sufficient to lead us to holiness, without a good opinion of our own state. In using this latter principle dexterously, consists, according to him, the great mystery of holy life. For whenever such gentlemen have any deep plot to manage against the gospel, they are sure to dun our ears with the deepness of the mystery they are going to declare. Page 248, & seqq. "This is the rare and excellent art of godliness, in which every Christian should strive to be skilful and expert. The reason why many come off with shame and confusion, after they have a long time laboured with zeal and industry for the attainment of true godliness, is, because they were never acquainted with this holy art, and never endeavoured to practice in a right gospel way. Some worldly arts are called *mysteries*; but, above all, this spiritual art of godliness is *without controversy a great mystery*, 1 Tim. iii, 16, because

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\* This is a very notable device, and of great and extensive influence in the popular doctrine. By this the conscience itself is drawn in to be the friendly supporter of self-conceit. Thus men are taught to think it a heaven-daring crime to suspect themselves of hypocrisy, even when a full conviction of it would be the happiest thing that could befall them, and though such a conviction can do no real harm to any man, at any time. All the most awful rebukes and declarations of the Divine displeasure, are artfully pointed against this imaginary crime. And thus the consciences of men are scared as with a hot iron, so as to become utterly impenetrable to the conviction of sin. They are taught to think, that if they should admit what their conscience, or what the Divine law hints to them, they should be guilty of the heinous damning sin of unbelief. Thus the popular preachers spend much of their time, and abuse many passages of Scripture, to the sending of multitudes down to the grave with a lie in their right hand.

the means that are to be made use of in it are deeply mysterious, as hath been showed; and you are not a skilful artist till you know them, and can reduce them to practice."—Whereas, if once the import of Christ's resurrection be understood, all the parts of the Christian religion appear to have as regular a connection with it, as is to be found betwixt any one part of the course of nature and another.

This author, with many others of his stamp, labours much to persuade his reader, that, without a good opinion of his state, the bare gospel can give no comfort, so can furnish no motives to love God and keep his commandments. Thus the ancient gospel, which from the beginning turned many from idols to serve the living God, is now set aside, to give place to human artifice, dressed out with many swelling words of vanity. Thus all the grand things testified concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God, are made to serve only as a footstool for human pride. Yet, however many may be blinded, the election shall obtain.

Now, seeing it is the fashion to recommend religious books, I am willing to comply with it for once. If any one chooses to go to hell by a devout path, rather than by any other, let him study to form his heart on any one of these four famous treatises, Mr. Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ*; Mr. Marshall's *Gospel-mystery of Sanctification*; Mr. Boston's *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*; and Dr. Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. If any profane person, who desires to be converted, shall take pains to enter into the spirit of these books, it will be easy to show, from the New Testament, that he thereby becomes twofold more the child of hell than he was before. If none of these four are at hand, he may, without travelling far, easily read or hear plenty of sermons and books to the same purpose.\*

On the other hand, if any one has got an ear for the truth of God, and desires to have his mind established therein, let him read the history of Jesus Christ, and the Acts of the Apostles, recorded by the four evangelists. Would he be skilful in distinguishing the ancient gospel from all counter-

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\* What sort of conversions are produced and encouraged by the popular doctrine, may be seen in the second volume of a book, called, *Historical Collections, relating to remarkable periods of the success of the gospel, and eminent instruments employed in promoting it*. The second volume is titled along the top of the pages, *The Success of the Gospel in the 18th century*. It is at present a point of zeal among devout people, to enter into concerts for prayer, for the promoting of such conversions as are there narrated.

feits, and so expert in fighting the good fight of faith? let him read Paul's epistles. Would he know what is pure and undefiled religion before God, in distinction from idle talking about it? let him read James. Would he learn sobriety of mind, and patience in suffering for the truth, and have his veneration for the greatest names in the Antichristian world abated? let him read Peter and Jude. Would he be satisfied that his spiritual joys are not the joys of the hypocrite, but that they arise from fellowship with the true God, so are the sure pledges and real beginnings of life eternal? let him read the Epistles of John. Would he know the true state and appearance of the kingdom of God in this world, and the world to come, and so have his mind fortified against all modern dreams, visions, and prophecies? let him read the Revelations of the last mentioned Apostle. Would he have a safe and authentic commentary on the Old Testament, to prevent his being imposed upon by the deceitful glosses of ancient or modern Jews? let him consult all these apostolic writings together.

WE may now proceed to take notice of the origin and spring of all practical errors as to the Christian religion. If any consideration, beside or along with the sacrifice of Christ, be admitted into one's faith, or held requisite for his justification before God, that consideration, whatever it be, is his righteousness, that is the centre and spring of his charity and hope, so the leading principle of his life. As the most holy faith, or one thing needful, refuses all mixture, or to be joined with anything else; so he who goes about to add anything to it, must be influenced to do so by disaffection to the one thing needful, and by love to that which he adds. His favourite addition, then, is the great spring of his life, and the hinge of his passions. And what he knows of the gospel is wholly subservient to this.

Moreover, if one maintains that Christ died for any other end than he and his apostles have declared, that other end, whatever it be, must serve, more or less, to darken his understanding about, and cool his affection to the great end for which Christ died; and, accordingly, give a false direction to his zeal in the profession of Christianity. The like effect flows from mistaking what was the justifying righteousness which Jesus Christ finished in his death. Perhaps there is nothing in Christianity less attended to by its professors, than the real character of Jesus Christ. He who is persuaded that that character, which was set at nought by all ranks of



men, was the only character on earth acceptable to God, and of such high value in his sight, as to procure his favour for the guilty, must in consequence of this persuasion, entertain very uncommon notions of virtue and piety. And he who declares this character to be the sole requisite for his justification, and does not make conscience of imitating it, evidently tells a lie, as the Scripture every where affirms.

Every practical error, then, in the profession of Christianity, proceeds from some mistake about the one thing needful. It would be endless to take notice of every particular mistake, and the practical error that follows upon it. Yet some are very glaring.

Many trusting in themselves, that they are more eminently godly than others, look down with a solemn pride on the rest of mankind, and are greatly encouraged in this pride by their teachers. Whereas, the members of one Christian church ought to have the same love one towards another; yet many are encouraged to look down on their fellows, in the same communion, as ungodly and profane. Many have their pride not a little gratified, by complaining of the defections of the church whereof they are members. They feed upon these defections, in the midst of all the mournful airs they assume, with a delicious sort of self-applause; because they are thus reminded of their own excellency. Take away this fund of religious discourse and meditation from many devout people, and you leave them little religion behind.

The dress, equipage, public entertainments, and amusements of people of wealth and rank, serve as a notable fund of declamation for the popular preacher. In handling this topic well, he awakens the devotion of the lower sort of people, while he stimulates their envy; and he extracts from their poverty, the richest food for their pride. At the same time, such of the hearers as are seriously intent on the pursuit of wealth, are led to consider that avarice, which restrains them equally from liberality in the works of mercy, as from expensive pleasures, as a Christian virtue.

The various methods by which popular preachers form the distinction betwixt the devout and the profane world, serve to possess the minds of the former with a self-sufficient censorious disposition toward the latter. Whereas, the gospel teaches its disciples a very opposite temper of mind, Tit. iii, 1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men; for we ourselves also were some-

times foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

The devout people are likewise taught, by the help of an ingenious distinction, with great confidence to resume the ancient prayer of the Pharisee. Mr. R. Erskine, in a sermon on Psal. ci, 1, called, *The Militant's Song*, p. 33, encourages his hearers to rejoice, "when, *says he*, ye are helped to say thankfully, what the Pharisee said boastingly, *The Lord be thanked that I am not as other men.*" But how comes the preacher thus to reproach the Pharisee, as praying with a worse disposition than his own hearers? The Pharisee spoke not a word of boasting more than they. He said, *God I thank thee*, &c. No reason, then, can be given, to show that he was not as thankful as they.

As to the ends of Christ's death, many think he died to purchase grace and spirit, to help men to establish their own righteousness, or acquire some requisite to justification; and accordingly their zeal is directed. It is common with people of this class, to show their zeal in longing and praying for the down-pouring on all ranks, of some other spirit than that which speaks in the Scripture, that serious religion may be brought into repute. And thus many satisfy themselves in their present neglect of the written mind of the Holy Ghost, regarding the Scriptures no farther than they find them impressed on their hearts in a certain way, and without such impressions, professing they want light about the clearest passages of Scripture.

Many think that Christ died to redeem the forfeiture of earthly happiness, so as to reinstate men in the possession of what the first man lost by transgression. And, accordingly, their attention must be drawn aside from the sole end of his death, which was to give his people eternal life by a resurrection from the dead. Many think he died to make way for the establishment of national churches; or, in other words, to procure a worldly kingdom for his followers and representatives, seeing he could not obtain it for himself while on the earth. And accordingly, their zeal runs in that channel. If they are dissenters, they murmur at the badness of the times and the irreligion of those in power, because their mode of religion is not more countenanced. And they take delight to vent their envy, in the midst of their religious warmth, by declaiming vehemently against the established clergy, as hirelings, intruders, wolves, &c.

It is common with those who are possessed of the foremen-

tioned zeal, whether churchmen or dissenters, to lament the decay of religion, the contempt of the gospel and gospel ministers, the open profanation of the Lord's day, the little frequenting of ordinances, the increase of infidelity, and in a word, everything that spoils the public decorum as to religion, or that serves to lessen that weight and influence which they apprehend their religious character or office entitles them to in the nation. Yet one might as well quote the *Alcoran* to these same people, as talk to them of *continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*. The commands of Christ have no manner of weight with them against tradition and reputable custom. Christ's new commandment of love is odious to them. Should they be put in mind of the express and particular law of Christ, *If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone, &c.*; they will answer, it is impracticable as matters now stand.

Though the apostolic decree, which declares the peculiar precepts of the Mosaic law, that served to distinguish the Jews from other nations, to be no way binding on believing Gentiles, with equal force and clearness of expression enjoins such Gentiles abstinence from blood, as a *thing necessary* for them to observe; yet our devoutest preachers, when lecturing on that decree, with solemnity equal to their impudence, take upon them to pronounce the enjoined abstinence to be a *thing indifferent*. The reason is, they regard the bare authority of Scripture no more than an old ballad. Yet the same men can show the warmest zeal against the stage.—The reason is, the frequenting of the stage interferes with the respect and attendance due to the pulpit, and the venerable personage who fills it.

Let mention be made of the particular expressions of love which the apostles enjoined the first Christians, and the devout people with their teachers will scoff at them. Put them in mind of that law wherein Christ calls his disciples to lay up their treasure, not on earth, but in heaven, by giving to the poor, adding this reason, *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*; they will readily answer, that Christ, far from forbidding to lay up treasures on earth, only forbids us to set our hearts on them. Thus they burlesque the reason given by Christ, and make him to say, "For where your heart is, there will your heart be also; or where you put your treasure, there your treasure will be." And herein they imitate their predecessors, the Pharisees,



who though they gave much alms, yet derided Christ's doctrine against covetousness.

And thus might I speak of every precept of Jesus Christ, that has nothing but the weight of his authority to enforce it; yet if any one presumes to trespass so far on the public decorum, as frankly to profess himself an unbeliever, the devout people will be apt to stare at him as a kind of monster. But whatever dislike they have to what they call *infidelity*, they hate the ancient gospel much more.

Not a few possessed of the last mentioned zeal are keen for persecution, so soon as it shall be in their power, and complain greatly of the toleration granted by the present government. These act a consistent part in declaiming bitterly against everything that opposes their wished-for uniformity. But why should the lovers of our present happy government, the friends of toleration and public liberty, murmur at the natural consequences of that liberty? But more especially, why should Christians complain whatever shape the world puts on, while they have liberty to follow their own religion? Is it not their business to live quietly; to pray for, and do good to all men as they have opportunity; to upbraid none, to glory over none, and to hate even the thought of pluming themselves over any of mankind on account of their religious devotion? Thus they will best recommend their religion to the attention of others. Thus they will imitate him, of whom it was said, *He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, &c.*—Two very fit emblems for the appearance of his kingdom in the world.\* I may add here, that it is a common thing with religious people to make a great noise about Divine judgment impending over the nation for the sins of others, not considering that the wrath to come is chiefly pointed against contempt of the ancient gospel, which takes place no less among the stricter than among the looser sort.

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\* A light or lamp, and a rod or sceptre, are frequently used in Scripture as signs of royal power and dominion. And no signs could be more fitly chosen for the outward weakly appearance of such power. than a bruised reed for a sceptre, and a smoking wick or lamp apparently ready to die away, and be extinguished. Agreeably to this, we find that the enemies of Jesus, decking him with the mock ensigns of royalty in order to insult his pretensions, gave him a reed for a sceptre, and carrying their insult to the greatest extremity, took the reed out of his hand and smote him on the head. But the day approaches when the bruised reed shall become a *rod of iron*, and the smoking flax a *flaming fire*, and all other kingdoms and establishments be quenched as tow.



Many are the little singularities of parties, by which the attention of men is drawn away from the common faith. And indeed they cannot be too lightly esteemed in comparison of the great end for which Christ died.—Some, who do not profess Popery, maintain that Christ died to consecrate an order of Priests, to offer certain unbloody eucharistical sacrifices to propitiate for daily sins, and must be influenced accordingly in their religious practice.—Many devout persons in Scotland are taught to think, that Christ died to purchase for the people inhabiting a certain district called a parish, a right to claim from the British government fifty, sixty, or a hundred pounds sterling yearly, to the man they choose for their minister. And, though it is well known, that the British government hinders no people to choose their own minister, nor to feed and clothe him in the best manner they can; yet many are taught to consider it as a heavy grievance to be deprived of the forementioned right: yea, this is the chief thing understood in the noted phrase, *The rights of the Lord's people*. Thus they are taught to think and speak disrespectfully of those in power, contrary to all the rules of the gospel. And thus they are taught to think impiously of Jesus Christ, as if it were in the power of any potentate on earth to deprive Christ's people of any right he died to purchase for them. Many think Christ died to authorize persecuting oaths or covenants, among whom even the friends of Aspasio make a distinguished figure. In a word, whatever side religious people take in politics, or whatever party designs they are engaged in, they are apt to suppose that they are promoting some end for which Christ died.

Mistakes about the character of Jesus Christ are attended with the like practical errors. Various parties, of the same temper with those who opposed him at the first, have found it convenient to patronize their favourite designs with his sacred name, by perverting, some one, some another part of his history. Yea, not to stay upon lesser instances, bloody and deceitful men have bound themselves by solemn covenant to the most impious inhumanity; and pretended they were herein following Jesus Christ, who drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. And though Jesus Christ made Pilate well understand that his kingdom no way interfered with that of Cæsar; yet many preachers, with great vehemence, oppose the headship and sovereignty of Christ to the supremacy of the King of Britain. Thus if times and circumstances allowed, they would patronize rebellion with the sacred name of Jesus. Here I must declare myself at a loss to understand how a friend

of public liberty, and of our happy constitution, should in a book, intended to recommend the imputed righteousness, or the character of Jesus Christ, direct us to learn holiness from men who declare their aversion to toleration, and so to humanity, and at the same time a sacred regard for persecuting oaths, from men who would make Jesus to be what the Jews accused him for, and at the same time lead us to follow a Messiah altogether such as they desired. Mr. Boston, I own, seems to have been so much taken up in teaching his people to establish their own righteousness by acts of faith, that he insisted less on the covenanted uniformity, with the several political uses for the Messiah, than some others of his class; but Mr. E. Erskine, in his sermons, shows his zeal abundantly for a Jewish secular Messiah in all respects; yea, he carries the matter so high, that in his sermon, entitled, *The Kingdom of God Within the Soul of Man*, he warmly commends, as *worthies*, those who, in the last century, chose rather to die than say, *God save the King*.

The popular preachers of Scotland are presently doing the best they can to infuse their spirit into England. Witness a late performance published by one of them, entitled, *England's Alarm, &c.* And they take care to propagate their appropriating faith in the closest connection with their impious principles of inhumanity. And, indeed, they so far judge right; for nothing is more cruel and inhuman than spiritual pride.—One would think that these gentlemen of Scotland, might easily enter upon a treaty of alliance with the followers of Mr. Hutchinson, in England, could they only come to some mutual agreement or forbearance about a few trifling questions relating to Presbytery and Prelacy. But it is happily so ordered by Providence, for the benefit of mankind, that their common enemies are often easily divided by very trifling circumstances; and however much they howl, pray, and groan forth their sorrow at the public divisions in religious matters; yet they are so infatuated, that all their machinations serve often rather to widen than to heal these divisions.

I SHALL here take some further view of the progress of the popular doctrine in England, as also of the counterfeit grace, which may justly be considered as the capital characteristic of that doctrine; even as the true grace of God is the grand characteristic of the apostolic gospel. The counterfeit grace corresponds with the preliminary faith formerly noted. And the purpose it serves for is, to prepare and qualify men for, or

to make them deserving objects of saving grace; that is, it serves to qualify some men beyond others for being benefited by the great work of mercy and grace finished by Christ on the cross, where alone the saving grace of God is manifested. This preliminary grace, however much it has been christianized, is at bottom the same thing with that divine *afflatus*, influence, or energy, by which it was supposed philosophers and heroes of old became good and great men. When the writings of any eminent preacher of this grace are published after his death, the editor commonly takes care to usher them into the view of the public with high encomiums on the piety of the author, as being desirous to make us understand, that he led a life of very intimate communion with the Deity, so could not fail to have been admitted far into his secret counsels. Thus their writings come abroad to us with a sanction or authority not unlike what attended ancient legislators, when they emerged to the view of the public from some cave or grotto, where it was supposed they had been for a long time intimately conversing with some male or female divinity.

But we are not to imagine, that the preachers of this grace are content with the prospect of being worshiped after death. They generally incline to leave their editors or gentlemen-ushers as little to do as possible. They take care to make it a principal part of their doctrine to preach up their own excellency, and make the people understand, that they have an uncommon intimacy with the Deity, and are the canals of his favours to men.

But this is not all: They are also careful to magnify the testimony of some spirit, which they call the Divine Spirit, above the written testimony of God in the Scripture. I do not say they magnify it expressly in opposition to the written word. This would never do; for the credit of the Scripture must still be maintained, so as it may remain as a proper foundation and ground-work for all their artifices. They generally agree with the more cautious of the people called *Quakers*, in maintaining, that this inward witnessing spirit must never flatly contradict the outward testimony of the written word, while yet it may give evidence beyond and above that word.

To sum up what has been said, a popular preacher may pretty easily be distinguished by these three marks, viz. by his preaching the counterfeit grace above described, by his aggrandizing his own person in lofty strains, and by his magnifying the testimony of some spirit above the Scripture. Yet any one of these is sufficient to darken one's mind, and to dis-

affect him to the doctrine of the true grace of God preached by the apostles.

“Beware” (says Dr. Crisp in one of his sermons\* on Is. liii, 6, ) “that you make not the credit of the voice of the Spirit to depend upon the word.” His notion of grace may be seen by the following passages. “Now hath the Lord given thee a heart to come, that thou wouldst fain have Christ if thou durst, fain thou wouldst that all thy iniquities should be taken from thee to be laid upon him. Beloved, the Lord saith expressly unto you, *Every one that will, let him come.* Have you but a mind to come and take him, your coming and taking is your security.”† In another sermon, on John vi, 37, *And him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out*; he proceeds thus, “I say, suppose a person to be in the worst condition you can imagine, single out the vilest man in the world, &c.;—such a person as this, and continuing to this very instant, now before the Lord, as he was before, without any change and alteration in the world until this time, suppose such a person; by this text it appears so manifest, that if the Lord do but grant, and hath but put a willingness and readiness of spirit into this man,‡ that Christ he would have, if it might appear he might have him; if his heart do but say, I would have him, all that sinfulness, though to this instant continued in, is no bar in the world but this man may claim his portion in Christ, and have as certain security that his portion is there, as any other man may have.”§

His lofty conceit may be seen by the following passage: “Let me tell you, the Lord hath sent me at this time to *proclaim liberty to such captives* that are in this sad, bitter, and (to their thinking) desperate condition; liberty God hath given thee, if thou wilt come freely; nothing in the world shall hinder thee.” ||

I am not surprised to find Dr. Gill espousing the grace maintained by this writer, as his avowed principles lead him to conclude, that adult persons are entitled to baptism, so to the kingdom of heaven, on account of that which distin-

\* See the two volumes of his sermons, published two years ago by Dr. Gill, vol. 2, p. 133.

† Vol. 2, p. 95.

‡ At this place Dr. Gill has the following note. “Here you see clearly the Doctor supposes willingness and readiness of spirit to come to Christ put into such a sinner, which is owing to power and grace thus making willing; and such a soul will never be rejected, let him be ever so vile.”

|| Vol. 1, pp. 341, 442.

§ Ibid. p. 343.



guishes them from infants: whereas, if the doctrine of the apostles be true, that the former can contribute no more than the latter for obtaining a part in the kingdom of God, their reasoning must also be just, that where God makes no difference as to the communication of his favour, we can make none in the expression of our regard, or in administering the outward signs or privileges, without being guilty of *withstanding God*. When Peter beheld God setting aside the difference which he formerly made great account of, yea, much more than of that betwixt infants and adult persons, he reasoned like a sober-minded man, *What was I that I could withstand God?* But the Doctor is a man of great consequence, no less than one of the Deity's ambassadors, if we will take his word for it.

I am rather surprised to find, that a class of people, whom I am just going to mention, have so thoroughly imbibed the very rankest poison of the popular doctrine. I have seen "A Collection of Hymns for the use of the Church of Christ, meeting in *Margaret-street*, near *Oxford* market, and other Churches in Fellowship with them." By way of introduction to the hymns, we have a summary of principles, subscribed by William Cudworth, and title thus, "The united principles of the church of Christ, for whom these Hymns are collected, being the substance of those maintained by the late Messrs. *Erskines*, and the seceding ministers in *Scotland*, agreeable to the Scripture, and all old protestant divines."—Here we see what names people now choose for patronizing their creed, instead of those of the apostles.

I shall here quote a few sentences from this summary. And as to *power* to come to, or believe in Jesus Christ, a worthy minister well observes as follows: "If thou hast a will to embrace him, the great difficulty is over; for there lies the principal stop, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life*. Where God gives the will, he gives also to do of his own good pleasure, *Erskine's Sermons*, vol. 1, p. 188." And again, "Strength to believe is one thing, and to believe in Christ for strength is another. Strength to believe is God's enabling one to the act of faith; but to believe for strength is faith acting upon Christ, the object held up in the word of promise." Here we see plainly, that the use these people have for Christ is, to give them strength to do something towards their justification. Here we see their notion of faith and of grace.

I shall copy a few more of the words which the author of the summary proceeds to quote: "Let us sow the seeds;

I mean, let us store our minds with the pure and precious truths of God, and acquaint ourselves with those things which are to be believed, as they are laid before us in the oracles of the Scriptures of truth. Think upon Christ's suretyship, and substitution in our room, *etc.* These are some of the materials of faith; faith comes by hearing of these things, and by thinking and meditating upon them. You have as good ground to expect the power of the Spirit of faith in this way and method, as ever they of old had to look for the celestial fire to come down and consume their sacrifices, as a testimony of the Divine acceptance, when they had, according to the command of God, done what was incumbent on them in preparing their materials.\* And when you have done the will of God in this matter as you can, you must hold on, even though you find no sensible influence concurring: for it is the command of God in his word, and not the influence of the Spirit, that is the rule and measure of your duty. And if you continue doing the will of God in this matter, with an eye to him who is the author and finisher of faith, you may assure yourselves, that he that shall come, will come, and put his hand to his own work." *Sermon on Assurance of Faith.*

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\* I shall here copy a few words more from the same passages from whence Mr. Cudworth brings the above quotation. "Although the act of saving faith be the effect of the Divine power and grace, yet it is in the power of nature, by a common concourse, to stock and store the mind with those things which are the seed of faith. The husbandman, though he cannot make one grain of corn to grow, yet he can plough and sow his ground; and when he has done his part, he leaves the seed under the clod, and looks up to heaven for the waterings of the former and latter rains: and accordingly God, for ordinary, crowns his endeavours with success, making the heavens to hear the earth, and the earth to hear the corn, whereby it brings forth ten, twenty, or an hundred fold. So here, let us do what is incumbent on us, and what we have power in an ordinary way to do: let us sow the seeds; I mean, let us store our minds with the pure and precious truths of God, and acquaint ourselves with those things which are to be believed, as they are laid before us in the holy oracles of the Scriptures of truth; and, having thus laid in the seed into the ground or soil of our hearts, let us look heavenward, and wait for a shower of the Spirit's influences, according to that word of grace or promise, *Is. xlv, 3, I will pour water on the thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.* You know, they that offered sacrifices of old, though they could not make fire come down from heaven to consume their sacrifices; yet they could fetch the bullock out of the stall, or the lamb out of the fold; they could bring it to the altar, and bind it with cords to the horns of the altar; they could gather their sticks, and lay in proper fuel; and having done their part, they looked up to heaven for the celestial fire to set all on a flame together. In like manner, I say, do what is incumbent on you; gather your sticks, lay in the proper fuel of faith, store your minds with the materials of believing, which you are daily reading or hearing in the word, &c.

Is it possible, after what we have seen, for any one to imagine that these people look for acceptance with God only through the sacrifice of Christ once offered for the sins of many, after they have so plainly declared the contrary: after we have heard them with open mouth setting up in its stead another sacrifice of their own preparing and offering? It is indeed surprising, that Mr. Cudworth, and his friends in communion, should have chosen in the public profession of their faith, the very passage in Mr. Erskine's sermons, wherein he betrays more evidently, perhaps, than in any other, his disaffection to the true atonement, and the true grace of God appearing there.

To these now mentioned, I shall only add one other notable promoter of the popular doctrine, Mr. Romaine, whose picture may clearly be seen in his *Practical Comment on the 107th Psalm*, 3d edit. Let us first observe with what dignity this gentleman struts in his pulpit, p. 109, "And can none of my exhortations, none of my friendly entreaties, prevail with you to rouse up and to look into your own hearts, and to examine your state and condition? cannot I prevail? If you still turn a deaf ear to me, O blessed Jesus, I will then turn to thee. Thou God of love, send thy good Spirit upon every person here present, on whom my arguments have made no impression, and show them the dangerous malady of sin, that, feeling the pain and misery of it, there may be raised in their hearts a strong cry for thy salvation. And may our most adorable God now work in you this happy change, that you may be disposed to apply for your cure to the great physician of souls," Pages 131, 132, "When the blessed Jesus invites, when he presses you to accept health and salvation at his hands, what can tempt you to reject his gracious offer? \* I now stand up in his name, and by his authority now proclaim these tidings, of great joy, *I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely.*"

Let us now hear him farther on his notion of grace. Page

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\* Thus it would seem our devotion must be animated by the consideration of the great goodness and condescension of the Deity, manifested in sending us the precious person of a clergyman, as his representative, to waste his lungs for an hour or two upon us. Thus the florist has his devotion chiefly animated by what he sees of the Deity in a tulip, the astronomer by the stars, the virtuoso by shells and pebbles, the man of pleasure by beholding every divine charm in the fair face of his mistress.

If once that point of view wherein the apostles beheld the Deity be set aside, it is indeed a matter of great indifference which of these be made use of as the great incentives to our devotion.

66, "And if you find any prayer, if it be but a desire, rising in your minds, to accept of full and free redemption through Jesus Christ, hear how comfortably the Holy Spirit exhorts you to apply to him in your distress, as it follows in the 6th verse: *Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.* Page 84, "So soon as the sinner was disposed to accept, the Saviour was willing to bestow free and full redemption." Page 118, "And the first sigh that comes from an awakened heart pierces the ears of our gracious God." Page 180, "The Psalmist says, he sent waters into the wilderness to change its nature; *i. e.* he sent his grace into our hearts to change their nature, to show them their dead and barren state, to make them sensible of it, distressed under it, and then cry to him for deliverance. And when grace has thus far disposed the heart aright, and it can pray for more grace; then will our Lord enrich it with abundant streams; for he is always disposed to give in the measure we are disposed to receive; and if we hunger and thirst for much, he has promised that we shall be filled.

"There is no doctrine of Christianity more opposed than this, nor any at present more ridiculed. And until men desire to have their barren hearts changed, it must sound strange to them to talk of the necessity of doing what they have no desire to do."

However much this doctrine may be ridiculed by those who, led more by sound than by sense, mistake it for that preached by the apostles; yet we have good reason to say, that the grace here maintained, deserves from the friends of the ancient gospel a graver censure than ridicule. It deserves to be treated with their most serious indignation; not the malicious indignation of extirpating heresy-hunters, but that honest indignation which always becomes the humane declaration of saving truth when opposed to pernicious falsehood. But who can help them? Who can pretend to undeceive them? They have already all advantages. They lack no means of instruction. They have Moses and the prophets, with the additional evidence of the apostles: if they will not hear them, what remains? but—If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Let the blind lead the blind, and every man stand to his own hazard.

By comparing the doctrine of the gentlemen now quoted, with that of the apostles, one may have a very good notion of the difference betwixt ancient Christianity, and that which is considered by many devout people as the best form of the modern.



BEFORE I conclude this letter, I would take some notice of the apostolic account of charity, which I have hitherto rather referred to in general, than considered particularly. Charity is a sound acceptable to all; and all contending parties are ready to reproach each other with the want of it. But perhaps no expression is more constantly used in opposition to the apostolic sense of it than this.

Paul gives us the most particular description of it in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xiii. After having shown that all gifts and virtues wherein a man may excel without it, are of no real benefit to him, he proceeds to set before us the general tendency of it in these words: *Charity suffereth long, and is kind*: so imitates the Divine long-suffering and kindness toward men. Then he declares what it is opposed to; *Charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, [or is not provoked to revenge,] thinketh [or deviseth] no evil.*

Thus far we see charity opposed to pride, and the various ways wherein men are influenced and conducted thereby. Then he comes to show positively, wherein the peculiar name consists, what is the hinge on which it turns, or what is the centre of its delight. He says, *It rejoiceth not in iniquity, (συγχαίρει ὅτι τῆ ἀληθεία,) but rejoiceth with the truth.* The great truth, that God is well pleased in his beloved Son, proved by his resurrection from the dead, is the centre of the joy of charity. The apostle amplifies this description, by giving us to understand, that charity *beareth all things* reported in the truth, or all the inspired descriptions of it, however opposite to the corruption of human nature, so counts none of them hard sayings, or unfit to be borne; that it *believeth all things* imported in the great truth, or all the inferences which the apostles have deduced from it, as being well affected to the amiable source from whence they flow; that it *hopeth for all things* promised in it, and *endureth all things*, or patiently suffers all the afflictions that can attend a steady attachment to it: and he crowns the description by declaring, that *charity never faileth*, so is greater than its temporary companions, faith and hope.

The blessedness of God consists in the consciousness of his own boundless perfections. These are fully displayed only in the atonement. The fulness of the Divine good-pleasure and delight, then, can only be manifested there. If we speak then of God as made manifest to his creatures, we must say that the atonement is the centre of his delight. This is also

the centre of the joy of charity. Charity, then, is fellowship with the true God in his blessedness.

Yea, if we take in the notion of Deity, which the Scripture is writ to exhibit, we must say, that the love manifested in the atonement, is the only true God; and that there is no God besides that love. Thus only can we perceive the propriety of the Apostle John's words, *He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.—He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* And he sums up all that he hath to say of love and happiness in one idea, in the close of his epistle, *This is the true God and eternal life.*

The sufferings of Christ, with the glory by which they were crowned, are known to us only by report. Charity, then, on this side the grave, is the love of that report. So Peter speaking of Christ says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Charity delights in the character of the true God drawn in the truth, and has no regard for any other though drawn by the wisest men, and applauded by multitudes.—Charity does not respect men for any of those things, on account of which one man glories over another; but it delights in all who are of the truth, for the truth's sake dwelling in them.—Charity has a sacred regard for all the institutions of worship delivered in the New Testament, as baptism, the Lord's day, and the several ordinances wherein the first Christians continued steadfastly on that day; as all these have the truth evidently stamped upon them, and serve to bring it to remembrance, and so to promote the happiness resulting from it. But it has no regard to any institutions of worship founded on the traditions or commandments of men, though authorized by the grandest assemblies on earth.—Charity is well affected to the great commandment of Jesus Christ, "Love one another, as I have loved you;" and to all the services and expressions of that love appointed in the New Testament, however ridiculous in the eyes of the world. But it has no reverence for the rules of holiness devised and held in high repute by this or the other religious party.—In a word, charity despises all the little singularities of parties, but it has a high veneration for the public statutes of the kingdom of heaven, which all serve to promote righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Charity bears good-will to all men, and is ready to do them good as opportunity presents; but its joy is confined to those in whom the truth dwells. We may see in Paul, who was an eminent pattern of charity, how it rejoices with

the truth. Speaking of his self-denial and condescension toward all sorts of men, to recommend the gospel to their attention, as well as for the benefit of them who believed, he says, *And this I do for the gospel's sake, (να τυγκτωσωσ αυτου, γενωμαι,) that I may be its partner.* He chose to join in partnership with the gospel, and to run all risks with it for the salvation of mankind, in hopes of partaking of the glory promised in it. So he says in another place, *I endure all things for the elects' sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.* Charity, then, is benevolent toward all men for the elects' sakes, as knowing none but whom God may save by bringing them to the knowledge of the truth. So its benevolence toward all men, proceeds from the joy it has in the truth. But the complacence of charity can be mutually exercised only among them who love the truth. Charity, then, is the imitation of the Divine goodness. God shows kindness to all, making his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust; but he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

Charity contains the sum of all holiness\* of heart and life. No action, however commendable, no character, however highly esteemed, that is not formed upon the love of the truth, can be well pleasing to God. All love to the truth is influenced by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the truth, who is therefore likewise called the Spirit of love. And thus we see the true difference betwixt the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the world, or the spirit of pride, by which men fortify themselves in their disobedience to God, and flatter one another down to eternal perdition.

In Paul's description of charity, iniquity stands opposed to the truth; as all iniquity proceeds upon falsehood, or the truth of God changed into a lie, according to which men are

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\* All sanctification solely springs from the bare truth, so much set at nought by our preachers. Jesus Christ said in his prayer, John xvii, *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.—And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.* Only by this truth are the consciences of the unclean sanctified, and encouraged to draw nigh to God. Only by this truth is the heart purified from evil affections, for obeying the new commandment of love. Only by this truth do men overcome the world: *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* If we attend to these passages of Scripture, we will readily be disentangled from many volumes of nonsense that have been writ by many famous preachers on sanctification.

emboldened to sin with hopes of impunity. In the profession of Christianity, all iniquity is promoted by some perversion of the gospel. Thus Jesus Christ foretold, *Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many; and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*—And Paul speaking of the great apostacy, as prefigured by ancient idolatry, calls it *the mystery of iniquity*, and says it comes with all deceivableness of unrighteousness. And he declares, that it comes as a judgment on them who *received not the love of the truth;—but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* Thus we have an extensive view of his account of charity, as it rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth.

As charity, then, always holds pace with the truth, and keeps company with it wherever it goes; so it is very jealous in its behalf, as finding all its joy in it. No injury can be done to the truth, but charity feels the wound. Christian zeal is nothing else but the fervency of charity; and as there are many counterfeits of the truth, so there are likewise of charity. We may easily know, then, what sort of charity any man has, by inquiring what does he hold for truth, or what is his justifying faith. The faith of some is nothing else but a good opinion of themselves, as helped to excel others by something that they call *grace*; and they maintain, that this faith is the only true principle of holiness. Whatever charity, then, such people pretend to be influenced by, we have good ground to say, that they are influenced by the spirit of pride, and that all their works of holiness are indeed the works of pride.—The spirit of love rejoices only in the works of Christ and delights to imitate them, and has no pleasure either in the direct or reflex acts of self-conceit, wherein the spirit of pride delights to exercise itself.

The spirit of pride, which is the spirit of the world, under the borrowed name of *charity*, always opposes the truth.—Yea, it can take pleasure in anything but the truth. Among some devout people, it takes the name of *catholic charity*; among the more fashionable, that of *universal benevolence*. But whatever name it assumes, it always looks with an evil eye on the truth, as a narrow way of thinking, exceedingly odious to it; and whenever it smells the breath of ancient charity, it is ready to oppose it with the same temper as it did of old, *Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?* It always charges ancient charity with some malignant disposition.

The profession of charity must proceed on some profession of the faith. Anciently men were acknowledged as Chris-



tians, or objects of charity, on what they had to say of Christ, or on their calling Jesus Lord. The Ethiopian eunuch was acknowledged for a Christian, when he said, *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* Among many devout people now, the expression of mutual charity proceeds on some such profession as this: "Thus and thus I endeavoured, and was accordingly assisted; I understand the case is the same with you: I sincerely consider you as a gracious person, and a good Christian; and I presume you can think no less of me." Having thus founded their charity toward each other, they comfort one another with the popular doctrine concerning the perseverance of the saints. And though one who has thus become an object of what is called charity, should not appear to be much influenced by the precepts of the gospel, nor to enjoy the comfort of it, yet it is still presumed that the root of the matter is in him. Thus the spirit of the world, which always fortifies men in a sense of their own importance, worth, and excellency, speaks comfort to thousands walking in the broad way to destruction.

The spirit of love, as it works in them that believe, leads them to a careful jealousy over each other, as well as every one to be, in the first place, jealous over himself. Charity delights in the *just living by faith*: yet it is ready to join with God, in saying, *If he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* The language of charity to its favourites may be thus summed up: "If ye know Christ, as I am bound by your profession to judge ye do, happy are ye if ye obey him." Charity regards its favourites only for the truth's sake dwelling in them, and is grieved at everything about them unbecoming the truth. Hence it is led to rebuke them; and when they repent, so return to the truth, to forgive them; and if they repent not, to reject them as hypocrites and unbelievers. Here I am reminded of some lines in a song, which, after addressing charity as the offspring of God, proceeds thus:

"True as the object to the glass,  
With him you wake your fire,  
Frown when he frowns, hate what he hates,  
And what he loves, desire."

Charity is indeed of supernatural birth. It learns its notions of what is good and profitable to mankind, not from the maxims of worldly society, the duration of which is but short, and fast draws nigh to its final period; consequently all its maxims are no longer of any significance. But it learns them from him who only knows the true interest of mankind;

from him who made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth; from him who gave his Son to take part in flesh and blood with men of all nations without distinction. Thus charity alone knows how to *honour all men*, and to disregard all the little distinctions, on account of which they either envy or undervalue each other. All the works of charity serve to promote the interests of one grand society, arising out of all nations, and whose union will not appear till the final dissolution of worldly society. That charity which *seeketh not her own*, can give no just cause of umbrage or jealousy to any party contending for influence and power in the world. As charity has no worldly project in view, so neither has it any baits to allure the passions of men, or spirit up any worldly faction. Yet charity promotes such a scheme of universal benevolence, as always did, and ever will, while this world lasts, provoke the hatred and contempt of all ranks of men in every nation, as was both exemplified and foretold by Jesus Christ, in whom alone Divine charity shone forth in perfection. When he came into the world, he alone truly understood, and faithfully pursued what was most beneficial to mankind. But what was the issue? All ranks thought him unworthy to live. And before he died, he warned his disciples never to expect to find the world in a better temper towards them, while they kept his word.

No works but those of charity will be rewarded in the New Jerusalem. Worldly society can never want baits sufficient to prompt men to run all risks in its service. And if it has not sufficient rewards to bestow on all occasions, it will never want leaders in religion, zealous enough to assign happy abodes in some Elysian field or other, for those whom it cannot otherwise reward. And such leaders will always be fondly listened to while worldly society lasts. Though charity does not fire a man's breast with ambition, yet it can never make him a bad subject, neighbour, or member of worldly society, while it binds him to venture his life at the command of those in authority, and while it will not suffer any Christian society to retain a member who is disaffected to the sovereign. And as no cause can be sufficient to make a Christian rebel against the worst government, he must have a grateful affection toward one which is good and gentle.

All the relations formed by charity are eternal. All relations, natural or civil, shall be dissolved when the fashion of this world passes away. Marriage, the origin of all natural relations amongst mankind, shall have no place in the world

to come. But no tie made by mutual charity can ever be loosed. The meanest services of charity will turn to account in the world to come, for God is not unrighteous to forget them. Whereas, the works which make the most shining figure in history, as of greatest account to worldly societies, though praised by cotemporaries and admired by posterity, shall be buried in oblivion with those societies, whose praise was their proper reward.

Charity, while absent from the grand things hoped for, has the truth for its companion and comforter, while it labours in self-denial for the salvation of mankind, holding forth the word of life to them at the risk of their greatest displeasure. Charity utters with delight the encouraging sound, *He that believeth, shall be saved*; and it adds, with benevolent concern, *He that believeth not, shall be damned*; that men may be warned in time of their real danger. Charity respects the meanest peasant, who loves the truth, as a prince in the kingdom of heaven, while it scruples not to call the most eminently devout perverters of the truth, *dogs, evil and deceitful workers, ministers of Satan transformed as ministers of righteousness, &c.* It were easy to show at large, and illustrate by facts, how a perverted gospel serves to promote, in its votaries, a temper of mind the reverse of charity, or such as charity is all along opposed to, in Paul's description of it; as that it leads them to grudge others the benefit of the Divine long-suffering and kindness, and cherishes the root of envy, vaunting, and all the other fruits of pride. But,

I proceed to observe the hinge of that charity which may properly be called *modern*.

Formerly the spirit of the Christian world showed itself, in zealously promoting and maintaining uniformity in religious opinions and practices. To be convicted of what was called *heresy*, was worse than being convicted of felony. Public uniformity was the hinge of charity. And nothing was more odious or heretical in the eyes of this charity, than the ancient gospel.

The spirit of the Christian world has now, for some time, been working upon a new plan, by promoting, among people of very different religious persuasions, a friendly intercommunity of charity at least, if not of worship also. As this friendly intercommunity is but forming as yet, different parties are not fully agreed on what common foundation it ought to rest; though good advances are already made toward this agreement. Hence it is, that we have as yet no fixed name or title for this common foundation. It is called by many,

*soundness in the fundamentals of religion.* In Scotland it is commonly called, *the being right in the main.* It is true, the more nice sort of people are apt to start questions about what are the fundamentals, or wherein does the main of religion consist. But those who would gain the greatest reputation for charity, choose to hold by the general expressions, and to avoid particular explications as much as possible. Hence the pleasure some fawning teachers take, in speaking of *our common Christianity.*

If we would give a name to this common foundation, suitable to what is aimed at by different parties, we must call it **PIETY TOWARD THE GODS.** This piety we shall find is the hinge of modern charity. For modern charity is not so much concerned about what character is drawn for the Deity, or what God one worships, as that every one worship his own God decently, seriously, or with piety, without speaking disrespectfully of that of his neighbour. This charity, as far as it has hitherto taken place, is as much disaffected to the ancient gospel, as the old uniformity was. And should the friendly intercommunity of this charity prevail so far as to carry the sword on its side, or, according to Scripture style, to "gather together the kings of the earth and their armies," as they were formerly gathered together in behalf of uniformity; then the lovers of the truth may expect to feel the weight of its vengeance, unless heaven seasonable interpose for their relief; for as the love of the truth will always provoke against itself the charge of that inhuman and unsociable temper, that inflexible obstinacy, that hatred and aversion to mankind, with which it was reproached from the beginning; it must remain excluded from this friendly intercommunity, and become the principal butt of its resentment.

The learned author of *The Divine Legation of Moses*, who has described the friendly intercommunity of worship amongst the ancient Pagans, likewise shows, how that friendly intercommunity stood affected to the peculiar pretensions of the Jewish and Christian religions. I shall here quote part of the passage, in vol. 2, book 2, § 6, p. 49, & seqq.

"The Pagan world having early imbibed this inveterate prejudice concerning intercommunity of worship, men were but too much accustomed to new revelations when the Jewish appeared, not to acknowledge its superior pretences. Accordingly we find, by the history of this people, that it was esteemed a *true one* by its neighbours. And, therefore, they proceeded in their usual way to join it, on occasion, with their own; as those did whom the king of Assyria sent into



the cities of Israel in the place of the ten tribes. Whereby it happened, (so great was the influence of this principle,) that, in the same time and country, the Jews of Jerusalem added the Pagan idolatries to their religion, while the Pagans of Samaria added the Jewish religion to their idolatries.

“But when these people of God, in consequence of having their dogmatic theology more carefully inculcated to them, after their return from the captivity, became rigid, in pretending not only that their religion was true, but the only true one: then it was, that they began to be treated by their neighbours, and afterwards by the Greek and Romans, with the utmost hatred and contempt, for this *their inhumanity and unsociable temper*. To this cause alone we are to ascribe all that spleen and rancour which appears in the histories of these latter nations concerning them. Celsus fairly reveals what lay at bottom, and speaks out for them all. “If the Jews, on these accounts, adhere to their own law, it is not for *that* they are to blame. I rather blame those who forsake their own country religion, to embrace the Jewish. But if these people give themselves airs of sublimer wisdom than the rest of world, and on that score refuse all COMMUNION with it, as not equally pure; I must tell them that it is not to be believed, that they are more dear or agreeable to God than other nations.” Hence, amongst the Pagans, the Jews came to be distinguished from all other people, by the name of **GENUS HOMINUM INVISUM DEIS**, and with good reason.

“This was the reception the Jews met with in the world, &c.

“When Christianity arose, though on the foundation of Judaism, it was at first received with great complacency by the Pagan world. The gospel was favourably heard, and the superior evidence with which it was enforced, inclined men, long habituated to pretended revelations, to receive it into the number of the established. Accordingly, we find one Roman emperor introducing it among his closet religions, and another proposing to the senate to give it a more public entertainment. But when it was found to carry its pretensions higher, and to claim, like the Jewish, the title of the **ONLY TRUE ONE**, then it was that it began to incur the same hatred and contempt with the Jewish. But when it went still farther, and urged a necessity for all men to forsake their own national religions, and embrace the gospel, this so shocked the Pagans, that it soon brought upon itself the bloody storms which followed. Thus you have the true

origin of persecution for religion;—a persecution not committed, but undergone by the Christian church.

“Hence we see how it happened, that such good emperors, as Trajan and M. Antonine, came to be found in the first rank of persecutors: A difficulty that hath very much embarrassed the inquirers into ecclesiastical antiquity, and given a handle to the Deists, who impoison every thing, of pretending to suspect that there must be something very much amiss in primitive Christianity, while such wise magistrates could become its persecutors. But now the reason is manifest. The Christian pretences overthrew a fundamental principle of Paganism, which they thought founded in nature, namely, *the friendly intercommunity of worship*. And thus the famous passage of Pliny the younger becomes intelligible. “For I did not in the least hesitate, but that whatever should appear on confession to be their faith; yet that their frowardness, and *inflexible obstinacy*, would certainly deserve punishment.”—What was the *inflexible obstinacy*? It could not be in professing a *new religion*; that was a thing common enough. It was the refusing all communion with Paganism, refusing to throw a grain of incense on their altars. For we must not think, as is commonly imagined, that this was at first enforced by the magistrate, to make them renounce their religion; but only to give a *test* of its *hospitality* and *sociality* of temper. It was indeed, and rightly understood by the Christians to be a renouncing of their religion, and so accordingly abstained from. The misfortune was, that the Pagans did not consider the inflexibility as a mere *error*, but as an *immorality* likewise. The *unsociable, uncommunicable* temper, in matters of religious worship, was esteemed by the best of them as a *hatred and aversion to mankind*. Tacitus, speaking of the burning of Rome, *Haud perinde in crimine incendii quam ODIUM HUMANI GENERIS convicti sunt [Christiani.]* *Convicted*, he says, *of hate to all mankind*. But how? The confession of the Pagans themselves, concerning the purity of the Christian morals, shows this could be no other than a *conviction* of their rejecting all *intercommunity of worship*; which, so great was their prejudice, they thought could proceed from nothing but *hate to mankind*.—The like character the same historian gives of the Jews: *Apud ipsos FIDE OBSTINATA, sed adversus omnes alios HOSTILE ODIUM*. Now, the Jews and Christians had nothing in common, but this *unsociable, uncommunicable temper* in religious matters, this *obstinata fides*, which gave so much offence to Paganism. We are not to imagine these excel-

lent Pagan moralists so blind, as not see all the merit of a *firm and fixed resolution of keeping a good conscience*. They did see and own it, as appears by the famous *justum et tenacem propositi virum*, &c., of one of their moral poets. But, unluckily for truth, they did not see the *perricacia et inflexibilis obstinatio* of the Christians in that light; though it was nothing more than such a *fixed resolution*, as one, who most severely censured them for it, the good Emperor Marcus Antonius, fairly confesses. In his book of *Meditations*, speaking of a wise man's readiness to die, he says, "He should be so prepared, that his readiness may be seen to be the effect of a well-weighed judgment, not of *mere obstinacy*, like that of the Christians." This is a heavy charge on the primitive martyrs. But he himself removes it in his constitution to the *community of Asia*, given us by Eusebius. "I know," says he, "the gods are watchful to discover such sort of men; for it is much more fit, that they themselves should punish those who *refuse to worship them*, than that we should interfere in it." Why then was it called *mere obstinacy*? The reason is seen above. Universal prejudice had made men regard a refusal of this *intercommunity*, as the most brutal of all dissociability. And the Emperor Julian, who understood this matter the best of any, fairly owns, that the Jews and Christians brought the execration of the world upon them, by their aversion to the gods of Paganism, and their refusal of all communication with them."

Thus far the learned author. Now, that much the like case to what is here represented, may take place among men wearing the common name of Christians will appear no way improbable to one who will only take time to reflect, what an obnoxious figure any small number of ministers, in either of our national churches would make, who should agree, with proper spirit and zeal, to maintain, not to say the ancient gospel, but the plain, obvious, first intended sense of their own public standards of doctrine, and insist upon a credible profession of hearty adherence to that sense, as the terms on which they admitted any to hold communion with them in the sacred institutions. It will be allowed, I dare say, that their situation in the national church would be very uncomfortable, as well as extremely ridiculous; for modern charity would soon awaken many enemies against them, to distress and misrepresent them in various respects.

Here I must acknowledge it to be a thing somewhat new, to see the cause of modern charity supported in volumes, professedly written to recommend the imputed righteousness, or

the character of Jesus Christ, and wherein the much insulted doctrine of the sovereignty of Divine grace is oftener than once strongly asserted. On this last article, which has the closest connection with the former, I shall here quote a very bold passage from vol. 1, p. 284, and seqq. "believe me, my dear friend, salvation, both in the root and all its branches is *entirely* of grace; or else believe me, for the many cogent testimonies of Scripture, which most circumstantially ascertain this great truth. *Election* is of grace: "*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children*, not on account of human worthiness, but *according to the good pleasure of his will*.—Equally gratuitous is our effectual *vocation*: "God hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace."—Faith is owing to the same cause: "By grace ye are saved, through faith."—from hence springs *justification*: "Being justified freely by his grace."—This is the origin of *regeneration*: "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth."—The *consummation* of bliss flows from the same all-supplying source: "The gift of God is eternal life." It is in every respect a gift; not only without, but contrary to all desert of ours. So that the foundation is laid in the riches of grace; the superstructure is reared by the hand of grace, and when the top-stone is brought forth, when our felicity is completed in the kingdom of heaven, the everlasting acclamation will be, *Grace, grace unto it!*

"This is that glorious gospel, which human learning could never have discovered; which carnal reason cannot understand; which the wisdom of this world accounteth foolishness; which the envy of the devil, and the pride of man, will always oppose."

What pity is it that these sentiments did not bear sway throughout the *Dialogues*, and to find that Theron's conversion is carried forward in such a manner, as if the reverse were true! But this is not my present purpose. What I presently think strange is, that one who avows the sentiments now quoted, should join in the friendly and affectionate alliance of charity, with such as he himself perceives opposing the imputed righteousness, and with the most open and determined enemies of the Divine sovereignty. After this, I own, I need not be greatly surprised at finding him likewise discovering a loathsomeness to exclude from the friendly alliance, even the philosophers described by Paul in the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans.—But may I not here be allowed to put the question, "What communion hath light with



darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" Or what delight can charity take in "the envy of the devil, and the pride of man?"

It was probably by observing this sociable temper in the author of the *Dialogues*, that a friend of his was induced to vindicate him from the odious aspersion, of being a lover of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, asserted in the above quoted passage, by alleging in his behalf, that though he does indeed adopt these doctrines, yet it is evident he does not lay much stress upon them: or, to give the words of that friend, "Of whatever consequence he may think them to the true comfort of Christians, it is evident he does not hold them to be of the same importance with these here mentioned, which are necessary to the very being of true Christianity," viz. the doctrines approved by this friend in the former part of his paper.\* It might well have been expected, that love to the truth would have resented, in a proper manner, the offices of such a friend, however kind they might seem.—But I have not as yet heard, whether any such resentment has been shown.

I shall now give some instances of the charitable esteem expressed for particular writers in the *Dialogues* and in the *Meditations*. For as I find nothing said in the latter revoked in the former, I may be well allowed to consider them together.

I shall first observe the respect paid to the author of *Night Thoughts* and his writings. For I suppose we understand each other all along to judge of particular writers, only as they appear in their writings. The two following lines, which breathe the very sentiments and style of the spirit of self-dependence, may well be considered as the motto of this author.

"O be a *man*! and thou shalt be a *God*!  
And *half self-made*!—ambition how divine!"

It would be tedious to note all the commendations of the *Night Thoughts*, both in the *Dialogues* and in the *Meditations*. I shall only quote what is said in the first volume of the latter, at the close of a note at the foot of p. 87; "These thoughts give the highest entertainment to the fancy, and impart the noblest improvement to the mind. They not only refine our taste, but prepare us for death, and ripen us for glory. I never take up this admirable piece, but I am ready

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\* See *London Magazine* for September 1755, p. 425.

to cry out, *Tecum vivere amem, tecum obeam libens, i. e.* Inspire me with such a spirit, and life shall be delightful, nor death itself unwelcome."

The author of these thoughts does indeed speak many grand things concerning the atonement; but as he evidently makes them all subservient to human pride, his leading scope can deserve no more regard from a Christian, than the testimony of him who said, *I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God.*

I shall next glance at Dr. Lucas's Inquiry after Happiness. In p. 126, of part 1, Edinburgh, 1754, he says, "That God so governs the world, that the issues of things are not fatal and unavoidable, but dependent upon ourselves."

In p. 137, after some previous reasoning, he says, "These, with many others, are the absurd consequences which attend the denial of the universality or sufficiency of grace; but if, on the other hand, we do grant that God Almighty is ready to assist every man who calls on him in his endeavours after virtue and happiness, and that his assistance is sufficient to the end for which it is designed, then we must needs acknowledge that man can do what he can do; or, which is all one, what God has put in his power to do."

In p. 166, while he is labouring to show the possibility of attaining happiness in this life, he supposes an objection will arise from these words of the gospel, *If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me*, Matt. xvi, 24. He acknowledges, that obedience to this precept was indispensably necessary to the propagation of the gospel;" immediately adding, "But, blessed be God, the obligation of that duty has long ago ceased."\* This specimen sufficiently shows the spirit of this author. Let us now hear the encomium given both to the author and his performance, in a note at the foot of p. 52, Meditations, vol. 1, "An *author*, in whom the gentleman, the scholar, and the Christian, are

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\* According to this author, and many others, we are much indebted to the first Christians for suffering that we might reign, or enjoy a religion suited to all our worldly interests. I have heard of an eminent prelate of the Roman church, who said to his fellow, *O quantum profuit nobis hæc fabula de Jesu Christo!* "What a fund of gain to us has this fable about Jesus Christ been!"—Here I am reminded of a remark writ me by a reader of the *Meditations* and *Dialogues*, on the author's scheme, in these words: "His scheme speaks little of bearing the hatred of the world after Christ, and as little of the Christian hope, seeming to be adapted to men enjoying worldly ease and wealth."—I could wish that all occasion for any such remarks had been effectually cut off.

most happily united.—A *performance*, which, in point of solid argument, unaffected piety, and a vein of thought amazingly fertile, has, perhaps, no superior; nor can I wish my reader a more refined pleasure, or a more substantial happiness, than that of having the sentiments of this entertaining and pathetic writer, wove into the very texture of his heart.”

What shall we say of the charity breathing here? Does it proceed from the same mouth which praises the Divine grace? “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” Must not the reader be tempted to think, indeed, that he who maintains the ancient doctrine of grace in this connection, does not lay very great stress upon it? Yea, what would Mess. Boston and Erskines have said to the proposal of uniting together in the same heart, their avowed sentiments of grace, with those of the two gentlemen we have been now considering? Would not the former have charged the latter with gross heresy, and judged them worthy of extirpation?—Surely we must allow, that no two Pagan gods differed more than the different characters drawn for the Deity by these Christian teachers. Is the popular doctrine, then, which has so long claimed the title of orthodoxy, now disposed to hold forth the right hand of fellowship to her eminent adversary, with whom she has so long waged war?

I shall now take notice of the respect paid to the author of the *Family Expositor. Mediations*, vol. 1, p. 147, in a note at the foot of the page, he is called “a masterly expositor, who has illustrated the life of our blessed LORD, in the most elegant taste of criticism; with the most amiable spirit of devotion, and without any mixture of the malignant leaven, or, low singularities of a party.”

In the second volume of the *Dialogues*, at the foot of p. 378, and 379, we have two notes on these words of Paul: “The Gentiles which followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness,\* even the righteousness which is of faith.”†

\* “Surely this must signify more, than “attaining to the *profession* of a religion whereby they may be justified and saved.” To this multitudes attain, who continue, as the prophet speaks, “stout-hearted and far from righteousness;” who derive no real benefit from their profession, but are rendered utterly inexcusable and liable to more aggravated condemnation.’

† ‘Surely, “the righteousness which is by faith,” cannot consist ‘in humbly *committing* the soul to CHRIST, in the way that he hath appointed.’ According to this notion, the justi-

fyng righteousness would spring from ourselves, would be constituted by an act of our own, and not by the perfect obedience of our Lord.

“ I am sorry to see this, and the preceding interpretation, in the works of an *Expositor*, whose learning I admire, whose piety I reverence, and whose memory I honour. Yet I must say on this occasion, with one of the ancient philosophers, *Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas.*”

It gives me some satisfaction to see the *faith* and *righteousness* of this author justly discarded and set at nought. But this would only serve to puzzle me the more, to find the reason why charitable esteem is expressed for him, were I not informed by these words, “ whose piety I reverence.” But what piety? Surely not Christian piety: for even the popular doctrine will assert, that unfeigned faith is the only principle of all the true holiness or piety. It must then be modern piety, or the modern imitation of ancient Pagan piety. For it may well be allowed, that this author worshiped his own God decently, without showing any unsociable or malignant temper toward that of his neighbours. But it can never be allowed, while we pay any regard to the New Testament, that he worshiped the same God with Paul.—This piety is the broad foundation of modern charity; but I am apprehensive, that the ancient charity, with its peculiar practices, would appear, in the eyes of the modern, liable to be charged with, “ malignant leaven, or the low singularities of a party.”

Piety, in the large sense, is now the reputable word in every one's mouth, except those who are at the very top of the fashion, who profess atheism, or to worship no other God but their own honour or favourite pleasure. Accordingly, our guardians of devotion, while they set themselves in opposition to the irreligion or atheism of the age, endeavour to awaken our attention to, and raise our esteem, of the piety of the ancient philosophers, whom, by the by, Dr. Warburton has shown to have been no better than atheists. And while they set before us the pious sayings of these wise men, in order to heighten our devotion, they produce so many passages from the Psalms of David, or other parts of Scripture, as more sublime sayings of the same kind with the former. And withal they condescend to add the name of Jesus Christ in such a manner, as plainly shows, that they have no other use for it but to throw a dash of popularity into their devotion, or to pay some decent respect to the religion of their country; yea, in such a manner, as plainly shows, that if they lived in Asia, or the east of Europe, they would make the same use of the



name of Mahomet. We shall even find Christian teachers admiring the piety of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus, who persecuted Christians unto death for their piety: and as if this had been too small an expression of his resentment, his philosophic piety led him to insult that joyful constancy appearing in their sufferings, which he himself was greatly straitened how to account for.

But whatever these men do, one would have expected, that in volumes, wherein the grand article of the imputed righteousness was to make the principal figure, the author would have made no hesitation, whether he should heartily agree with Paul's account of the ancient philosophers, or be either intimidated or caressed by their modern successors and admirers, to strike into some doubtful middle path.

In *Dialogues*, vol. 2, the note at the foot of p. 97, begins thus; "Though I love and admire the character of Socrates, yet I cannot approve the whole of his conduct. One thing which gives me particular offence, is, the *habitual* practice of *swearing*, which occurs in all his conferences with his pupils."

*Ibid.* p. 201, Aspasio had said, "Even their *philosophers*, the most improved and penetrating geniuses, were unacquainted with the very *first principle* of true religion. Even they could not pronounce, with an unflinching tongue, That GOD IS ONE." The note below has these words; "A learned and ingenious friend would fain have Socrates exempted from this charge. I wish I could gratify his benevolent temper, and spare that amiable philosopher. But, however justly he may express himself on some occasions, at other times he wavers; he evidently revolts, and is most pitiably inconsistent with himself.—Even in his excellent conference with Aristodemus, where he argues admirably well for the *existence*, he cannot steadily adhere to the *unity* of the GODHEAD.—Nay, in his last solemn apology before his judges, he publicly *renounces* the truth; declares, that he worshiped those gods which were acknowledged by his countrymen; worshiped them, and no other, on the same festivals, at the same altars, and in the same [*idolatrous*] manner.

Let none conclude from this or any other passage, that we would consign over all the heathens to damnation. This is as far from our intention, as it is foreign to the argument. We are only like witnesses summoned to give in our evidence. From which it appears, that the very best among the Gentiles were ignorant of the true GOD; or, if *they knew him* in any degree, "they glorified him not as God; but became vain in

their imaginations," and vile in their worships—*Whether* they shall obtain mercy, or *which* of them shall be objects of Divine clemency, is left *solely* to the determination of their supreme, unerring, righteous JUDGE ;

—“ Non nostrum est tantas componere lites.”

Though nothing is more common, yet nothing is more foreign to the gospel, than for men to expect from each other's complaisance or benevolence, the mutual returns of charity, or to be acknowledged as objects of the Divine favour. A cheerful good-natured man will be liberal of his pleasantry and good humour to all around him ; but if he love the gospel, he will not dare to pronounce his most acceptable comrade more agreeable to God, than he sees his heart and life agreeable to the gospel. The gospel will lead a man to be kind and obliging to his neighbour, as to all things within his power ; but for one to pretend to dispose of either the smiles or frowns of the Almighty, is impious : and to do the former is of more pernicious consequence to men than the latter, for men are often hurt, yea, and utterly ruined, by flattery or false charity. But on the other hand, he who enjoys the favour of the true God, has that joy which no man can take from him by any anathema whatsoever. When one expostulates with me thus, “ I have charity for you, and hope you have the same for me ;” I can understand him to mean nothing else at bottom but this, “ The favour of my God is at your service, and I expect you will be no less obliging in return ;” or, “ I am disposed to frame and accommodate my God to your pleasure and comfort, and would think it very unkind in you not to do the like for me.” Thus men often gain reputation for charity by the most atheistical trifling in sacred things ; and thus he who has the coolest notions concerning the Deity, comes to be reckoned the man of the most extensive charity, though he should be no way remarkable for self-denied beneficence in his actions.

But let us consider the above cited note, where it is said, “ Let none conclude from this or any other passage, that we would consign over all the heathens to damnation.” But why this caution ? Surely no Christian will ever dream of consigning over all the heathens to damnation. The Scriptures abound everywhere with promises of salvation to the heathens, and with testimonies that they obtained it ? But how ? I hope no Christian will say they obtained it any other way than by faith, or the knowledge of the Messiah. Before the

Messiah came, we read of heathens, who believing the promise, came to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel; and after he came, we find that the salvation of God was sent unto the heathens, and that they heard it, and were thereby turned from idols to serve the living God. But, perhaps, I am here multiplying proofs aside from the purpose. If so, the question still recurs, For what serves the caution? Do we think it wrong to affirm, that there is no salvation but by the knowledge of Christ; and that there is no name but his given under heaven for salvation to men? Then we think it right to affirm, that there is at least a possibility of salvation otherwise; and that the Divine mercy may be conveyed to men by some other channel, though we cannot certainly say it shall be so, or who shall be objects of it. If this be our opinion, then, it is plain, that however much we talk about the gospel, we are far from laying much stress upon it. Then it is plain, that we consider all the grand things revealed in the Scriptures to be "Much ado about nothing."

But what intimidates us? what shakes our confidence about many of the clearest passages of the gospel on this head? Are we afraid of being deficient in our due respects to the philosophers, ancient or modern? Do we consider this sort of men as "the very best among the Gentiles?" Do we "love and admire the character of Socrates," or any of his followers, down to his eminent modern disciple in our own country; who, by the use he made of his test of truth, if I may not say taught the nation, has at least made it very fashionable for people to laugh at the religion of their country, and withal to observe what is reckoned outward decorum, by a decent compliance with the public forms and rites of that religion? Can we ever expect to learn what is TRUE, what is COMELY, or what is HONEST, from the random unmeaning flourishes of those men who are, and ever have been, notable enemies to truth and sincerity, especially in the most sacred matters? And if we examine their sentiments as to humanity, we shall find that it is perfectly agreeable to their *good taste*, their *sense of order and decorum*, their *sound judgment*, their *enlarged sentiments*, and their notions of public utility, to persecute, under the name of enthusiasts or fanatics, the very same people whom zealous churchmen would persecute under the name of *heretics*; even all who fear God, more than them who kill the body. We shall find them ready to agree with the most bloody-minded ecclesiastics, in considering reverence for the true God, as looking with an evil aspect both on the church and state. The truth

is, nothing is more comely in the eyes of the former, than dissembled atheism; and in the eyes of the latter, than piety supporting pride.

But, of all men, I wonder how the followers of the fishers of Galilee should come to admire the philosophers, *the very best*; rather the very worst among the Gentiles; so as to wish the earth might be removed for them: yea, what is infinitely more stable than the earth, that the Divine character might be varied in their favour. We may easily think of other classes of men to whom it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment than for them. Nothing can serve more readily to beget mistakes in our minds about the gospel, than our being unhappily led in to admire, either the ingenious atheism of the philosophers, or the ostentatious devotion of the popular preachers. For in what else do either of these stand distinguished above other men, so as to claim our particular attention or admiration?

I find that the gentle spirit, which breathes in the Dialogues, can be roused to a sufficient height of resentment when it meets with suitable provocation. This is manifest from the angry note against common beggars, vol. 3, p. 346, Yet this is far from being the only class of men where gross imposition prevails; neither is their imposition of the most considerable or extensive hurt to mankind. After all that is said against them, and those who are prevailed on by their importunate clamours, I can find no reason to blame myself, or others, for parting with a trifle to a common beggar, even though the note endeavours to put us in fear of a rebuke at the day of judgment for so doing.

I leave the restraint of common begging to those in authority, who have power to provide for the needy otherwise, as well as to correct the unruly; and suppose that every man's first care of himself will keep him from being greatly hurt by common beggars. So I see no reason to grudge them what Providence, civil authority, and the indulgence of their fellow-creatures allows them. The note which recommends the real poor to our compassion, in opposition to common beggars, whom it excludes, does not sufficiently show, that many of the former class may not be found among the latter. I find, that in Judea, when Jesus Christ lived there, the streets, the lanes, and the highways, were frequented by supplicants, who were undoubtedly so sturdy, as to be "able to undergo the fatigue of travelling;" and were also "able to undergo the inclemencies of the weather;" yet, I do not find that he, who on all occasions showed his zeal against sin



without reserve, ever pointed his displeasure against this class of men, or yet forbade any to relieve them; yea, some passages in the gospel look much the other way.

As people of this class seldom appear in print, and have no friends of condition who choose to own them, so can form no party, we may, indeed, with all freedom, show our indignation against them, without dreading any repulse from them or their friends; yet, methinks, when we are writing of set purpose in defence of the gospel, the strength of our zeal would be much more profitably employed in opposition to its most eminent and deceitful enemies, who daily impose upon thousands to their utter destruction.

For instance, might not something like the spirit and style of the note now referred to, be properly used to guard us against many such, who cry aloud for our reverent esteem, and make heavy complaints for the want of it? - As, "Let us be deaf to their most importunate clamours, and assure ourselves, that, by this determined inflexibility, we do God, we do our *community*, we do *them*, the most substantial service. Should they implore by the *injured* name of JESUS, for the honour of the *Lord Jesus*, let us resolutely withhold" our reverence. "Their meaning is, I cannot go on in my present—iniquitous course," with sufficient credit and influence, "unless you will administer some kindly pernicious assistance; for CHRIST'S sake therefore, assist me," by your hearty concurrence, "to persist in the way that leads to eternal destruction. This is the *true import* of their petitions. And whether the sanction of that most venerable name, added to *such* a request, should move our" reverence, "or excite our abhorrence, let every" lover of the gospel and of mankind "judge."

Here I cannot forbear remarking, that the zeal of ancient charity must be very rare, when he who, among writers, justly deserves to be accounted the chief, if not the only contender for the doctrine of Divine grace and imputed righteousness in the Church of England, shows so much loathness to break friendship with, and expose himself to the hatred of its open and determined enemies: and when the like chief, in the Church of Scotland, I mean the author of a late Essay

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\* The second edition, Edinburgh, 1756, is called, *Essay on the Connection between the Doctrine of Justification by the Imputed Righteousness of Christ, and Holiness of Life.*

When I took notice of the author of this Essay as above, and in my fifth letter, I had some reason to hope, from the uncommon regard he showed to the Scriptures, that he would proceed to bestow his attention

on Justification,\* expressly declares himself, agreeably to the modern trimming humour, disposed rather to "reconcile than widen" the several differences about faith; and even as to what he himself judges worthy of being contended for, seems afraid of being "ensnared, and exposed to censure." Of

on their great and leading scope; and leave to others the discussion of such curious questions as these: Whether it be agreeable to *Divine right*, or the maxims of the kingdom of Heaven, that the patrons, or that the populace of a parish, should have most influence in presenting a candidate for the vacant benefice allotted by earthly kingdoms for the preacher of the national religion? Whether the pulpit or the stage, in the present improved state of both, are fittest means for promoting sanctification in the hearts of men? and, Which is the best method of consolidating iron and clay into one uniform substance; or of making a nation wealthy and powerful under the true profession of Christianity?

For my part, if the theatre, as it pretends, serve to refine the taste and manners of those who claim the rank of gentlemen; if the national religion, as in duty bound, retain the body of the people in due respect to the magistrate, and subjection to the laws, I know no higher benefit we can reasonably expect from either. I do not expect from any theatre, regulated according to the taste of those who rule the fashion, nor from any religion established as most agreeable to the inclinations of the people, as it must be, if worthy of an establishment, and fit to render the expected service to the civil government; from either of these, I say, I do not expect to find an effectual remedy against the corruption of human nature, nor do I think that either of these tend to fit men for the kingdom of Heaven.

Dean Swift, in one of his serious moods, (in a sermon called *Mutual Subjection*,) once discovered, that were we only all righteous, were it our only emulation who should serve each other to the best advantage, we should become a very happy nation. But he who could effectually teach the nation to become holy and righteous, would certainly make a much more important discovery. For after all the fine things that have been said, the complaint of the corruption of human nature is still as strong as ever.

I have lately seen *A Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage*, writ by the author of the abovementioned Essay. In this inquiry, the author shows no small zeal against the stage, as the rival of the pulpit. And his reasoning would lead us to form our notion of the ancient distinction betwixt Christ's people and the world, in an especial manner, by opposing those who are fond of sermons, to those who delight in the stage; or the devout, to the gay and fashionable world: whereas that distinction, when first made, was most clearly manifested and understood in the opposition betwixt Christ's disciples and the strictest leaders in devotion. It does not look well in our author, that he should be so amicably disposed to reconcile, or make little account of the differences wherein the honour of Christ is evidently at stake; and at the same time so resolute in employing all his abilities to widen to the utmost those differences wherein the honour of the clergy is chiefly concerned. Yea, so zealous is he in this latter cause, that he seems to think he has gained a considerable point, if, by collecting a great variety of different considerations into one complex idea, he has been able to raise a doubt in the minds of men concerning the lawfulness of the stage.

whom? Surely of none other but those whom he himself looks upon as enemies of the gospel. How often do we see the ancient proverb verified, especially in the matters of religion, *The fear of man bringeth a snare?* The force of its counter-part is not so readily attended to,—*But whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, shall be safe.*

I shall now close what I have to say on charity, with observing, that as apostolic charity seeks the good of men without courting their favour by flattery, modern charity, however

I could wish this author would think seriously on the state of the question he has given us with regard to the stage. In his 10th and 11th pages, he first supposes the best regulated stage that can be expected, and then enumerates the things, either bad in themselves, or of bad tendency, which must necessarily be implied in supporting it in this its best supposable condition. After this, in p. 12, he states the question. Now, put the case, that I have, in like manner, supposed the best established church that can be expected, and described the various things necessarily implied in the erecting and supporting of it; then let us hear his state of the question, without any other variation of his words, than the *national church* instead of *the stage*. “The fair and plain state of the question then is, Whether it is possible or practicable, in the present state of human nature, to have the above system of things under so good a regulation, as to make the erecting and countenancing *the national church*, agreeable to the will of God, and consistent with the purity of the Christian profession?” Could our author attend to this fair and plain state of the question, it might furnish him with a key to his knowledge of the Scripture, and lead him to apply many passages of it more pertinently than he has done.

But by what follows it would appear, that his mind is very strongly tinctured with the pride of his order. Whereas, the partisans of the pulpit, and those of the stage, with equal discretion on both sides, have lately exchanged “many little pieces of satire;” our author charges the latter with no less than the heinous crime of “blasphemously comparing the pulpit with the stage.” This is like the language of the tenth century. Can our author seriously think, that a frame of wood called a *pulpit*, when filled with a living creature called the *Reverend*, acquires a dignity equal to the throne of the Highest; so as all freedom of speech against the former, should, like that used against the latter, deserve the charge of blasphemy! It may justly be reckoned a very doubtful question, whether the pulpit or the stage, in the present improved state of both, conveys most spiritual benefit to the souls of men; but which of them does most hurt, may, I think, be very easily decided, if any regard be had to the authority of the New Testament.

The apostles, mean spirited mortals it would seem, never supposed that their persons, their sermons or epistles, would be respected by the public on a footing with dramatic performances, or the writers of them; so they never ran the risk of being foiled in the competition.

It may give those who observe the fulfilment of the apostolic prophecies some satisfaction, to perceive the high-minded gentlemen of the pulpit reduced so low, as to enter the lists with those of the stage; and at the same time apparently sensible, that the competition is by no means contemptible.

benevolent it may seem, bears the same aspect toward the real interest of mankind, as the insinuating address of that spirit who first taught, and still continues to teach mankind, to disregard the words of their Creator with hopes of impunity; or to presume, that every act of disobedience, for which they have plausible reasons, is not necessarily connected with misery. On the whole, What avails it what set of principles we choose to stamp as properly our own, while we join in the friendly alliance of charity with determined promoters of impiety and inhumanity! It is not evident from the Scripture, that the judgment of God is pointed, not only against them who do these things, but also against those who take pleasure in such as do them?

If the leading sentiment in these sheets shall prove acceptable to any party having, or desiring to have the public leading in religion, there will thence arise the strongest ground to suspect, that either I have greatly mistaken the apostles, or that my readers have greatly mistaken me.

I have in these letters studied to write agreeably to the cry of John the Baptist, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low;"—to show, that philosophers, savages, revered doctors, knights of the post, &c., stand all an equal chance for the kingdom of heaven;—so to set at nought all the boasted distinctions among men, on account of which the great salvation is neglected. And I have the satisfaction to find, that when Aspasio has the Divine grace full in his eye, without being diverted by any other object, he is ready to second and support me in all the greatest freedoms of speech I have used; while he ascribes all opposition to that grace, to "the envy of the devil and the pride of man." And I have no other intention in these letters, but to support and enforce the many excellent things he has said in commendation of that grace, and to separate the chaff from the wheat.

I have used some freedom with the names of several eminent preachers. But I have no occasion to apologize for this to the friends of Paul's gospel: for such will readily perceive that there was no attacking the popular doctrine\* to any pur-

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\* Perhaps it will be thought needful, that I should define, with greater precision than I have hitherto done, what I mean by the *popular doctrine*; especially as I have considered many as preachers thereof who differ remarkably from each other; and particularly as I have ranked amongst them Mr. Wesley, who may justly be reckoned one of the most



pose, without making an honest essay towards profaning the divinity of those demi-gods, whose authority supports it, and whose credit must stand or fall together with it. Meanwhile, the votaries of that doctrine may, if they please, rest quietly assured, that the voice of truth will be heard only by a very few in the midst of the more alluring cries of worldly factions, and that Paul's gospel will never pretend to set up for a rival to theirs in this world.

I have, as I found occasion, freely adopted the observations, and even the words of the friends of the doctrine contained in these sheets, without seeing any necessity for quoting them, or mentioning their names; for I frankly acknowledge, that I have no friends, whose names are of sufficient weight to enforce anything I have said, or to screen me from censure if I have departed from the mind of the apostles, who alone are the proper judges in every question about the Christian faith. If I have not been faithful to the one thing needful, I can complain of no censure as too severe; if I have, I see no reason to be greatly alarmed on any other account.

As I am sensible my own name can add no weight to these letters, so I judge it ought not to diminish any weight

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virulent reproachers of that God, whose character is drawn by the apostles, that this island has produced. To remove all doubt concerning my meaning, I shall thus explain myself.

Throughout these letters, I consider all those as teachers of the popular doctrine, who seek to have credit and influence among the people, by resting our acceptance with God, not simply on *what Christ hath done*, but more or less on *the use we make of him*, the advance we make toward him, or some secret desire, wish, or sigh to do so; or on something we feel or do concerning him, by the assistance of some kind of grace or spirit; or, lastly, on something we employ him to do, and suppose he is yet to do for us. In sum, all who would have us to be conscious of something else than the bare truth of the gospel; all who would have us to be conscious of some beginning of a change to the better, or some desire, however faint, toward such change, in order to our acceptance with God; these I call the popular preachers, however much they may differ from each other about faith, and grace, special or common, or about anything else. For I am disposed rather to reconcile than widen the various differences among them.

But my resentment is all along chiefly pointed against the capital branch of the popular doctrine, which, while it asserts almost all the articles belonging to the sacred truth, at the same time deceitfully clogs them with the opposite falsehoods. This I would compare to a chain having one link of gold and another of brass alternately: or, I would call it a two-fold cord, wherein one thread of truth and another of falsehood are all along entwisted together. If we think of its practical address to, and influence on the minds of the people, as contrasted with its formally avowed tenets, it resembles a whited sepulchre, inwardly full of rottenness.

they borrow from the Scriptures. And as I espouse that *faith* which Aspasio pronounces to be "certainly of the *enfeebled* and *infantile* kind," when he condescends to "suppose" it "to be sound and genuine," vol. 3, p. 290; I shall at present, knowing no reason for being either anxious to conceal, or yet forward to publish my own, content myself with assuming the name, under which that faith is introduced, as not knowing any particular person intended by it. And as I have not the pleasure of being personally acquainted with you, nor had any opportunity of seeing or knowing you, but by your writings, I have chosen the same public channel of the press, by which you have communicated your sentiments to me, among the rest of your readers, for returning mine to you and them.

On the whole, the result of all that has been said amounts to this, That every man's great concern turns upon what issue his mind comes to about the question, which Pilate once moved, without waiting for an answer, *What is truth?* He who knows what is the truth, has no occasion to give himself any disturbance with any of the controversies that have been moved about, *What is faith?* Yea, he may, with the greatest confidence and safety, dismiss all the modern descriptions of it, whether fashionable or popular, and send them back to the regions of darkness from whence they came.

To conclude, were it needful, I would willingly produce here many passages from the Dialogues, containing sentiments, which never owed their birth to the popular doctrine, and as to which, it is enough to awaken the highest regret and resentment, to think that they should ever be confounded with it.\* But I shall content myself with transcribing,

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\* That the saving truth is effectually undermined by this confusion, may readily be seen in the following easy view. He who maintains that we are justified only by faith, and at the same time affirms, with Aspasio, "that faith is a work exerted by the human mind" undoubtedly maintains, if he has any meaning to his words, that we are justified by a work exerted by the human mind.

I have all along studied to make use of every form of expression I could think of, for evincing, in the most clear, palpable, and striking manner, a difference of the last importance, which thousands of preachers have laboured to cover with mist. If I have made that difference manifest to those who have any attention for the subject, my great end in writing is gained, on whatever side of it men shall choose to rank themselves. It has frequently appeared to me a thing no less amazing than provoking, when the great difference betwixt the ancient gospel here contended for and the popular doctrine, has been pointed out, as clear

out of many, one passage on the article of justification, from vol. 1, p. 276.

“Both grace and faith stand in direct opposition to works; *all* works whatever. Whether they be works of the law, or works of the gospel; exercises of the heart, or actions of the life; done while we remain unregenerate, or when we become regenerate; they are all, and every of them, *equally* set aside in this great affair.

“That the bill of exclusion is thus *extensive*, or rather quite *unlimited*, appears from the reason assigned: *Lest any man should boast*. That all pretence of glorying may be cut off from fallen creatures. That the whole honour of obtaining salvation, may be appropriated to him, who *hid not his face from shame and spitting*. And is he not worthy, unspeakably worthy, to receive this *unrivalled* honour, as a recompense for his *unparalleled* humiliation?”

May the truth set forth here, be the strength of your heart in the hour of death. And, meantime, may fellowship with this truth, in all the afflictions and joys which attend it, be your hearty choice. Many, indeed, will be your enemies, and few your friends on earth; but all in heaven will be on your side. After what is now said, it would be a very small thing to add, that to hear of this being your determined choice, will greatly heighten the affectionate esteem of,

DEAR SIR,

Your friend and servant,

May, 1757.

PALEMEN.

as words could make it, to find many, after all, so obstinately stupid as to declare they saw no real difference. This I cannot account for, by assigning any other cause than the special agency of the prince of darkness. All such will be ready to complain that I have treated the popular preachers with too great severity. And to such I can only say, that I cannot pretend to explain myself more clearly than I have already done. Only they will be pleased to remember, that where there is a real difference from the apostles on the point of acceptance with God, however small and insignificant it may seem, when obscured with a multitude of words, either without meaning, or fitted only to deceive, it will be found in its effects and consequences, wide as the difference betwixt Christ and Belial, light and darkness, heaven and hell.

To lead Christians to distinguish, with the utmost jealousy and care, upon this point, is the great scope and constant aim of the apostles in all their writings; yea, this is the principal branch of instruction inculcated throughout all the Scriptures. And in nothing more evidently does it appear how cheap the gospel is held by many of its professed friends, than in their want of this jealousy, and their readiness to count differences about faith of small importance.





## APPENDIX.

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'Tis agreed, by the great majority in all Christian countries, that there is no salvation but by Jesus Christ. Thus far general consent agrees with the apostolic doctrine. But, then, a capital difference between these two arises in the following manner.

The apostles maintained, that Christ did enough to save sinners in his own person, without their concurrence, and that all who were so persuaded, accordingly found salvation in him. As the natural counterpart of this, they at the same time maintained, that if any man went about to deny or undermine the all-sufficiency of Christ's work to save, by insisting on the necessity of any other concurring requisite whatever, Christ should profit him nothing.

On the other hand, since Christianity began to flourish and prevail in the world, the majority of those wearing the Christian name have been agreed in maintaining the necessity of something beside Christ's work to save them, or procure them acceptance with God. Yea, long before that time, even in the apostolic age, the Judaizing Christians, who were far from being few in number, proceeded upon the same plan. This we are taught by the apostles to call a corrupted or perverted gospel. And here chiefly we may perceive the consent of the Christian world all along opposed to the apostolic doctrine.

But while we behold the Christian world consenting, against the apostles, about the necessity of some addition, we see them at the same time very far from being agreed among themselves about what ought to be added, and how much, the nature of the assistance needful to promote the addition, and the properest means of soliciting the concurring assistance, with various other considerations depending on these. So, when Israel once departed from the worship of the one God, who led them out of Egypt, they could never settle upon the worship of any other, but lay open to all the innovations of the neighbouring nations. Thus, when a wife once departs from her husband to admit another, she may easily be pre-

vailed upon to admit a second, third, and fourth, till at last she become a downright prostitute.

In the apostolic age, the favourite addition was, to become a Jewish proselyte by circumcision. And it is evident, that much more could be said in favour of that, than could be urged in behalf of any other that has been adopted since. In the Roman church, the additional grounds of acceptance with God have been multiplied in a very extravagant manner. Protestants have in many respects discarded the extravagance of that church, yet they still generally agree in establishing their own righteousness as the ground of their acceptance with God, according to various schemes of their own, some in a more open, others in a more secret and ambiguous manner frustrating the all-sufficiency of the righteousness finished by Jesus Christ. Now it is evident, that the scheme of doctrine which most resembles the apostolic in honouring Christ's work, yet find means of rendering it of no effect, must in a more especial manner awaken the jealousy and move the resentment of such as maintain the all-sufficiency of that work exclusive of every reserve. And such is the scheme contained in the dialogues between Theron and Aspasio.

The reader will perceive by my first letter, with what reluctance and respect I commenced an opponent to the author of these dialogues; and that I was willing to consider him as rather imposed upon than sufficiently aware what he was doing. But not many months after the publication of these letters, I found, by three sermons\* he published in August, 1757, that I had presumed too much in favour of my author, and that, accordingly, the affectionate esteem I had expressed for him had proceeded upon a fond mistake. In short, I found I had no reason to distinguish him from other preachers of the same doctrine. Those who know the difference between the strain of doctrine in his three sermons and that in my letters, will easily understand me here; and to others, I apprehend it would be but so much lost labour to attempt a large explanation.

Though I found reason to change my thoughts of Mr. Hervey, yet, in forwarding this second edition, (which was mostly printed before his death,) I thought it best to retain the same form of address all along as in the first, that the reader might still have in his eye a full view of the genuine

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\* *Called, The Time of Danger, The Means of Safety, and, The Way of Holiness.*

progress of the controversy. The slowest of my readers will probably perceive, that it is now too late to say anything to move the attention of Mr. Hervey; and I presume they will likewise readily agree with me when I say it is highly probable that he will continue to live as an author, when both I and my book are forgot. If, amidst the throng of daily publications, my book serve as a little transitory fuel to the fire of that contention which the Saviour came to revive upon the earth, and which will continue burning till he come again, my purpose in writing is sufficiently honoured. Yea, though it should be forgot before the current year end, I have it to say, that my purpose has already been honoured far beyond expectation.

Not a few, I understand, (such is the curiosity of people about the sentiments of famous men,) would be fond to know what I have learned of Mr. Hervey's reflections on reading these letters. But as they have been so much of a piece with the reflections made by many others, I think it equally needless as unseasonable to produce them here. Besides his correspondents have already made them circulate, in a private way, pretty widely.

Yet, I apprehend, it is not yet unseasonable to take some notice of a foolish complaint against me that has been handed about with no small keenness among the larger circle of his friends; as if I had wronged him much by choosing to animadvert on the first edition of his dialogues, and not on the third; since it appears from my book, (p. 430,) that I had seen his third edition before my letters were finished. This complaint, I call, at first instance, foolish; because those who make it, do not so much as pretend to say, that in his third edition he has retracted any one sentiment that I have censured in his first.

However, to give such as may be imposed upon by such a complaint all reasonable satisfaction, I am willing to inform them, that soon after I read his first edition, in April, 1755, I set about the writing of these letters. I had not opportunity of seeing any of his subsequent editions till more than a year after, when my letters were well advanced. Some time about midsummer, 1756, my attention was drawn by a newspaper, advertising a new edition of Marshall on Sanctification, and producing a recommendation of that book from Mr. Hervey's dialogues, edition third. This led me to look for that third edition, that I might see the recommendation there with my own eyes. On this occasion, in a bookseller's shop, I glanced several pages of that edition, especially in dialogue 16, to see

if there were any alterations or additions. Some of both these I found, but no change in point of sentiment. Instead of that, I saw fresh care taken to support, with a variety of human suffrages, his main point, which appeared to me unsupported by the Scripture, to wit, the appropriation supposed necessary to saving faith. Therefore I thought it needless to tire myself and the reader, by noting the variations between two editions of the same book, when the strain of doctrine was the same in both.

Not long after the publication of my letters, I considered his third edition with more leisure, and found that a particular notice of it would have served rather to enlarge than diminish my censure. Besides, the sensible reader will readily reflect, that as the writings of such an author have a good chance of soon running out into many editions, whatever edition I had chosen to remark upon might, before I had finished my remarks, have been followed by another, and accordingly the pretended cause of complaint still have remained. If then a reason were to be assigned for the complaint suitable to the temper with which it has been urged, I apprehend it must turn upon this, that I should have been so presumptuous as to point my severest censure against the doctrine most acceptable to the strictest sect of the national religion, whatever book, or whatever edition of any book I had chosen to attack it in. In confirmation of this, it may be observed, that the three forementioned sermons, which were published some months after my letters, have proved no less acceptable to the complainers than all the editions of the dialogues. Yet nowhere more palpably than in those sermons, has the author laboured to change the gospel of the Divine grace and the kingdom of heaven into a self-righteous and political scheme.—Self-righteous while he leads men to make use of Christ as their assistant in fulfilling the law, that thereby they may save their souls alive, and while he comments in such a manner on Ezek. xviii, 27, as serves to deface, or rather abolish the difference between living by the works of the law and living by faith, even that grand difference, which I may say the New Testament was writ to elucidate. Political, while he leads Britons to consider the true atonement as a like defence to them from the sword of the French, as the blood of the paschal lamb was to Israel from the punishment inflicted on Egypt.

Though Mr. Hervey is now removed from the field of controversy, and how soon his opponent may follow him is uncertain, yet all on whose minds the Scripture has more



weight than the empty noise of giddy multitudes, will readily perceive, of how small consideration the life or death of any sinful mortal ought to be in the controversy about the faith once delivered to the saints; a controversy that has already outlived many generations, and will continue to be upheld, in what shape Providence pleases, till the time of the final determination of all disputes; and I may add, a controversy wherein every man's highest interest is at stake, and eventually turns upon what conclusion his mind comes to about it.

Before I proceed to another branch of my subject, I would here make a few general reflections on the conduct of those who any way interest themselves in the controversy about the faith. None appear to me to be more obnoxious to censure from the Scripture, than those who go about to diminish, obscure, or dissipate the capital difference between the apostolic faith and all counterfeits of it, even the grand difference between the one thing needful, and every addition, however artfully and ambiguously introduced. As the Scripture is clear and positive on the point, that there is but *one faith* that saves men, it always appears so far respectable in any man, as betokening something like the action of conscience, when we see him steady and zealous for his own notion of faith in opposition to every other, so as to admit no other to stand either in competition or alliance with it. All neutrals, trimmers, and reconcilers in this case, stand more especially obnoxious to the censure of all such as find as much in the gospel as determines them in good earnest to take a side. The former, like the pretended mother before Solomon's judgment-seat, not having their hearts and bowels interested, are willing to accommodate matters, by halving, dividing, or destroying the capital difference. Whereas, those who find all their salvation in the one thing needful, and see its proper value in that very point of view wherein it excels or differs from everything that affects either competition or alliance with it, find themselves interested at all hazards to preserve the difference clear, full, and entire.

Yet the corruption of Christianity has from the beginning been chiefly introduced by the more prudent and respectable sort of men, who desired to accommodate matters betwixt the obnoxious gospel and the people of best repute for piety and good sense; by men who desired to make a fair show in the flesh, and to do their utmost that the offence of the cross might cease; in a word, by men who had the interest of religion at heart, and who desired nothing more than to see Christianity flourish and prevail. Such were the men who,

from the beginning, gave the greatest disquiet to the apostles, and awakened their keenest resentment. They had the address to introduce their deviations from, or additions to the truth, so privily and artfully, as to persuade many that they taught the same gospel with the apostles, only in a manner more advantageous, and less offensive to the better sort of people. On such occasions we see how much the anxiety and jealousy of Paul was moved, and how he laboured to convince those who had been deceived with a gospel thus smoothed to the taste of the world, that they had been bewitched with what was in reality, and in effect, another gospel; however much art was used to make it appear to be at bottom the same with what he preached. Even as, in his reasoning against the Jews, we find him nice to the last degree, in his distinctions about grace, while he maintains, that grace bestowed on those who appear in any respect more deserving than others, is in reality no more grace.

The attempt made to deface the excellency of the sole requisite to justification, bear no small resemblance to the methods that have been employed to eclipse the dignity of the Messiah's person. We have been desired to conceive a vast extensive scale of created beings, arising from the lowest and most imperfect condition, even from the meanest reptile or shell-fish, up to man, and thence, through a very long series of angelic natures, gradually ascending in perfection till it approach very near to the summit of all perfection, or to the Deity. Thus men have endeavoured to enlarge our ideas of creating power, and extend our views of the dominion of the Deity. At the head of this vast scale of created beings, they place the Mediator, next step, as it were, to the Deity: and thus, 'tis presumed, they have consulted his honour in a most advantageous manner, and set his eminence in a very high point of view. But after we have stretched our thoughts to the utmost, and exalted our ideas of created excellency as high as imagination, aided by invention, can soar; what a vast, what an infinite gap do we find remaining unfilled up betwixt the highest creature and the Deity! and how vast the disproportion between the remaining gap and the whole scale of created being beside! Yea, the disproportion here is infinitely greater than that between the circumference of the earth and the circumference of a reed shaken with the wind. So we must conclude, when we think of him before whom all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or

say unto him what dost thou? All creatures, then, from the highest to the lowest, in point of dependence, stand at an equal distance from the Deity; and all, conscious of their dependence, are equally bound to obedience and unreserved submission to his will.

Now, if it was necessary, that a substitute should work a righteousness for guilty men, the question arises, Who was equal to the great undertaking? Was the highest angel, or the highest creature imaginable? Far be it! It is impious at first view to suppose it possible for any creature to supererogate, or do more in the way of obedience to the Deity, than he is strictly bound to for himself, by virtue of his natural dependence; therefore, none was fit for the task, but a person who naturally had, so could without robbery, or without any degree of disloyalty, claim independence. Nor could such a person be found without the revealed distinction in the Deity. According to that distinction, we find the majesty, authority, sovereignty, or independence of the Deity, preserved in the person of the Father; while we behold it honoured and illustrated in the most striking view, by the unparalleled condescension and submission of the Son; even of him, who, in his lowest condition, could say, *I and the Father are one*; and as to all works peculiar to the Deity, from the creation downward, could say, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

Again, if the law to be honoured by the substitute was a law given to men, or a law respecting the nature and situation of men, then it was necessary that the substitute should be truly and properly a man: for the majesty and wisdom of God, in giving a law to men, could never be evinced to their satisfaction, if that law was never honoured with perfect obedience in any one instance; or, in other words, if it was not perfectly and notoriously obeyed by a man. If obedience then was performed by one man, under an appeal to the most explicit declaration of the Divine law, in its utmost extent, in the midst of every disadvantageous, discouraging, and intimidating circumstance, and opposed by all other men, yet honoured as faultless with the highest testimonies of approbation on the part of heaven; then the perfection and incomparable excellency of such obedience must shine forth with the clearest and most unexceptionable splendour. And such, according to the Scripture, was the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who often took pleasure to design himself the *Son of man*, thereby denoting his proper manhood, while showing himself to be

the *Son of God*, by doing the works and speaking the words proper only to the Most High.

Now, that such a Divine righteousness is necessary for the relief of guilty men, may appear from all the trials that have been made by those who have laboured most seriously and diligently, in following after righteousness, or in the business of establishing their own righteousness. The chief hope of success in those trials has arisen from the observable series of the many degrees of difference or excellency between the most despicable and the most respectable character among men. This series is variously traced by men of different complexions; as, from the basest degree of barbarity to the highest of politeness, from the lowest knavery to the highest honesty, from the most illiterate to the most learned, the savage to the philosopher, &c. But the chief and most extensive series is from the most profane person to the most respectable devotee. The person who, being eminent in every other respect, shines also in devotion, is considered as not very much inferior to the Most High, and is even talked of as a kind of deity upon earth. Such persons, it is acknowledged, rarely appear; but then, where living example fails us, romance, legend, and fine imaginations borrowed from expected revivals of religion, come into our aid, and help to elevate our ideas of human virtue and piety a hundred degrees beyond what we ever see in real life. And the reader who can, while he is reading, admire such elevated virtue, fondly supposes himself on the road to the distant point, and ready to make more speedy progress, if he could only find suitable encouragement and concurrence. Yet if it be seriously inquired, what it is at bottom that on such occasions most captivates the hearts of men with admiration and fond hope, it will be found to be something very different from the character of Jesus Christ, which was disallowed of men even when shining with the most heavenly lustre before their eyes.

The forementioned hope of success likewise arises from the many observable degrees of improvement in the character of the same individual. Well adapted to cherish that hope are our most approved accounts of the rise and progress of religion in the soul, proceeding from the long chapter of convictions, through the following ones of good endeavours, desires, resolves, &c. And though this matter is sometimes greatly abridged, in order to retain some respect to the facts recorded in the New Testament; yet, as the teacher's skill



chiefly appears in marking out a series of various stages between the profane person and the well-formed professor, so likewise, the attention of the reader or hearer is chiefly captivated with such a series, so that he is apt to suspect matters will not be right with him if he go not regularly through the several stages.

All excellency among creatures rises in proportion to the observable degrees of inferiority, but no sooner do we turn our eyes to the province of the Deity than all such excellency evanishes, like that among the stars before the sun. The case of a guilty person following after righteousness may be illustrated by the similitude commonly applied to the insatiable thirst after gain. He is like one ascending a very high mountain, which beguiles the eye with the successive view of many intervening summits betwixt him and the highest. Every next summit promises him the satisfaction of his desired rest, till having attained it, he finds the prospect as distant as before. But nowhere does the similitude halt more than in the present case. Here the weary traveller, having reached his utmost accessible point, on having his view extended, finds, after all, the distance betwixt him and a sure resting place to be immense, and that his remaining task is equal to that of scaling the heavens.

Though nothing short of effectual and sad disappointment on the trial will convince any man of the folly of his self-justifying labour; yet, on an appeal to the consciences of all those who have applied themselves most seriously to this labour, it will be found that such disappointment is its sure attendant. However hopefully, yea, and however much with apparent success, young beginners may proceed for a while, yet the longer and the more seriously men are employed in religion, the more importunate do they find the damping question, *What lack I yet?* But when the most respectable person for religion comes to be withdrawn from the consideration of what gave him importance before men, or from the self-satisfying contemplation of the many degrees, in point of character below him, on which his excellency was elevated; and when his mind comes to be wholly occupied with the question, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?* then the scale by which his excellency was formerly measured, shrinking into nothing, the height of the Divine justice, and the extent of the Divine law, open the prospect of an immense distance betwixt him and the perfection his conscience calls for.

He who came to obey for men, had a full view of this

height, extent, and distance. The sentiment of his heart is thus described, "Thy righteousness, O God, is very high.—O God, who is like unto thee!—I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad!" Yet, with all this in his eye, he could hold up his face before the Father, and confidently say, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Putting his obedience in balance with the perfection of the Divine law, he could say, "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence, let thine eyes behold the things that are equal." Laying open his inmost thoughts to the judgment of omniscience, he could say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Resting the perfection of his obedience on the most awful appeal, he could say, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me, he hath attended to the voice of my prayer."

This perfect obedience is frequently called, both in the Old and New Testament the righteousness of God; because the Father sent the Son to perform it, supported him by the aid of the eternal Spirit in the whole of his work, and at last crowned him with the highest testimonies of his approbation and delight, when they glorified him in that body wherein he was humbled, with that same glory wherein he was partner with the Father before any creature was.—Nothing short of the knowledge of this Divine righteousness can reconcile men to that gospel which sets at nought all the boasted distinctions among men; and nothing less can show men the force and propriety of Paul's words, when he says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be. So, then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

If the dignity of this righteousness had risen according to the dignity by which human worth is rated, then he who wrought it would have allowed the characters most esteemed among men to rank next to his own; he would have given the men of such characters readiest access to his presence and favour; he would have consorted chiefly with them, as being the most eminent person among them, or their proper head and leader. But this righteousness being divine, like every thing else that is divine, stands at an equal distance from all that can be called high or low, great or little, among men.\*

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\* When the Scripture condescends, for our instruction, to use the

Therefore, that this equal distance might appear, it was proper and necessary that every character that made the most forward advance, and claimed the greatest preference among men, should meet with the strongest repulse from the righteous one, even as the gospel history everywhere shows the fact really happened. The fact took place according to his repeated declaration, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." John the Baptist, who came to intimate his approach, said, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord.—Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low." Isaiah foretold, that his appearance would be attended with the debasing of every thing that is high and lifted up among men. And Simeon, beholding him when a babe, said, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

The great peculiarity of the gospel is the high idea it gives men of Divine perfection. Every other scheme teaches men, that, by the progress and improvement of nature, properly assisted, they may approach near to what is Divine. Thus men are at bottom led to think of the Deity no otherwise than as of the grandest imaginable creature, the first in the scale of beings, or the first being in nature. No sentiment is more fondly embraced among men than that contained in the following lines,

Nature delights in progress.—

O be a *man*! and thou shalt be a *god*!  
And *half self-made*! ambition how divine!

The Scripture speaks in a very different strain to men, when it represents the Deity, saying, "Hearken unto me ye stout-hearted, and far from righteousness; I bring near my righteousness,—my salvation shall not tarry." The gospel, which declares the accomplishment of this prophecy, does not save men by instructing them what to do, and stimulating their emulation, but by declaring what God himself hath wrought;

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language of comparison between human and Divine excellency, it does it in such a manner as to show that the latter scorns all comparison with the former; for instance, *The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* Here is a strange peculiarity of style, the force of which must be abated rather than heightened by any paraphrase. But one thing is evident at first view, that it is adapted in the most striking manner to put all human excellency to the blush, and cover it with confusion.

even as the prophet Isaiah taught men to expect, when he said, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us; for thou also hast wrought all our works for us."

Christian teachers generally set the righteousness of the Messiah in the same position toward men, as the Jews did the righteousness of the law: and the self-justifying labour marked out for the hearers is made to consist in their serious endeavours to come within reach of that righteousness.—Let us hear the Divine address, by the prophet Isaiah, to Israel, who followed after righteousness: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." The instruction here given may be paraphrased thus. "Consider the origin of your nation, and remember that ye sprung from Abraham and Sarah, when according to nature, they were equally incapable of having children as the dead to rise from their graves. Remember, that ye were produced by power equally superior to the power of nature, as if ye had been formed of stones from the rock, or of clay from the pit."

The faith of Abraham, in the case now referred to, is set forth as a pattern of faith to all that believe; even as the miracle of his becoming a father is a pattern of the power by which men are made righteous. Abraham, along with the promise of the Messiah, got this miracle intimated to him as a present pledge of the future fulfilment of the promise. And though every thing in nature stood against the hope of his being a father, yet he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. Paul, declaring that his faith was imputed to him for righteousness, adds, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."—All Abraham's true children, in a manner answerable to the pattern of his faith, perceiving nothing about themselves that can in the least promote their justification, yea, nothing but what, on the contrary, serves to condemn them, do yet find all that is needful to justify them in the Divine word, testifying of Christ as delivered for the offences of sinners, and raised again for their justification.—And all such find strict truth and propriety in the words of Paul, when he says, "As by one man's



disobedience many were made sinners ; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

The gospel is called the preaching of peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are near. All who partake of this peace, obtain it by creating power, and not by the ordinary power that upholds, assists, or forwards, the course and progress of nature. So runs the Divine word by Isaiah : " I create the fruit of the lips ; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord, and I will heal him " The Messiah, by a striking sign, showed himself able to speak peace to the most troubled conscience, when he relieved his disciples from imminent danger by rebuking the wind, and saying to the sea, " Peace, be still : " and the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Where creating power interposes, it is evident, that all consideration of fitness in any creature to concur with it, or forward its operation, must be utterly superseded.—The Jews were in many respects near to the Messiah ; and the Gentiles, in respect of them, were afar off: yet that the Divine salvation might bear the same aspect to all who partook of it, matters were so ordered, that the Jews, through their unbelief and religious spite, were removed to full as great a distance as the remotest of the Gentiles. So Paul, addressing the latter concerning the former, says, " Even so have these also now not believed, that, through your mercy, they also may obtain mercy ; " that is, that such of the Jews as were saved might be brought nigh, merely, so to speak, on the footing of Gentile-mercy. That this is his meaning, is evident from the next verse ; " For God hath concluded all in unbelief (or disobedience,) that he might have mercy upon all." On this occasion Paul exclaims in the verse following : " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! "—Paul beheld the majesty of the Divine character chiefly there, where the wise and prudent find their chief handle to scoff and sneer, and where the men of first repute for piety chiefly point their solemn contempt and disdain.

Of all the Jews, none could be reckoned nearer to the Messiah than the citizens of Nazareth, where he grew up from a child to the age of thirty. Yet they, by their mortal spite, manifested in a resolute attempt to destroy him, for no other reason than his declaring before them the Divine grace in its genuine simplicity, evidently forfeited all claim of nearness to him beyond the remotest heathen.—Paul was once a zealous Jew, and had a first rate character among his countrymen ; yet, writing to Timothy, in order to show that the grace which

saved him was exceeding abundant, he first gives a list of the most infamous characters among the heathen, then draws his own, and concludes thus: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the FOREMOST. And the inference he draws amounts to this, That after him, no one needs to despair.

Though the doctrine I have been insisting on shines clear as the light of the sun throughout the whole Scripture, though all the principal facts and reasonings recorded there evidently centre here, yet if any one shall take the liberty to affirm it confidently in the face of the public, the most moderate censure he can expect from fashionable Christians is, that of being destitute of the spirit of Christianity; while the more zealous and devout will not hesitate to declare him eminently influenced by Satan. Nor can it be imagined the case will be otherwise, while the words of the Messiah stand true.—His warning to his disciples is thus recorded, Matt. x, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.—The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.—If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?" Jesus Christ, careful to prevent his disciples forgetting these words, reminds them in this manner, John xv, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than the lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." The truth of the gospel then stands or falls with the foretold opposition to it. However much then the seed of the serpent may frown or sneer, or even in their rage resume the old cry, "He hath a devil, and is mad, why hear ye him? yet the united spite of the whole generation of vipers ought to have no other effect on them who love the sacred truth, than to confirm their persuasion of it, and consequently animate them to a more hearty and zealous contention for it.

As the gospel stands opposed to the wisdom of the Greek, as well as the devout zeal of the Jew, it may be proper now to take some particular notice of the philosophers.

In my fourth letter, under the head of REASON, I have at some length considered a noted book, called "Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion." Since my letters were first published, that book has undergone a second edition, in 1758, with alterations and additions. Though the alterations are indeed very considerable, I do not here intend

to insinuate that they have been caused by my animadversion. No; for if I should, the nature of them would show the contrary.

But the second edition naturally suggests this reflection, That the nearer philosophy approaches to truth, and the philosopher to the grave, the less comfort can the latter draw from the former: Philosophy loses her captivating bloom of wisdom, and the chief support of the philosopher's confidence fails him.

In the first edition, we beheld the throne of virtue highly elevated, upon a nice and artificial set of feelings, a peculiar sort of glory thrown around her, and a sort of extraordinary machinery introduced for her sake. But what was most extraordinary of all, and most comfortable for such as were in hazard of leaving the world with a bad conscience, was, that all the operations of conscience, respecting praise or blame, rested upon an illusive foundation, which, when human nature, by mellowing in the grave, attained its full maturity, was wholly to vanish in the light of philosophic truth.

In the second edition, the main wheel in this machinery, or rather its principal spring and mover, is withdrawn, being found unworthy to exist even on this side the grave; unworthy, even in the condition of an illusion or phantom; so it is banished, even from the airy regions of ideas. The operations of conscience are now settled upon a firm foundation; he who acts contrary to his duty, has now no resource for the ease of his mind, in leaving the world, but the old reply against the Deity, "Why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?"—Yet the privilege of supererogating still remains. And though the chief project of wisdom in the constitution of man, and of the glory thrown around virtue, has vanished; yet our author is very loath to abate the former loftiness of his style on that head; he has found it necessary to retrench it a little; yet he still endeavours to support the general strain of it, though his principal fund has failed him. This he does by making the most of what remains. The sense of contingency in events, which formerly meant no more than our ignorance of, or uncertainty about future events, is now erected into something more positive, and pronounced to be an original law in human nature, as necessary to move man to action; since without it he could have no sense of power to direct and control events. It was formerly indeed made to answer the same end, but now more advantageously.

This sense of contingency in events, together with the

sense of power to direct and control them, is declared to be delusive, and contrary to the truth of things. And this delusive sense, now set in a more advantageous light, is thought worthy, nearly, to fill not only its own former place, but also that of the other delusive sense now discarded. This alone is admired as the grand contrivance of the author of nature to make man appear with an air of independence, or being something more than a creature, as if there were no midst between independence and involuntary agency; or as if it were inconsistent that man should be a voluntary agent, yet always sensible of his dependence. An apostle, setting aside his authority, appears to me to reason much more intelligibly as well as more respectfully of the Deity, when he infers our dependence from our ignorance of to-morrow, saying, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow,—ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that;" declaring, at the same time, that all confidence about to-morrow, that carries in it any air of independence, is evil. If further evidence shall convince our author that his delusive sense of contingency, with that of power to control events, and his boasted privilege of supererogating, are indeed no less unprofitable delusions than he has already found his principal delusion to be, even that which gives the chief brilliancy to his former scheme; then, perhaps, he may come to find, that the gospel preached by the fishers of Galilee contains a more solid and satisfactory scheme, at once more beneficial to men, and more respectful to the Deity.

Let us now observe with what a good grace our author parts with the delusion he was formerly so fond of, as a most wise contrivance to serve the grandest purposes.

"I acknowledge it to have been once my opinion, that we have a delusive sense of power to act against motives, or to act against our own inclinations and choice, commonly termed *liberty of indifference*. I was carried along by the current of popular opinion; and I could not dream this sense to be a pure imagination, when I found it vouched by so many grave writers. I had at the same time a thorough conviction, from the clearest evidence, that man is a necessary agent; and, therefore, I justly concluded, that the sense of liberty of indifference, like that of contingency, must be delusive. I yielded to another popular opinion, That the perceptions of the moral sense, praise and blame, merit and demerit, guilt and remorse, are inconsistent with necessity, and must be founded upon the delusive sense of liberty of indifference. From these premises, I was obliged, though reluctantly, to admit, that some of the



most noted perceptions and emotions of the moral sense are entirely built upon this delusive sense of liberty. The subject being handled after that manner in the first edition of this book, I was sensible of the odium of a doctrine that rests virtue in any measure upon a delusion; and I stated this as the first objection, in order to remove it the best way I could. Candour I shall always esteem essential in speaking to the public, not less than in private dealings; and my opinion of the wisdom of Providence in the government of this world is so firmly established, that I never can be apprehensive of harm in adhering to truth, however singular it may appear upon some occasions. I now cheerfully acknowledge my errors; and am happy in thinking, that I have at last got into the right track. It appears to me at present a harsh doctrine, that virtue in any part should be founded on a delusion, though formerly the supposed truth of the doctrine reconciled me to it. It gives me solid satisfaction to find the moral sense entirely consistent with the voluntary necessity, which I must pronounce to be the system of nature. The moral sense makes a chief branch of the original constitution of man, and it can never lose its authority while we have any feeling of pleasure and pain. According to this plan of morality, the objection, that it is partly founded on a delusion, vanisheth; and the objection, for that reason, is dropt in the present edition."

But, then, the reader will perceive, that the most enticing wisdom of our author's former scheme is at the same time dropt, and its chief glory faded. In considering the final cause of the delusion now discarded, in answering objections to it, and in his endeavours to relieve the minds of men from uneasy apprehensions about the Divine benevolence, he had found it most advantageously adapted to serve the most glorious ends. Where he began to consider it with regard to its final cause, even in his very entry on the subject, he showed the greatest fondness for it, saying expressly, (first edit. p. 204,) "And in this branch of our nature are displayed the greatest wisdom and the greatest goodness." Now, it must be acknowledged to be no small stretch of candour in a philosopher, to give up peaceably, not to say with solid satisfaction, his brightest view of Divine wisdom and goodness. It is natural to think, that one's highest idea of Divine perfection should rather lead him to conclude, that the fact, contrivance, or design whence it arose, behooved to be something very stable, certain and true, so far more solid than any delusion. No maxim can be more self-evident than, That

which is greatest must be God; and nothing more absurd than to suppose, That aught greater than God can any how be imagined. It would be setting the love of truth in a very romantic point of light, to suppose one influenced by it, to give up his belief of a Deity; yet nearly in the same light must we consider that love of truth which leads one to lower his apprehensions of Divine wisdom and goodness. That our author has been led to this, will appear by the alteration now made in the latter branch of his last essay, where he treats of the benevolence of the Deity.

Nothing can be more interesting to the mind of man, than to know how matters stand betwixt him and the Deity. Our author, sensible of the importance of the subject, had said in his first edition, "As we cannot say too much upon a subject which is of all the most interesting, I shall add some other considerations to justify our belief of the pure benevolence of the Deity." And he says farther in both editions, "At the same time, as the utmost labour of thought is well bestowed upon a subject, in which mankind is so much interested, I shall proceed to suggest some reflections, which may tend to satisfy us, that the instances commonly given of natural and moral evil are not so inconsistent with pure benevolence as at first sight may be imagined."

Undeniable tokens of Divine goodness are indeed every where manifest; yet natural and moral evil every where obscure the lustre of that goodness to the eye of man; or to say the same thing in other words, throw a cloud over the mind of guilty man, damping his comfort and hope in reflecting on that goodness. None but the guilty can ever be affected with the least shadow of an objection to the pure benevolence of the Deity. All our author's labour, then, to show, "that there is not a single instance to be met with, which can be justly ascribed to malevolence or bad intention" in the Deity, is altogether wide of the point, or foreign to the great concern of the human heart. Men daily see proofs of ill intention in one another, but no mortal could ever show the least token of ill intention in the Deity. For, if none but the guilty suffer, nothing can thence be inferred in the least inconsistent with the purest benevolence. Yet the guilty can find no comfort in reflecting on the purest benevolence. If one is led forth to execution, as an ungrateful traitor to the most wise and beneficent prince, he may, indeed, be persuaded, that his misery affords no just imputation on the benevolence of his prince; yet that benevolence can yield him no comfort in his present condition, but must rather

serve to embitter his last moments, as a high aggravation of his crime.

Our author's reasoning about the Deity's regarding *the whole more than particulars*, which is his last resort for an answer to the objection arising from natural evil, is so trite, so whimsical, and has already become so generally ridiculous, that I am almost ashamed to offer any confutation of it. Yet so long as men gravely reason in this manner, it may with equal gravity be inquired, What, or where, is the whole? For if death puts a period to all the happiness of human life, and if all the parts which make up the whole of every generation since the world began, have successively arrived at that period; then we, the present generation, for whose benefit all our predecessors have been destroyed, are for the time being the whole; and in a few years we must give place to another whole, and so forward. I insist, therefore, on the question, What, or where, is the whole? or, how many thousand ages must yet revolve before a permanent and happy whole shall begin to exist?

We must see, then, what our author has to say of natural evil for the satisfaction of individuals. In a general view of the subject, he says, "It can afford no argument against the benevolence of the Deity, that created beings, from their nature and condition, are capable of pain, supposing in the main, their life to be comfortable." And afterward, in order to show "that pain and distress are productive of manifold good ends," he says, "In the first place, pain is necessary as a monitor of what is hurtful and dangerous to life." In short, the sum of all that he, or any other philosopher, has to say on this head, amounts to this, That Divine goodness bears a benevolent aspect toward us only, so far as it appears in any respect providing for the preservation and comfort of our life; for it must still be held a necessary supposition, even according to our author, that our life be in the main comfortable. But where shall we find a philosopher who can comfort us at the approach of that event, which naturally extorts from our hearts the following reflection concerning the Deity? "Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men." Yea, do not all the tokens of goodness with which the world is replenished, the air we breathe, the food we eat, &c., at last conspire to put an end to that life, which, for a few years, they preserved and cherished? Besides, is there not something in man that denies him happiness, even while he is most advantageously situated? A late writer, who would be considered rather as a philosopher than

as a poet, showing the vanity of expecting happiness on earth, concludes his argument thus :

How oft the scene that gives delight  
 At morn, offends the eye at night ?  
 'Tis not the want of that or this ;  
 Possession is the bane of bliss :  
 And hence, of happiness, we see  
 On earth th' impossibility.      *Epist. Philos. & Moral.*

But our author, inclining to view things in a more pleasant light, makes a vigorous effort to open a hopeful prospect to men. I shall here quote a few of his words, where, in his general view of the subject, he introduces a consideration, which is the more worthy of our notice, as, says he, it " hath always afforded me great satisfaction. Did natural evil prevail in reality as much as it doth in appearance, we must expect that the enlargement of natural knowledge should daily discover new instances of bad, as well as of good intention. But the fact is directly otherwise. Our discoveries ascertain us more and more of the benevolence of the Deity, by unfolding beautiful final causes without number ; while the appearances of ill intention gradually vanish, like a mist after the sun breaks out. Many things are now found to be curious in their contrivance, and productive of good effects, which formerly appeared useless, or perhaps of ill tendency. And, in the gradual progress of learning, we have the strongest reason to expect, that many more discoveries of the like kind will be made hereafter. This very consideration, had we nothing else to rely on, ought to make us rest with assurance upon the intuitive conviction we have of the benevolence of the Deity, without giving way to the perplexity of a few cross appearances, which, in matters so far beyond our comprehension, ought rationally to be ascribed to our own ignorance, and by no means to any malevolence in the Deity." Our author is so fond of the hopeful thought here suggested, that, in the second edition, though his doubts and perplexities still remain uncleared up, he has chosen to add, immediately after the words last quoted, a fresh and more sanguine profession of his hope, in the following words : " In the progress of learning, the time may come, we have great reason to hope it will come, when all doubts and perplexities of this kind shall be fully cleared up."

It were to be wished that our author had been so kind to his readers as to inform them, for their comfort, what are those modern discoveries which have so much comforted himself.



Has he found out any method of doubling the length and joy of man's life? If that were the case, men of genius at least, might yet, by the gradual progress of learning, be encouraged to make a bold push for immortality.—Have the discoveries made by the telescope or the microscope rendered the curious happier or better men than those who never saw but with the naked eye? Have the modern improvements in luxury promoted either the strength of the body or tranquillity of the mind? And as to the course of Providence, have earthquakes, wars, and other public calamities, been less frequent in our own than in former ages? In fine, has our author discovered any remedy of sufficient efficacy, either to ward off death, or to restore life to the dead? In that case, indeed, he might, with a graceful assurance, hope that the time of clearing up all doubts and perplexities was nigh at hand. But this leads us to take a view of our author's reflection at the close of this branch of his subject.

Having rummaged all nature for some glimpse of comfort, he at last, like one suspended between hope and despair, takes an anxious look of the grave, as if he would fain look beyond it, could he only perceive the least opening. He boldly attempts to use the language of hope, while yet he is obliged to confess, he has no solid foundation for it, and that it cannot be supported by fair reasoning. "I have," says he, avoided urging any argument from our future existence; though it affords a fruitful field of comfort, greatly overbalancing the transitory evils of this life. But I should scarce think it fair reasoning to urge such topics upon this subject, which would be arguing in a circle," &c.

Here is an honest acknowledgment. But the question remains, Whence the air of confidence in our author's hope? If it has no real, it must have at least some imaginary foundation. We have a hint of it in the close of his Essay on Liberty and Necessity. While the philosopher is solacing himself, in his closet, with the review of some ingenious discovery he has made, by which he is greatly exalted above the vulgar, he is apt to wonder at his being admitted to such intimate acquaintance with nature, and his elevated thoughts are then ready to suggest, that it was "perhaps that some *augurium*, some intimation may be given, of his being designed for a future more exalted state of being, &c.—Here it may be proper to observe, that the great defect of philosophy lies in this, that its fondest hopes are founded on a slippery *perhaps*.

Now, since our author acknowledges upon one occasion,

to wit, when treating of liberty and necessity, that whatever peculiar speculations a philosopher may have on that subject, his common train of thought, in the ordinary occurrences of life, is the same with that of other men, it is natural for us to inquire, what shall comfort a philosopher or any other man, at the time when his body comes to be filled with pain, and his mind with sad foreboding: when the blameable and foolish part of his conduct presses so hard on his thoughts as to overbalance all his wisdom and virtue, and natural evil is found to prevail as much in reality as philosophers acknowledge it does in appearance? Or what *augurium*, what intimation has he then concerning a future state?

Our author, sensible of the great and important difficulty arising from this quarter, exerts himself at the close of his *Essays* to remove it. Moral evil is indeed the universal gall that imbitters all the afflictions of human life. And that is the evil which chiefly clouds the Divine character to the eye of man. Now, it is in obviating the weighty objection hence arising, that the great difference between the two editions of the *Essays* is chiefly manifest. In the former edition it was obviated in this manner.

The author, after referring to his essay on Liberty and Necessity, proceeds thus, "It is there made out, it is hoped to the satisfaction of the reader, that the feeling which we have of liberty, does not correspond to the truth of things; and that our peculiar manner of conceiving human actions, as right or wrong, and as praise or blame worthy, is wholly founded on this deceitful feeling. The final cause of this singular feeling is also there laid open; that it is happily adjusted to the nature of man, as an imperfect being, and tends to promote virtue in an eminent degree. *This discovery affords a solid answer to an objection, which, so far as I know, has not hitherto received any good answer.* And it is, that the objection rests entirely upon a false supposition, as if human actions were seen in the same light by the Deity, in which they are seen by men."

In the second edition, the notable sentence I have marked with italics, as well as the argument in which it stands, is entirely dropped. And guilty men have nothing now to comfort them but the following reflection: We have a just ground of conviction, that all matters are by Providence ordered in the best manner, and therefore, that even human vices and frailties are made to answer wise and benevolent purposes. Every thing possesses its proper place in the Divine plan. All our actions contribute equally to carry on

the great and good designs of our Maker; and, therefore, there is nothing which in his sight is ill; at least nothing which is ill upon the whole."

What we have now seen, gives us a very unpromising view of the gradual progress of learning. What was newly found in 1751 to be the only solid answer to the weightiest objection against human happiness, is since found, in 1758, unworthy to exist even in the rank of delusions; and that even by the inventor himself. Here I cannot help expressing my agreement with those who declare it unbecoming a wise man to remove any support of human happiness, be it real or imaginary, unless he can substitute something more solid and beneficial in its place. For if the condition of men, with regard to their Maker be in reality desperate, or if heaven has provided no solid ground of hope for them, why should any man seek to deprive his neighbour of any dream or fancy that may contribute to his present amusement?

Our author has left nothing now for guilty men to reflect on for their comfort, but that all their actions contribute equally to carry on the great and good designs of their Maker; and that even their vices and frailties are made to answer wise and benevolent purposes. And, with our author's leave, I will add, so also are their punishments and miseries. For he has warranted us to say, that "pain is the great sanction of laws, both human and Divine." But what comfort can it give to one who is doomed to misery, and has no solid ground to expect he shall ever be delivered from it, to reflect that his guilt and misery are subservient to some wise and benevolent purpose? Yet I agree with our author in maintaining, that both the vices and miseries of men are made to answer wise and benevolent purposes. Who sees not how greatly the triumph of Israel was heightened by the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea? and who sees not the grandeur of the contrast, which, according to sacred writ, will take place at last between two great divisions of mankind? "And again they said, Halleluja; and her smoke rose up for ever and ever."

I chose, when writing my letters, to remark on the Essays, as containing the most ingenious scheme of philosophic religion I had seen. And the second edition of the Essays, however much varying from the first, has not served to change my opinion. For the peculiar sort of glory which shone in the first, has confessedly departed from the second. Therefore, in this new edition of my letters, I have thought it best

to let my animadversions on the Essays remain in the same form as at first.

Our author appears to me the more worthy of attention, as he has, in my view, traced the main lines of our natural knowledge of the Deity, and of our duty, in a simple, easy, and satisfactory manner. It gives me pleasure, to see so eminent and serious a theist, who, I think, cannot justly be charged with any bias in favour of Christianity, clearly evincing an universal determining Providence. One would think, indeed, that a very short process of reasoning might serve in this case. For if once it be admitted, that any event can happen otherwise than the Deity intended, we are at atheism immediately. Again, where our author gropes in the dark, pleasing himself with delusive perceptions, he does it in company with all other philosophers, who have sought, by the aid of philosophy, to open a prospect of hope beyond the grave. Here they are all like so many hounds at fault, who have entirely lost their scent. Accordingly, after they have laboured now for many centuries, availing themselves of each others' inventions, we find them at this day as unsettled in their notions as ever, even in the most interesting and important matters.

Our author has, in his second edition, settled remorse on a firm bottom; but then he has removed the main pillar of hope. And thus it is always found, that the nearer philosophy approaches to truth, the sense of law, obligation, duty, and remorse, weighs the heavier, while the ground of comfort and hope gradually becomes lighter in the opposite scale, till at last it quite vanish away. As the course of nature is the province of philosophy, so death, the dissolution of nature, is its *ne plus ultra*, its impassable limit. Yet philosophers have access to view and consider the solemn and interesting approach of man to that limit. And, if they could read the lesson it naturally exhibits, perhaps they might come to find something worthy of their attention in that gospel, which gives the only account that ever yet could bear being twice told, of a comfortable opening beyond that limit. But why should I urge this reflection, since nothing less than the evidence of the gospel can embolden one to give due attention to the last stage of man's life? Accordingly, we find, that philosophers, who examine every other appearance in nature with the most prying look, seldom or never incline to give any proportional attention to the last and most important one.

However, it may give those who love the Scripture some



satisfaction to find, that the farther progress philosophy makes, the more plainly appears its insufficiency to help man in his most interesting concern, and the more evidently shines forth the excellency of the gospel to answer that end; which without amusing us, either by delusive perceptions or cunningly devised fables, but by the most solid truth, built on the surest facts, clears up all difficulties about the condition of man with regard to the Deity; which not only consults the happiness of man, and the honour of the Deity, to the best advantage, but also opening to view a grander character of the Deity than could be learned anywhere else, at the same time clears that character, in the most satisfactory manner, from every objection arising from the dark side of things. And thus we behold great propriety in the words, wherein is delivered the message which the apostles received from the glorified Messiah: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, **THAT GOD IS LIGHT, AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL.**"

By an appendix, now subjoined to the Essay on Liberty and Necessity, it appears that our author, on an occasion sufficiently there pointed at, has, in order to screen himself from the imputation of heresy, thought it expedient to shelter himself among such great orthodox names as Calvin, Turretine, Pictet, and the late Mr. Jonathan Edwards, of New England. The last of these, who was then alive, thought fit to reject the offered alliance, as appears by a small pamphlet, bearing his name, published at Edinburgh, 1758, called, "Remarks on the Essays, &c., in a Letter to a Minister of the Church of Scotland." This letter I read with much satisfaction, it appearing to me to have been wrote by one thoroughly master of his subject. It is enough for my purpose at present to quote a few words from the first page, where he says, "I think it must be evident to every one that has read both his *Essays* and my *Inquiry*, that our schemes are exceeding reverse from each other."\*

This letter led me to read his octavo book just now referred to, entitled, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame.* It appeared to me not only answerable to its title, but also to exhibit a

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\* To the abovementioned *Letter* and *Inquiry*, I refer for a proper answer to the reasonings in the *Essays*, on the delusive sense of contingency in events.

more full and clear view than I had anywhere else seen, of the controversy between the doctrines commonly distinguished by the epithets *Calvinist* and *Arminian*. As this book, which was published in 1754, (Boston, New England,) is acknowledged to be a masterly performance in its kind, one would think that writers, who are of the latter persuasion, should find themselves concerned to provide a pertinent answer to it. The author, in the conclusion, has sufficiently hinted his challenge. After taking notice of the boldness of writers on the other side, he adds, "Indeed such is the case, that we might, if so disposed, speak as big words as they, and on far better grounds; and really all the Arminians on earth might be challenged, without arrogance or vanity, to make these principles of theirs, wherein they mainly differ from their fathers, whom they so much despise, consistent with common sense; yea, and perhaps to produce any doctrine ever embraced by the blindest bigot of the church of *Rome*, or the most ignorant *Mussulman*, or extravagant enthusiast, that might be reduced to more, and more demonstrable inconsistencies and repugnancies to common sense and to themselves; though their inconsistencies may not lie so deep, or be so artfully veiled by a deceitful ambiguity of words, and an indeterminate signification of phrases."

Though this writer's professed design is to support the doctrine of the gospel, I am sorry I cannot recommend him as giving us any just view of the grand point of a sinner's acceptance with God; especially as, in my view, the whole controversy is of very little consequence, but in so far as that grand point is concerned. Though he has much occasion to speak of the influence of commands, invitations, &c.; yet, so far as I could perceive, he takes no notice of any difference between the gracious command that freely communicates life and hope to the guilty, and any other command requiring the performance of some duty or good action in order to acceptance with God. Or, to express myself in fewer words, it does not appear to me from that book, that he has duly attended to the grand opposition stated in the New Testament between the *law of faith* and the *law of works*. He rather seems in agreement with the bulk of the reputed orthodox, (p. 169,) to speak of *exerting faith in Christ* as on a footing with *performing other spiritual gospel duties*.

Now, before I close this appendix, it may be expected I should take some notice of the pamphlets that have been written on occasion of my letters.

If any one would see *A Sufficient Answer to the Author of*

*the Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, he may find a pamphlet so called, writ by no less a man than Mr. John Wesley, and to be purchased at no greater price than a penny. It appears from this pamphlet that the writer is very angry; and it must be owned, that in my letters I had said nothing to please him; for near the close of the last of them, I had, as I still think was but reasonable, apologized to the popular preachers for ranking him among them.—As I cannot say that this writer has treated me with worse language than he had formerly done the God I profess to worship, I cannot decently have any personal quarrel with him. We have heard of an old royal mandate, which, however dissimilar the cases, I consider as a rule proper to be observed on the present occasion; *The King's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.*

However, a reply has been given him, called *Remarks on the Reverend Mr. John Wesley's Sufficient Answer, &c.* Though this remarker is abundantly keen in my defence, so far as he thinks me defensible, yet I apprehend the attentive reader will be at no loss to perceive that his zeal and mine do not run altogether in the same channel. It will be perceived, I presume, that the peculiar complexion of his zeal must appear no less exceptionable to me, than mine does to him, where he finds himself obliged to deliver me up defenceless into Mr. Wesley's hands.

Other two pamphlets have appeared; of which the one is called, *Animadversions on the Letters on Theron, &c.*, and the other, *A Plain Account of Faith in Jesus Christ, in Remarks on several Passages in the Letters, &c.* The author of the former charges me as an advocate for works to the prejudice of faith; and the author of the latter charges me as an advocate for faith to the prejudice of works. If these two gentlemen would read each the other's performance, and then take another glance of the book they have been remarking on, though they should not come to like the book any better, they might learn to oppose it more pertinently. Yet, to deal impartially between the two, the latter appears to me to understand better what he is doing than the former. However, as it was my purpose to contend for such faith and such works as are equally obnoxious to the dislike of the religious world, I have no reason to be disconcerted at seeing my book disapproved by men of very different sentiments in religious matters.

Perhaps it may be expected I should likewise take some notice of a book published last year, and advertised in the Scotch papers, as containing, among other things, "a de c-

tion of some ignorant and rash notions about *faith* and *conscience*, thrown out in a late book, entitled, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*." But as the author, in a letter to his publisher, which I have seen, has declared he disapproves that advertisement, that part of it now quoted I mean, and as the public is not now sufficiently authorized to apply any strictures in his book to mine, I apprehend I have no occasion to trouble the public with any particular notice of them.

I have only to add, that as several of the books and pamphlets remarked on in these letters may have undergone alterations in new editions, I have thought it proper, to prevent mistakes, to subjoin the date of the first publication of the letters at the close of the last of them.

*March, 1759.*



# P R E F A C E

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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SINCE Christianity, by the address of the clergy, became an engine of their dominion, almost every attempt to illustrate the truth and peculiar excellence of that religion hath been obnoxious to very obvious imputations. And many showing a readiness to allow the clergy, whether reigning or only yet aspiring, to be, according to their claim, the genuine successors of the apostles and first ministers of the gospel, have fondly embraced so plausible an occasion for insinuating, that these two very different sorts of men have been all along of the same stamp, and actuated by the same views from the beginning, to the no small reproach of the Christian religion.

But if the true genius and tendency of that religion, exhibited fairly only in the New Testament, be duly attended to, it will be found that the Christian cause and that of the clergy form two very different, yea, two very opposite interests, which, from the commencement of the opposition, have been all along very hostile towards each other.

This opposition hath been more especially manifest since the Scripture began to be published in the several languages of Europe. As that book hath proved the great instrument in the hand of Providence for breaking their kingdom, filling it with darkness, and obliging them, however reluctant, gradually to lower their pretensions; so they have looked with a most invidious eye on the increase of knowledge arising from that book, especially while sapping the foundations of their kingdom, it hath served to disclose, in its primitive lustre, the ancient doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, so much insisted on by the author of the Christian religion.

It sensibly touches them to find their yoke cast off by many, who, allowing Christianity to be such as they exhibit it, have found a plausible pretext for avowing their aversion to that religion altogether. Yet, in this regard, they receive some consolation, by reflecting, that their credit sinks along with that of Christianity itself.

But what must grieve them still more sensibly is, to find themselves forsaken and opposed by others, who maintain, and what is worse, by what has hitherto appeared, have unanswerably proved, from the very book whence they (the clergy) have so long derived their importance, that Christ's kingdom is quite a different thing from theirs, and that the very author of the Christian religion hath devoted to destruction their kingdom, which he is now evidently fast consuming by his word and providence.

Freethinkers provoke their followers to throw off the clergy's yoke by the fear of a temporary laugh; but Christ moves his followers to turn away from them by a much more weighty consideration, even the fear of everlasting shame and contempt.

Those who understand the difference between Christ's kingdom and that of the clergy, must see, that it is the interest of the latter to deceive. The truth on which Christ's kingdom is built, could never be the foundation of theirs; yet that both have one foundation must be pretended. The pretence cannot be kept up without some form or likeness of what is pretended to. As, therefore, it was necessary to the rise of the clergy's kingdom, that the Divine truth should be changed into a lie, so it concerns all who would study the support of that kingdom, to prevent as much as possible the imposition from being perceived. It is allowed that many, while imposing on others, are at the same time imposed on themselves. The Scripture, pointing at the means by which Christianity would be separated from the cross, and the clergy's kingdom erected, acquaints us, that this would take place by a gradual progress of men *waxing worse and worse*, and a circulation of *deceiving and being deceived*. It belongs, however, to every friend of the truth to detect the imposition, and expose the deceit wherever he can find it, let the heaviest part of the guilt fall where it may.

Now, that the clergy's kingdom is falling, it highly concerns all who have any taste for that kingdom which cannot be moved, that a fair and open appeal to the Scriptures should be urged and carried on with all freedom. As the writer hath got the satisfaction of finding that these letters have been in some measure subservient to this end, he concludes this preface with his hearty wish, that far and wide may the controversy spread, whether by means of his or any other pen, and let every man judge for himself.

# A P P E N D I X

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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IT now remains to give the reader some view of the progress of the controversy since the publication of the second edition.

In consequence of these letters, two pamphlets have appeared :

One of them entitled, "An Epistolary Correspondence between S. P. and R. S. Relating to the Letters on Theron and Aspasio." Printed at London, 1759.

The other, "The Law of Nature Defended by Scripture, against a learned Class of Moderns, who think it needful, in order to support the credit of Revealed Religion against Deists, to deny the Existence of that Law." Printed at Edinburgh, 1760.

In the first of these, Palæmon's account of faith, with its influence on the heart and life, is illustrated and enforced. By the other, it is hoped, the reader will see how vain the pretence of serving the cause of revealed religion by denying the law of nature.

In opposition to the doctrine maintained in the letters, Mr. Cudworth, dissenting minister in London, published two pieces. The first a pocket volume of 224 pages, besides the preface, called,

"A Defence of Theron and Aspasio against the Objections contained in a late Treatise, entitled, Letters on Theron and Aspasio." Printed in London, 1760.

The other a shilling pamphlet, called, "The Polyglot, or Hope of Eternal Life, According to the various Sentiments of the Present Day, &c." Printed in London, 1761.

This author maintains such an universal grant of Christ as warrants every hearer to appropriate; and it must be owned, he does it in some respects, with more consistency than many others; for he maintains, that Christ gave himself a ransom even for all those of mankind, who shall never be saved by him. See Polyglot, p. 35, &c.

Those who follow Boston and Erskine, will not go so far

as to say, that Christ died for any but his people whom he came to save, and will assuredly bring to everlasting happiness. They content themselves with saying, what is indeed equally foreign to, and subversive of the grace of the gospel, to wit, that Christ, by his taking on the human nature, stands in an equal or undistinguished relation of a kinsman redeemer to mankind sinners as such; so lead us conclude, that Christ took part in flesh and blood no less with the seed of the serpent than with the children God gave him, even the many sons whom he brings to glory. Whereas, the Scripture, far from countenancing their way of speaking, as if Christ took hold of the whole human race, in contradistinction from fallen angels, speaks expressly thus, "Verily he taketh not hold of angels, but of the *seed of Abraham* he taketh hold." It is also evident from the Scripture, that Christ died for the sanctification of all with whom he took part in flesh and blood. And as *he who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified* by his death are all of one Father, he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, *I will declare thy name unto my brethren; and again, behold I, and the children whom God hath given me.* Forasmuch then (says the Apostle, Heb. ii,) *as the children were partakers in flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*

From all which it is plain, that Christ's brethren, the seed of Abraham, or the many sons he brings to glory, are no other than the children God gave him, even the children with whom he took part in flesh and blood to die for them. It is likewise evident from Rom. viii, 29, 30, that all the many brethren, among whom Christ is the first-born, shall be justified and glorified.

Now, while the followers of Boston and Erskine profanely maintain, that Christ took part in flesh and blood with many who shall reap no benefit in the world to come by that connection. Mr. Cudworth and his associates only go a step farther in the same profaneness of mind, while they say that Christ died for many who shall never be justified by his blood, nor saved from wrath through him. The former class likewise maintain, that Christ is by his office a Saviour to many besides the elect; and would persuade us, that he is an official Saviour to many who shall be effectually damned. And farther, to persuade their countrymen that they have all some common interest in Christ, they remind them of their relation to God by the Scotch covenant, and would assure them, that hereby their land is married to God, not forgetting to add,



that the people have likewise been dedicated to God in baptism. The latter class have a shorter way of persuading every one to say, *Christ died for me*, because they maintain that Christ died for every one of mankind. The former maintain that Christ became related, by his birth, to many who shall reap no eternal benefit by that connection; the latter, with like reason, say the same of his death; and both classes agree in maintaining, that God hath made a deed of gift or grant of Christ and eternal life to every hearer of the gospel, yet so as that multitudes of those to whom God is said to have given eternal life, may perish eternally, through their incapacity or aversion to receive, or, in other words, to obey the command to believe; even as multitudes come short of the life offered in the law, through their incapacity or aversion to obey its precepts. Thus we see how thin are the partitions which divide the enemies of the gospel among themselves, and what pitiful perversions of Scripture they have recourse to, while they go about to overthrow the doctrine of the true grace of God.

The inseparable eternal connection which God himself, of his sovereign grace and good pleasure, hath made between Christ and those for whom he was born and died, is set at nought, as a thing that may be frustrated as to many, through some defect in their ability or will; and all this, that the stress of our salvation may be laid on a connection we are called to make between Christ and us, and then the province of what is falsely called *grace* is to enable us to make this connection. This assisting grace, according to many, is commonly bestowed on those who ask it, or are some way desirous of it; while yet, to avoid too flatly clashing with the Scriptures, exceptions are allowed. And here take place all the hocus-pocus tricks about grace alternately prompting or seconding our efforts to make this connection, with suitable directions for discerning, in some corner of our averse will, some hopeful disposition arising to meet that grace, or produced by it.

Some notice may now be taken of a small piece against the letters, introduced by a sermon, the title running thus :

“The True Comer; being the substance of some Sermons preached in July and August last, upon John vi, 45.—To which is annexed, A Detection of the Spurious Faith in the Letters on Theron and Aspasio, &c. By Colin Mackie, Minister of the Gospel in the Associate Congregation at Montrose.” Printed in Dundee, 1761.

This author pleads for the appropriation, rebukes Palæ-

mon, as maintaining only the faith of devils, and points out the danger Palæmon's friends and other dissenters are exposed to for want of Presbyterial government. The reason of this publication is given in a short prefatory address to the reader, which begins thus: "The errors contained in the Letters on Theron and Aspasio, &c., being so dangerous, specious, and deceiving, I was therefore in hopes some proper hand in Scotland would have detected the same; but as there was no appearance of this, and the delusion taking too well with many in different places, and even throwing some professors into a jumble in the corner, I judged it proper, for the vindication of truth, to essay a detection of the letters-author's spurious faith, with which he is deceiving the public," &c. At the conclusion, after pointing out the advantages of Presbyterial government faithfully exercised, says, "And how happy would the dissenters in the neighbouring land be if such church order were among them? errors then of this kind would not find such favourable reception among them, as it seems this letters-author's faith has obtained; at least they would not be put into such confusion thereby, as it seems they presently are."

Next comes a pamphlet of fifty-four pages, in the title-page of which the letter-writer is said to be *refuted by an old woman*. The following part of the title runs thus: or, *Thoughts on his Letters to the author of Theron and Aspasio; in a Letter from a Friend in the Country to a Friend in Town*. Printed in London, 1761. Scarce inferior to any of the answers I have got from the men, young or old.

This serious old woman contents herself with evincing, as she can, throughout her pamphlet, a tenfold charge against Palæmon, which I shall lay before the reader, by copying her first page. "Dear Sir, I dislike too many things in Mr. S——n's letters to notice, without being to you extremely tedious; and shall, therefore, give you my thoughts only of some as briefly as I can; with respect to, 1. His omission of the great work of regeneration, as previous to any act of faith in us for salvation. 2. Deficiency in definition of justifying faith. 3. Deriding the Scripture doctrine of faith, in its direct and reflex acts. 4. Reproaching the Holy Spirit's witness in the word of promise. 5. Denying the influence of the gospel-grace on the heart unto gospel-holiness. 6. Turning the acts of pure faith in the soul's flight unto Christ for life, into acts of love, in obedience to his command. 7. Placing believers when they sin, under the curse of God, and in danger of the wrath that is to come. 8. Making our love

to Christ in continued obedience of life, the condition of our salvation. 9. False accusation of all those that assert the necessity of direct acts of faith in order to justification, as making faith our justifying righteousness. And, 10. Dismissing all the descriptions of faith, which he is pleased to call *modern*, to the regions of darkness, from whence (he impiously says) they come." I shall only add, that it concerns the reader, as much as the disputants, to judge for himself, for if his faith is not warranted by the apostles, it is matter of no great moment whether he hearken to Palæmon, or to an old woman, either of whose authority, after all, is just as good as that of a general council in the concerns of the next world.

Toward the end of last year was published in Edinburgh, a treatise of 181 pages, called, "An Inquiry into the Spirit and Tendency of Letters on Theron and Aspasio, with a View of the Law of Nature." By the last words is meant the above-mentioned pamphlet, called, "The Law of Nature defended by Scripture," &c. The *Inquiry* is said, in the editor's preface, to be "wrote by an eminent minister of the church of Scotland," and "published with an intention to obviate the many gross mistakes of the letter-writer, and to prevent the influence that his subtile abuse of the sacred writings may have on some of those into whose hands his books may have fallen."

The shortest account I can give my readers of this performance is, that it exhibits an effort to overthrow the law of nature, and the doctrine of supernatural grace preventing man's will, in imputing righteousness without works.

As to our author's opposition to the law of nature, even Palæmon's adversaries, who are very willing to understand what makes against him, confess that their understandings fail them here. If the Hutchinsonians have any men of sensibility remaining among them, who are capable of feeling regret at seeing their main fortress lying in ruins in this Inquiry, they must find themselves concerned to provide something liker an answer to the above-mentioned defence of the law of nature. It would be hard to suppose that all of this class are so blinded with rage against the defenders, as to suffer such loose talk to pass for the best answer they can give. Some, perhaps, however much diverted at seeing the obstinate defenders pelted with such a profusion of rhetorical nosegays of the coarser sort, will reflect, that such diversion would have been somewhat more seasonable, after seeing their strength taken down with more substantial weapons.

Our author's way of opposing supernatural grace is more intelligible, better suited to the capacities of his readers, and has accordingly proved much more generally acceptable. The force of what he says is far from being new indeed, having been much hackneyed for many ages, till it is now grown quite threadbare. But, then, its want of the advantage often attending novelty, may seem to be in a good measure compensated by its antiquity; for truth itself is justly venerable on that account. His chief topic of reproach, however much he seems to plume himself upon it, as if he had newly opened a rich vein of fresh wit, is evidently coeval with the first preaching of the gospel. When Paul displayed his doctrine of supernatural grace, his enemies charged him as saying, *Let us do evil that good may come; let us continue in sin that grace may abound*: in a word, they charged him as making void our duty to God by his doctrine of faith. Celsus, as we find in Origen's third book against him, brought the like charge against the Christians of the second century. "But let us hear now whom these call: whoever, they say, is a sinner, whoever is without understanding, whoever is childish, and to say plainly, whoever is wretched, the kingdom of God will receive him.—They say, that God is sent to sinners; but why was he not sent to them that are without sin? What evil is there in not having sinned? They dictate that God will receive an unjust man, if he humble himself under his wretchedness; but the just, if he look up to him with virtue from the beginning, him he will not receive.—They commonly say, that God can do all things; but he will not do anything unjust. So, then, like unto them that are subject to compassion; God, being subject to commiseration of them that plead pity, relieves the bad, and the good, doing no such thing, he rejects!—I indeed blame these, and such like, that I may not enumerate all; and I say they trespass wickedly, being contumelious to God, that they may allure evil men with vain hopes, and persuade to despise the better things, as if, should they abstain from them, it would be better for them." How common it has been in later ages, particularly the present, to load the doctrine of supernatural grace with like imputations, needs not be insisted on.

Our inquirer's account of the natural consequence of Palæmon's doctrine runs thus, "The only safe way and the only way to be easy on this plan, is to run as fast and as far from God as we can, and boldly presume, that *The Lord have mercy on a miserable sinner*, will in the end do the business at once. Palæmon dare not avow this natural consequence



of his new Divinity, which, it is to be feared, has deluded many into everlasting destruction." This is only a sample of the reproach copiously poured forth, in a number of pages, by the inquirer against supernatural grace.

The more we observe the aspect of the clergy towards that grace, the less cause of wonder shall we find at seeing eminent men among them highly provoked at the doctrine of it; for so far as that doctrine is clearly understood, down comes their eminence by the lump. On their principles (if those of the inquirer be taken for a sample till a better be produced) they do indeed owe a very deadly grudge to that doctrine, as nothing rubs harder on their high pretensions, nothing serves more effectually to evince their hypocrisy.

Meantime the acceptance which the inquirer's reproach has found with the religious, affords Palæmon an additional proof of what he has frequently had occasion to observe, that people may have the character of devout Christians, and yet be filled with great aversion to the grace of the gospel. And this aversion holds pace with their aversion to the Christian labour of love, which is likewise treated with great contempt in the Inquiry.—Hence arises a presumption that Palæmon's notion of grace, both in respect of its nature and effect, is the same with Paul's, seeing it provokes the same sort of reproach as Paul's did from the beginning.

As an extract of a letter, of December 16, 1761, sent me by one of the readers of the Inquiry, may be of some service to the rest, in comparing their thoughts on the matter in hand, I shall here offer it to their perusal. "This nameless antagonist cannot be the author of the famous *Sober Inquiry*, as has been given out, nor any other popular minister of the Church of Scotland. He rather sorts himself as an answerer with Wesley; and indeed he appears abundantly in his spirit and temper, though he would show more of the philosopher, and less of the theologian than he. It is true, he would reason you out of the law of nature, in order to maintain his philosophical divinity; but he has acquired much moral philosophy, from which he gives you manifold sage moral instructions and reprehensions.

"If you had reason to find fault with Aspasio for making too light, first of the comfort that is in the belief of the truth, and next of the comfort of the Spirit witnessing with our spirits, to maintain his groundless appropriation; you have much more reason to say *the Lord rebuke thee* to this author, who, without Aspasio's serious concern, spitefully reproaches both. His last resort for defence of the appropriation, or

believing what is not true till it be believed, is an old argument used by the marrow-men, (p. 28,) which was long ago fully answered in a treatise lately printed, vol. 3, p. 402-406, of Glas's works.

"The great outcry against what you say from Ezekiel, chap. xviii and xxxiii, is full as strong against Lev. xviii, 5; Rom. x. 5; Luke x, 25-28; Matt. xix, 16-19; with Gal. iii, 21. He saw this but waved it; and all that he alleges against the children bearing the iniquities of their fathers, he saw confuted in that seventh number of notes, (Glas's works, p. 245,) which is quoted by him; for whom, therefore, it will be to no purpose to write anything.

"He holds no law common to mankind sinners but the law of faith; no natural law but supernatural revelation. And his law of faith may possibly be that lately discovered in revelation, viz. a law introducing Christ to the inheritance, not by his fulfilling the law, or redeeming from its curse, but, in opposition to that, by a promise to him, and by a faith of his that stands in the same connection with that promise, as works do stand in with the law. This law of faith has been sufficiently exposed in a letter now printed, vol. 4, p. 371-379 of Glas's works.

"He would still maintain his most ridiculous gloss on Rom. i, without removing your just objections; and so would he maintain the two most opposite and ridiculous glosses on Rom. ii, but he supports these glosses, and, as a philosopher, reasons you out of your law of nature by this demonstration. It is impossible even for you to deny the fact, (which you forgot,) that you was an infant, and that then you had not, by reason of use, your senses exercised to discern good and evil; therefore, now when you discern them, it is most manifest you do it not by nature. Even so you must remember, that we were all infants, and were not then capable of generating our species; and thus must you know for certain, that when we grow to do that, we do it not by nature.

"But if he has got the better of you in any one point, it must be in what he calls judging and speaking evil, which he doth with great spirit and alacrity with respect to you, your friends and adherents."

Follows an extract of a letter wrote by another reader.

"The inquirer hath observed a contention, in which a greater personage than either of these disputers durst not bring a railing accusation; I wish his own remark had produced an imitation of this moderation in himself. If misrepresentation and ill names may be called railing accusations,

I cannot help thinking you may see some of it in p. 28. "Palæmon insists—there is no such thing as—commands to unbelievers—to believe," &c. Here, I suppose, you will not say the charge is literally true; nor that representation of his sentiments from p. 36–40, that the gray-headed sinner, especially if he be very obdurate, &c.—stands infinitely fairer for salvation than, &c.; or that (p. 45) he (Palæmon) is ready to curse to the pit of hell—them who say that any Divine assistance is necessary to make the word effectual; unless by Divine *assistance* he means, that the new creation is accomplished by Divine power coming in to aid and assist the efforts of nature, which representation I grant Palæmon would think as ridiculous as to say, that God *assisted* the chaos to produce a world. Or, when he insinuates that Palæmon says, that Christ hath done all, and left us nothing to do, to the exclusion of the obedience of faith.

"These, and some other things, appear to me no better than railing accusations, which are altogether unworthy the inquirer. We all know it hath been found necessary for disputers of the lower class, when they could not confute what their opponents had really said, to make them say what they could confute; but the inquirer could need no such low artifice. There is certainly difference enough between these two authors, if they would condescend to state what they affirm and what they deny plainly, that the opposition might be perceived by men not very skilful in the use of words. As the inquirer has entered the lists in defence of such addresses as I heartily detest, as they seem to me subversive of the gospel proclamation; and as he seems defending an account of faith, which, as I understand him, I have some objection to; I shall give my thoughts on these two points without being solicitous about the choice of words.—As I am conscious of deficiency in polemical divinity, I do not pretend to any formal or orderly remarks on the inquirer, only to say simply what I think I ought to believe and do, leaving to you the reconciling or contrasting it with whom you please.

"If Palæmon denies all exhortations to unbelievers except *Be perfect*, (which you see I do not believe,) he may as well deny that the *gospel* is to be preached to every creature, or that *now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent*; for certainly *Be perfect* is not the gospel.

"I have no scruple to say, that all who labour in public doctrine are bound to speak to the people all the words of this life, and to say to all whom the word of this salvation is sent,

that it is God's command that they repent, and believe the gospel. I take it, all scriptural addresses to the world are only saying this in different ways. They cannot be vindicated if they do not, as they are able, point out the evidence of the things *which began to be spoken by our Lord, and were confirmed to us by them that heard him*; at the same time addressing themselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God, showing them the breadth of the Divine law, the guiltiness of human nature, the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness of men, and the justice and mercy displayed in salvation; and add to all this, with the strongest confidence, *He that believes, shall be saved; and he that believes not, shall be damned.*

“ If these truths get access to the conscience of any, they are not at liberty to encourage the hope of such, by lowering the Divine claim of perfect righteousness to commend them to God's favour, but are bound to show them where alone that righteousness is found, in which they can be accepted. I do not see anything should induce them to consider men as believers, while they are neither comforted by the revealed righteousness, nor influenced by gospel; nor have I any conception of an unbeliever desiring to believe; however it is natural enough to desire ease of mind. Ignorance and enmity which still remain in the children of disobedience, seem to make such a character impossible to be found. *He is enmity against God, and understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, &c.* It is absurd to suppose a person desiring to believe what he hates should be true, or what he sees no evidence of, or importance in. He that doth perceive the evidence and importance of the gospel as the Lord hath spoken it, is doubtless a believer; for what else is believing, but receiving the evidence, and perceiving the true meaning and importance of a doctrine? You see I have nothing to say to any supposed equivocal character, or person making advances toward that righteousness which God brings near to the stout-hearted, which are far from it; for I do not suppose that there are indeed any such characters.

“ I can easily see how such as believe may be said to hunger and thirst after more knowledge of the truth, which brings a righteousness to their view on which all their safety and happiness depends, and so hunger and thirst after the enjoyment of that righteousness: but I cannot see how any person can be said to hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness, who do not with the heart believe, *that by him all that believe are justified*, which is *with the heart believing to*



*righteousness*: I cannot see how he can thus hunger, unless we may suppose him longing for that which he hath no knowledge of, or value for! Yet it will be owned to be natural enough for men to desire some kind of righteousness, real or imaginary, seeing the present peace of a thinking mind greatly depends on having some reason of hope at hand to fortify them against the fears of wrath to come.

“ Taking this to be the view the gospel considers all men in, (as believers or unbelievers,) I see no danger in supposing that all its exhortations may be addressed to *believers*, who are to walk in the Lord Jesus Christ as they received him. Nor do I see any danger in all the exhortations being addressed to *unbelievers*, supposing the command to believe on the Son of God be understood as inseparably connected with, and essential to every act of obedience to such exhortations. Thus we may say to men promiscuously, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and love, obey, &c.* But I cannot think any encouragements to believe for justification should be taken from such dispositions of mind, as we may observe about the serious and inquiring; for such encouragements would be so many impeachments of the freedom and suitableness of that grace which reigns through righteousness by Jesus Christ.

“ Any such encouragement to believe would be turning the attention from the abundant grace and *gift* of righteousness, to the token for good which is observed to embolden our confidence. He that thinks he may believe, *because* he hath these good symptoms, must needs think, if he could see no good about himself, the gospel would not be suited to give him joy and peace in believing it. Now, whatever such a man believes, I should not think that *he believes on him that justifies the ungodly*. You cannot but know the *art* of religion greatly consists in soothing the minds of men, and promoting their peace without the painful conviction, that all their labour after distinctions and precedency are aggravations of their guilt and rebellion; for the last thing a man parts with is a good conceit of himself. And I must still say, I think this has been greatly promoted by the kind of address for which the inquirer is a most ingenious and resolute champion.

“ I suppose every man hath good authority to urge on as many as will hear him, the full import of such words as these, *Repent, and believe the gospel*. And on such as profess the faith, (as they must be careful to maintain good works,) he also must urge, that they show out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom; for they

cannot show their faith but by their works. But I see not what obedience can be paid to the special precepts of the gospel by such as are not under the law to Christ. Nor do I conceive that exhortations can receive any additional weight from the importance and solemnity of what they call ministerial authority, without detracting as much from the reverence due to God alone.

“If you do but understand my way of expression on this head of exhortation, it is all I have aimed at; and I proceed to a remark or two on the grant or deed of conveyance, by which the inquirer seems to think Christ and all his benefits are made over to all mankind.

“I readily admit, that the gift of the Son of God, the gift of righteousness, and the gift of God, which is eternal life, are inseparably connected, so that *he who hath the Son hath life*; but what I demur upon is, How doth it appear that this is made over to all mankind? The inquirer freely owns, it is no benefit to any but them that believe; and he also admits, that perfect sovereignty is exercised in the actual application and reception of this gift. If this is so, I cannot see the necessity of introducing the difficult business of proving, that is given which is never received, or that God hath, by a deed of conveyance, given eternal life to them that suffer eternal death. If this be not to suspend our actual participation upon some condition to be performed by us, I confess I cannot see why he should make the grant more extensive than the actual conveyance. If this grant comes limited by the absolute sovereignty of God, as he says, p. 31, how, then, is it more than an universal proclamation, *that whosoever believeth on the Son of God shall not perish, but have everlasting life*? Does not this way of expressing it look like saying, A grant made to all mankind is limited to a certain number or small remnant of them?

“I cannot think of the Son of God being given for such to whom the inheritance of sons will never be given, because, I suppose these gifts to be equally extensive; and as little can I think of Christ being given to such whom he was never given for. For this is the account Christ gives of it, *viz.* that he laid down his life *for his sheep*; and of others he saith, *Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep*. For this end he tells, he had power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life *to as many as the Father had given him*; and accordingly as many as were *ordained to eternal life, believed*. But is the gospel a grant of eternal life to such as

he did not lay down his life for? to such as were not given to Christ, nor *ordained* to eternal life?

“It is plain enough that the general declarations of the gospel of God to *whosoever will, whosoever believes, &c.*, afford sufficient encouragement for all the ends of the earth to look to him for salvation; and as these declarations are not limited, by being addressed to men of such qualifications as naturally lead them to glory over one another, they leave no room for any desire of distinctions *in order to justification*, nor yet for any suspicion lest this grace be not extensive enough to reach the most guilty character. Thus it is equally calculated to oppose both pride and despair.

“As here the Divine faithfulness is security, that *whosoever believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life*, I see nothing to hinder their *rejoicing in hope of the glory of God*. Yet I do not see this rejoicing will exclude a fear of coming short of the promised rest, of being a cast-away, or of drawing back unto perdition; for I apprehend this may be maintained in perfect consistence with the record, that *God hath given to us eternal life in his Son*. It will yet admit of a jealousy, lest we have deceived ourselves, mistaken the truth, or believed in vain, notwithstanding we have been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, &c. For the Apostle will warrant me to say, there are yet *better things which accompany salvation*. Therefore I do not perceive how a man is emboldened to say, He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*, before his calling and election is made sure by faith working with his works, and being made perfect by them; for his faith must be justified by its fruits, (as I apprehend,) before he can say with confidence, I believe, therefore I shall not come into condemnation.

“I also see, that as faith grows, so love will abound till it is perfected; and that ‘there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.’ But I have no other conception of faith growing than increasing in the knowledge of God, or in acquaintance with his good will to men, whence comes that love to him, from which obedience is inseparable.

“But if we speak about that peace with God which is enjoyed as soon as a man knows the truth, and is inseparable from being justified by faith, I know no other reason of this beginning of his confidence and rejoicing of hope, but the general and free declarations of the gospel to sinners, under no other character than as ungodly and without strength.—Nor can I think of the most advanced believer, who certainly

keeps in mind, that nothing commends men to God but a perfect righteousness, (if he keeps not this in view, he is not the person we speak of;) I cannot think of such an one who keeps in mind, that our God is a consuming fire, who can extract joy from anything but that righteousness in which God is well pleased? This is that which his faith works by love to, and is thereby proved to be the faith of God's elect.

“But as we were speaking of what that is in the record of God, in which men rejoice as soon as they know it is true, you may take my thoughts thereon in a familiar simile. If in a time of famine a person who had store should cause to be proclaimed, Whosoever will, let him come and take corn at my granary freely; in this case, a starving person who believed the proclamation, would need no particular invitation, describing him by anything but his wants, to encourage him to say, Then I shall not starve or want, seeing he is faithful that promised. I conceive the joy of this person would arise from, and be proportioned to the confidence he had in the truth of the proclamation; and he would have *personal* hope and joy, because it is a general invitation of whosoever will. Yet all this generosity would pass for nothing to him who did not believe it, or was in hope of doing well without it, and too proud to live on mere alms. If any one questioned his own personal welcome to the gift, seeing it was of mere grace, it is obvious he would mistake, and so not believe the proclamation; as he would who should put an impertinent emphasis on the word *will*, and inquire, Am I truly willing? &c., thus limiting it to the better disposed sort of people.

“The *whosoever will* would be sufficient to maintain the joy of him that believed it, although it was said, this bounteous person foreknows who will believe him and accept his kindness, and for such only he intends it: for he would say, Such a general invitation leaves me no occasion to make out my personal election, for I am not invited under any descriptive name, but that of a wretch that is perishing with hunger; therefore I am as freely invited as though there was no other in my case, or as any of them who have already received it. I own my similitude halts, in that no man can exercise sovereignty in disposing the mind to acceptance, consistent with the supposed declaration; nor is bodily food actually enjoyed when the report of it is believed, which is the case of the bread of God, for men live *by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*.



“I admit, that joy and peace in believing would be very faint, if it had no more to rest upon, or rise from, than saying and believing some few will be saved, peradventure I may be among them. For I do not take this to be believing the whole record of God concerning his Son, seeing this declaration would leave us to imagine some qualification in those few which partook of it. I take it, the joy of faith is greatly proportioned to the clearness and extent of that view which the person has of the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Yet this doth never banish such a fear as is not tormenting, but like the apprehension of danger which a manslayer would have; keeping him in the city of refuge till the death of the high-priest, knowing he could be safe from the avenger of blood nowhere but there.

“The inquirer’s account of faith seems to suppose it to consist in more than a belief of the facts which God hath testified concerning his Son. But if we include in that account of faith the belief of what God hath told us as the *meaning* of those facts, I cannot see how faith can consist in anything more, unless it consists in believing more than God hath spoken: for if I can determine *what* men ought to believe, I will leave it to critics to tell them *how* to believe. Introducing the devils as believing, to show, that we must believe more than they, or in another manner, is nothing to the purpose; for we cannot say to them as we may to men, *To you* is the word of this salvation sent. If by assurance of personal welcome he means no more than believing, that *him that cometh, he will in nowise cast out*, I heartily approve its full meaning.”

Those who would see the inquiry considered more particularly, may peruse a sixpenny pamphlet, lately published at Edinburgh, called, “Considerations on an Inquiry, &c.”

Toward the end of last year (1761,) was published in London, though not in Edinburgh till March, 1762, a book entitled,

“Palæmon’s Creed Reviewed and Examined; wherein several gross and dangerous Errors advanced by the author of the Letters on Theron and Aspasio are Detected and Refuted, and the Protestant Doctrine Concerning the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, Conviction of Sin, Regeneration, Faith, Justification, Inherent Grace, &c., Vindicated from the cavils and exceptions of that Author, and shown to be entirely conformable to the Apostolic Doctrine concerning the several points aforementioned.” In two volumes, by David Wilson.

This book may be considered as the best answer to Palæ-

mon that has yet appeared, and that in three respects. 1. It is the most copious and particular one. 2. As it espouses most points of the popular doctrine censured by Palæmon, so it gives the fullest view of the temper of mind which that doctrine inspires, as how it operates when roused by opposition, and what low arts it must use to hide the shame of its favourite doctrine, when freely exposed in its proper hatefulness by the Scriptures. 3. The favourable reception it hath obtained among those whom Palæmon obviously intended to point forth as the most zealous enemies of the gospel, clearly evinces the inattention or insincerity of those who affect to insinuate, that there is little or no difference between the truth Palæmon contends for, and the popular doctrine; yea, it serves to show, that there must be an irreconcilable aversion between the two. This book, then, may be considered as the best answer Palæmon has got, as being, in most respects, subservient to his views, and affording the fullest confirmation of his censures.

As the author is known to be a preacher of the Scotch covenant, in London, and of that which consists in believing what cannot be called true till it be believed, his doctrine is not like to have much weight with those who hope to be saved by the truth already ascertained in the Scripture, and who have thence learned to hold in just abomination every attempt to revive horrid principles of extirpation, which become doubly hateful when introduced under the impious pretence of their being patronized by the sacred name of Jesus, than which it will be difficult to find a more base impudent falsehood.

It may seem at first view no small condescension in the sons of the solemn league, to take such pains in convicting heretics whom they cannot extirpate. But, then, it must be remembered, that the old tyrant their father is dead, having experienced the truth of that ancient saying, *all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword*; and that he was solemnly buried (firm may the turf lie on his head) by consent of the three estates of the kingdom at the revolution, having left behind him only some weakly posthumous children, who frequently, with sad countenances, point at his grave, lamenting his untimely fate. As his memory is very dear to them, they have contrived to make an image\* of him, which is thought by some to be as like him as a dead thing can well

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\* That is, a bond framed, not twenty years ago, by the leaders of the *secession*, as much after the form of the old league and covenant as the difference of the times would, in their view, admit.

be to a living. Being desirous that the memory of their father should be preserved as lively as possible by means of this image, they have resolved, demanded, and solicited, that the same homage should be paid to the image as seems due to the original, at least so long as the latter remains underground. For however strange it may seem, they still entertain hopes, as well as fervent wishes, that such a favourable concurrence of circumstances may happen, as that the old tyrant himself may yet be raised from the dead, and once more bless his children, and terrify their foes by a sight of his awful face. Meanwhile, however, the homage demanded for the image goes but heavily forward; for many, even of the acknowledged children, scruple to pay it. Nor is this to be wondered at; for it is difficult to supply the place even of one graven image by another, without the risk of greatly diminishing the wonted homage, as may appear from the following passage of Maitland's History of Edinburgh, relating an event that happened there in 1558.

“The reformation of religion in Scotland being greatly encouraged by people of all ranks, the populace, out of a furious zeal, destroyed the monasteries and images in all parts; and the first of September, which was approaching, being St. Giles's day, the tutelar saint of Edinburgh, the Popish priests and monks, according to custom, made great preparations to celebrate that anniversary in honour of their patron: and lest the new converts should disturb the procession, they humbly entreated the queen-regent to honour the solemnity with her presence, which they imagined would prevent the insults of the populace; which Mary agreeing to, they prepared a magnificent pageant, whereon the statue of St. Giles was to be placed and carried in triumph through the city. All things being ready for the sumptuous procession, both regulars and seculars repaired in great state to the shrine of St. Giles, to fetch his statue to be carried in triumph; but, as ill-luck would have it, it was carried off the night before by some mischievous enemy, which had like to put an end to the whole affair. But that St. Giles might not lose the honour of a triumph, a small statue was borrowed from the Grayfriars, which the people in derision called *young St. Giles*; which being attended by a great number both of priests and monks, and fine bands of music, marched in great pomp through the chief streets of Edinburgh. But the regent withdrawing a little before the procession was over, the mob dismounted young St. Giles from his throne and tore him in pieces; which so intimidated his attendants, that

happy was he that could secure himself from the fury of the enraged multitude. But, by the prudent management of the magistrates, none suffered but young St. Giles, who was entirely demolished."

This story may likewise serve to remind us of several other useful, though obvious reflections; as, that all idols set up by the clergy triumph or sink into contempt according as princes and those in power give or withdraw their countenance; that the popular clergy will fall upon strange shifts rather than suffer a displaced idol to want some kind of substitute; that the triumphant idols, which formerly made Christendom tremble, and the modern substitutes differ in reality no more than an old and a young St. Giles; and that when the magistrates are prudent, even the more formidable idols may slide easily into contempt, without damage to any living soul.

The retainers of the young solemn league, not having the countenance of a prince to command respect, have hitherto declined the attempt of honouring him with a public triumph, lest they should provoke the greater insult both against him and themselves. They content themselves at present with doing him homage within doors, by solemnly swearing fealty to him with uplifted hands, and confirming the same by subscribing their names; yet, as it is highly convenient that his followers and well-wishers should be as numerous as possible, the most tender indulgence is shown to such of them as scruple to pay the full homage, or, as the phrase is, want light about it. For these are admitted to the highest privileges of brethren, provided they are found lying open to light, and using the means of instruction, that is, if they seriously peruse the writings, and reverently attend the proclamations of the young league's heralds. And perhaps the heralds themselves are sensible, that it is not easy to paint a dead image in so lively colours as to strike the eyes of the beholders with that same evidence of majesty, which would shine so naturally from the awful presence of the living original. For if the old tyrant himself should yet arise from the dead, and having the sword carried before him, step forward in his wonted fierceness, holding in his right hand the Bible open at *Curse ye Meroz*, and with his left shaking his parchment, enacting all pains, civil and ecclesiastic; who can doubt but he would soon dispel the darkness from the eyes of many, who now excuse the deficiency of their homage by their want of light?

However much the sons of the solemn league, who subsist



by the generous indulgence of the present government, have shown themselves unworthy of that blessing, by their unnatural murmuring against the legal toleration, not to say establishment, enjoyed by others; yet I would be far from grudging them the benefit of that toleration, which they so much grudge to see bestowed on their neighbours: yea, I ought rather to wish the continuance of that benefit to them, not only from principles of humanity toward those, who, however disposed, are unable to hurt the public tranquillity, but also in regard that the continuance of such a religious body, enjoying the protection of the government, is, in several respects, an useful and instructive sight.

They serve, like the impotent remains of Jacobitism, as a standing proof of the generosity and easy security of our government, which is no more affected by their murmuring than the well-mounted horseman is by the little barking creatures of the villages through which he passes, whose hoarse notes he considers rather as an enlivening salute, than a cause of serious resentment. They serve, also, like the Jews, for a standing proof of the truth of the Scriptures, while they bear witness to those writings as Divinely inspired, which afford the clearest documents of the absurdness and hypocrisy of their conduct. Moreover, they serve the same end in the present age, as did their ancestors the Jews and Judaizing Christians in the apostolic age, who, by the opposition, kept alive the controversy about the faith, and furnished occasion to the apostles and their adherents to make the evidence of the truth concerning Christ's person and kingdom to shine forth the more clearly in its beautiful simplicity and consistency. Farther, it might be difficult to persuade some Christians, who have little opportunity of reading history, that the gospel has already been corrupted as much as the apostles foretold, if such living proofs were wanting.

Now, when one beholds such men teaching us to hope for salvation, by believing what is not true till it be believed, and abusing the sacred name of Jesus to patronize the same corrupt worldly views, on account of which the reformers censured the Church of Rome, must he not think it very diverting to see these same sons of the solemn league setting up for champions of the Protestant doctrine against Popish tenets, unless he considers their serious aim to be, to persuade us to be true Scotch instead of Roman Catholics?

When we observe how deeply our reviewer has been afflicted by Palæmon's censure of his doctrine, and his worthies who patronize it, and at the same time reflect that he is

a son of the solemn league, we must own, that he bears his chastisement as well as could be expected. The virtue of patience is always most conspicuous when it sustains properly the greatest trials. So well is the reviewer armed with this virtue, that, even after the fatigue of advancing to the middle of his second volume, he says, p. 159, "I would not choose to render railing for railing," which plainly indicates a very sober-minded choice. Nor must we too hastily conclude that he had no idea of the propriety of such a choice, though we find him, from beginning to end of his two volumes, frequently discharging his heart in such noisy explosions as these noted below;\* for even ships of war sometimes discharge guns that have no tendency to annoy the enemy, but serve merely as signals of distress. How averse he is to give the least offence to Palæmon, may appear from his modestly withdrawing from his worthies the title of *Reverend*, which he is satisfied well becomes them. "I have," says he, "omitted the title of *Reverend*, lest it should offend our author."† Since the reviewer, then, is so inoffensively disposed, have we not some reason to conclude, that if he could have found relief to his mind otherwise, he would have fired fewer guns of distress?

His distress may farther appear, both by the charges he brings, and his manner of evincing them. The general charge, which is several times repeated in nearly the same words, may be seen in vol. 2, p. 297, where speaking of that

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\* For shortness, and to prevent mistakes, his book may be cited under the name of *Review*; vol. 1, this impious writer, p. 127; agents for hell and factors for the devil, 207; a malignant opposition to the true doctrine of the gospel—with a malicious attempt to defame, 213; and there is no reason to doubt but God will seasonably vindicate the honour of his own name—by stopping the mouths of such liars and blasphemers, 187. Again, vol. 2, reveries of a distempered imagination, occasioned by a rooted disaffection and malicious opposition—scorning libertine and stubborn sectary, 159; such brainsick writers as he, 163; such a *farrago* of crude, senseless, and contradictory notions, 187; an impudent ranting sectary, 197; by many degrees exceeded the grossest Pelagians in heresy and blasphemy, 219; his impious assertions, and blasphemous insinuations, 226; scurrilous reproaches, 227; wicked prevarication, and scandalous disingenuity—blasphemous insinuating, 228; makes every appearance or semblance of practical religion and godliness a subject of ridicule, and treats all Christian exercise and experience with the most profane contempt, 231; such an amazing height of impiety—such an instance of daring impiety and blasphemy—that scheme of principles, or rather, hodge-podge of error, nonsense, and blasphemy—for impiety and blasphemy few of them [the doctrines of devils] have exceeded, or even equalled, 241.

† *Review*, vol. 1, p. 117.

creed which Palæmon has the assurance to call the *ancient apostolic gospel*, he adds, "And I hope the intelligent and impartial reader, by this time, will easily perceive, that, far from meriting that honourable appellation, it is nothing else but a confused jumble of Pelagian, Popish, Socinian, and Antinomian errors, blended together with a little art, and interspersed now and then with some fantastical notions peculiar to that new society of sectaries in Scotland," &c. To evince this charge, which is distributed into twenty articles, is the task he undertakes; and what distresses him is, that he can find so little evidence. Hence, we find him so often complaining of Palæmon's obscurity, as Pref. p. 42, "It would be a very unpleasant task to follow this extraordinary writer through all the mazes of obscurity, mysticism, ambiguity, and inconsistency, in which he endeavours to entangle the ignorant and the unwary. It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that this writer has thrown such a mist of ambiguity and obscurity upon almost every subject he treats of, as makes it very difficult to know what are his real sentiments. He has buried almost every subject he touches upon in such ambiguity and obscurity, that it is often very difficult to know whether his words have this or that meaning, any meaning, or no meaning."

Moreover, it distresses him to find any one pretending to receive the least instruction from such a trifling writer. "What pity is it that men should suffer themselves thus to be bantered out of their religion and reason too, by the scornful and senseless reflections of one of the most trifling, though one of the most arrogant writers that this, or perhaps any age has produced?"\* Now, reader, is it not somewhat strange, that an obscure, trifling, and withal arrogant writer, should put together a confused jumble of senseless notions, in words to which it is often difficult to affix any meaning, and yet in composing this jumble, to lay down a plan for deceiving, not only the simple, but also those of whom other things might have been expected, and that even in the most important matters? yet it seems "thus he endeavours to deceive the simple, and has actually imposed upon some, of whom other things might have been expected; but it is hoped, the more judicious will easily perceive the *artifice*, and escape the snare which he has laid for the inattentive and unwary."†

Now, to what shall we compare the strange obscurity of

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\* Review, Pref. p. 52.

† Review, Pref. p. 47.

Palæmon's creed? It seems to resemble the blackness of an impending storm, dark and dreadful at once; and it would seem, that, in the one case, as in the other, a gleam of lightning now and then darts through the gloom, adding increase of trouble to the beholder's mind. That our reviewer is both troubled at that creed, and at the same time straitened to account for the design or artifice manifest in it, may appear from his own words; for he says, "It is not easy to conceive what the writer could intend by troubling the world with such a *farrago* of crude, senseless, and contradictory notions as he hath thrown together on this subject"\* of faith. Now, why should a foolish book about religion trouble the world so well accustomed to such productions? But if Palæmon's creed be supposed the same with that of the apostles, and accordingly to have something Divine about it, then the wonder will cease: for it was said long ago, "These men do exceedingly trouble our city." And when the author of the Christian creed was born, though his earthly condition was very obscure, yet that event being attended with an apprehension that God was there, we find that Herod and all Jerusalem with him were troubled on that occasion.

It may likewise be remarked, that as the doctrine of the apostles about faith is very closely connected with their account of the heavenly nature of Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world; so nothing serves more effectually to fill the clergy's kingdom with darkness, and defeat their attempts to restore it, than a free display of the Scripture doctrine on the connection of these two important points. And the New Testament forbids us to be surprised, when on that event we find the clergy, instead of repenting of their deeds, gnawing their tongues for pain, and to ease their hearts, opening their mouths in strange expressions against that doctrine, and all who maintain it. How much the reviewer is galled by that doctrine, which neither he nor his fellows, though long since loudly called upon, have yet dared to answer; and what strange things the anguish of his heart compels him to utter, (while he looks back with wishful eyes toward that period, which appears so glorious in his eyes, when his forefathers, the covenanters, with a high hand wielded the persecuting sword,) may be seen in many pages of his book, particularly toward the end of his preface, and toward the end of each volume, and in p. 159, of the last. But, however great the anguish of such men may be, Christians are not allowed to

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\* Review, vol. 2, p. 187.



sympathize with them; because it is said of the great Redeemer, that in recovering his people from the anti-christian kingdom, or spiritual Babylon, *he shall thoroughly plead their cause*, not only to give rest to his land or his people, but also with this express intention, *to disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon*, as we now see abundantly verified at this day. Therefore, let Babylon, with those who lament her decay, bear her judgment, and let Christians join with the honourable company mentioned in the heavenly proclamation, "Rejoice over her thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her."

If we attend the reviewer a little farther, we may find him no less troubled with the light than with the darkness of Palæmon's creed. The case seems to stand thus: Palæmon's scheme, *at first view, would seem* to be a defence of the Christian doctrine; this *one would take to be the genuine and obvious signification* of his words; but this can by no means be admitted; for if he had *honestly intended to vindicate* the Christian doctrine, *he would never have discovered such a warm opposition to such eminent preachers of the gospel.*\* "We do allow that there are some valuable truths which he sometimes appears to set in a very clear and strong light,"† though never with a good intention. His constant opposition to the orthodox plainly proves that he must have an heterodox or heretical intention in all that he says. But the great difficulty is, how to convict him of this wicked intention, so as to make it plainly appear to others from his own words. This difficulty is the greater, that the cunning heretic hath carefully studied so to choose and arrange his words, that at first view they would seem to present a good and sound meaning, and this sound meaning one would take to be their genuine and obvious signification. Yet by these same words his wicked intention must be proved. A hard task it must be owned! who would not in this case complain aloud of the obscure prospect before him? And had not the reviewer reason to say, "it would be a very unpleasant task to follow this extraordinary writer through all the mazes of obscurity," &c. and accordingly to take the best method he could to abridge his labour?

The task of detecting the heretic however is undertaken. The prying reviewer, by carefully poring on Palæmon's words, at last obtained something like the faculty of second sight in regard to them, which made them wear quite another aspect

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\* Review, Pref. p. 12.

† Vol. 2, p. 297.

than they obviously do *at first view*; and accordingly found that, by the help of a little art, they may be so explained as to admit of a sense quite opposite to that which one would take to be their genuine and obvious signification; and the whole scheme may be turned into almost as many different shapes as you please. For though, at first view, it would seem to be laid in opposition to some dangerous corruptions of the Christian doctrine, especially concerning justification through the imputed righteousness, it may be so explained as to favour either Pelagianism, or Antinomianism, Socinianism, or Popery; yea, one might easily form a creed out of it, containing the substance of all the heresies just now mentioned, in so far as they relate to *faith, justification, regeneration, conversion, sanctification, &c.*"\*

When Palæmon's words and sentiments are once thoroughly grounded to powder in the reviewer's mill, and then wrought up into a new paste, or digested into his *summary*, and then carefully reviewed and examined, then the reader may *easily form* a very different judgment, concerning the scope and tendency of his whole scheme from what he could at first view. So after intimating how unpleasant it would be to follow Palæmon's mazes step by step, as he had at first intended, he adds, "Upon second thoughts I changed my resolution, apprehending it would be more for the benefit of the reader, and less trouble to myself, to collect some of the principal heads of his new doctrine into one *summary*, which being carefully reviewed and examined, one may easily form a judgment concerning the scope and tendency of his whole scheme."†

It is proper likewise to observe, that though it was Palæmon's design to catch the simple, and make his errors take hold even of the inattentive, yet so wretchedly and obscurely hath he executed his design, that even his more palpable absurdities and gross abominations lie concealed in his writings, so as frequently to elude the observation of the simple and inattentive;" and perhaps might have remained concealed from their view, if they have not been aided by some such sagacious pointer as our reviewer. Take his own words. As it would be needless to pursue this author through all the tiresome and intricate paths of error, in which he endeavours to entangle his unwary reader, we must content ourselves with giving only a few hints, that perhaps may be of use for detecting some of the more palpable absurdities, and gross

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\* Review, Pref. p. 44.

† Review, Pref. p. 42.

abominations, which lie concealed in his writings, so as frequently to elude the observation of the simple and inattentive."\*

Though the reviewer is at great pains to lay open Palæmon's heresy, yet by some strange accident so it happens, that the sentiments of the latter are so closely wrapt up in the disguise of truth and sound meaning, that the former, after writing more than 200 pages of his review, is greatly perplexed how to tear off that disguise, while yet he would have his reader take his honest word for it, that, were the disguise once fairly stripped off, the wickedness of the heretic's sentiments *would instantly be obvious to the meanest capacity*.—Take his own words again, "Were this gentleman's peculiar tenets stripped of all disguise, cleared of all ambiguity, and set forth in a plain simple dress, their contrariety to the Scriptures, and all true Christian experience, would instantly be obvious to the meanest capacity: and a malignant opposition to the true doctrine of the gospel, and the power of godliness, with a malicious attempt to defame the memory and character of a number of worthy men, who showed a laudable zeal, and hearty concern for the purity of the gospel, found to be the special *characteristics* of his strange performance."†

If what is here wished for could only be done, all matters would be easy; but Palæmon is such a cunning rogue, that the best pointer is in hazard of losing his scent in following him; so the reviewer immediately subjoins to the words last cited: "But he is remarkable for a peculiar dexterity in expressing himself, so as to reserve a number of little subtuges, to which he may have recourse when attacked, and avoid the dint of any argument that may be offered in confutation of his darling sentiments. If he should be beaten out of one, he has another to fly to; and to pursue him through all the dreary paths of *ambiguity, mysticism, and obscurity*, and the several *refuges of lies*, in which he endeavours to secure himself from the blows of any adversary that may think fit to attack him, must be acknowledged to be no pleasant nor easy task."

Nor is it easy for the reviewer to compose his mind so much as to be able to affix any certain character to Palæmon, whose book sometimes appears a masterpiece of deceitful artifice, at other times such a confused jumble of senseless contradictory notions, that the reviewer is obliged to say at the close of his 17th article, "But it is to no purpose to reason

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\* Review, vol. 1, p. 119.

† Ibid. vol. 1, 213.



with one who either knows not or cares not what he says." At another time Palæmon is scarce inferior to the devil himself for contrivance: "Perhaps the devil himself could never have invented an engine more effectual for supporting and promoting all the interests of his kingdom in the world, and in the heart of men, that this [scheme of justification,] especially as it is improved by the letter writer, must be acknowledged to be."<sup>\*</sup>

Yea, so distressed is the reviewer with the light or clear evidence of design shining through the dark chaos of Palæmon's book, that one would think his own mind was somewhat disordered or jumbled by it, like the good people in his brother Mr. Mackie's neighbourhood, who, as we have heard above, were thrown into a jumble by the same means. For he sometimes, even in the same sentence, calls what is contained in said book a medley, or confused jumble of things put together with art, imagining perhaps to soften the contradiction by saying, *a little art*. That strange book, then, is a fortuitous concourse of atoms in thick darkness, or "a confused jumble of many different things put together without any order or connection;"<sup>†</sup> yet by some strange chance arranging themselves in such order, as everywhere to show evidence of intention, yea, of unity of design through the whole, and so clearly, that even our reviewer, notwithstanding the mist of obscurity he has to look through, is obliged to confess that all this could scarcely happen without some little art.

Though the reviewer hath taken no small pains to undeceive the simple, yet he is scarce willing to risk his discoveries on the verdict of such readers; but by frequent courtesies he hath contracted a very intimate acquaintance with the judicious, intelligent, and impartial reader, who, after so many instructions, would be very unworthy of the pains taken with him, if he did not acknowledge, as his instructor kindly hopes, that he easily perceives at least the more gross and palpable heresies which lie concealed in Palæmon's writings.

As for Palæmon, since he is allowed to have some faculty, or to have endeavoured with some success, to persuade the simple, it would ill become him to despise such readers; yea, it is only from such readers as are so simple as to entertain a friendly bias toward his creed, that he can expect a favourable ear to his defence of it; as for the judicious, intelligent, impartial, or unbiassed readers, as he has not the honour of

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<sup>\*</sup> Review, p. 122.

<sup>†</sup> The reviewer's explication of *farrago*, vol. 2, p. 187.



being acquainted with them, so he despairs of writing much to their satisfaction, till they receive some bias in favour of his creed, and so take their rank with the simple.

For answer, then, to the review, simple reader, be advised by your friend Palæmon, to take his meaning as it appears to you at first view, or, according to the genuine and obvious signification of his words; and if there be any gross palpable heresies that lie concealed in his writings, he wishes, for your sake and his own, that they may remain forever concealed from your sight. As to the reviewer's account of Palæmon's tenets, you are in no great hazard of being imposed upon by it, because you see it wants even the requisite character of tolerable fiction, to wit, probability. So you find he resembles the lowest class of painters, who take care to inform the spectator by what name he should call the picture. Hence you find what he gives you for Palæmon's tenets, so often marked with some of the worst sounding names he can find in his catalogue of heretics.

Observe now what rule he lays down for convicting the heretic. "We must not take an estimate of his principles from any assertions which we find occasionally dropt in his letters, but from the general scope and purport of them, and especially from the doctrines he shows the strongest inclination to oppose and vilify."\* This agrees with what was said in preface, p. 12, "Had this gentleman honestly intended to vindicate the doctrine of justification through the imputed righteousness,—he would never have discovered such a warm opposition to those eminent preachers of the gospel, who made it their business, and whose leading aim it was, in all their discourses and writings, to teach, improve, illustrate, and vindicate the same doctrine," &c. How far Palæmon's doctrine is from being the same with theirs, is sufficiently evident by the wide difference between him and the reviewer, who, it seems, is sustained as their advocate by the people who adhere both to him and them. Now, Palæmon must be a vile heretic, because he opposes so many worthy men; and, therefore, it is vain for him to pretend to clear himself by any assertions found in his book, on however many occasions they have dropped from his pen; for if he had been a man of sound principles, he would never have opened his mouth against the solemn league, the appropriation, direct and reflex acts of faith, and all the worthy men who have taught us to reverence these things. He often asserts justifi-

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\* Review, vol. 2, p. 273.

cation by faith without works; but what signifies his assertions? his meaning can never be right, so long as he opposes those good men, who, having given us many directions how to perform a right act of faith, or to essay stretching out the withered hand, enforce all with the earnest exhortation, *Up therefore, and be doing*. He can be no friend to the interest of religion, because he despises the zealous and prudent methods taken by good men to make Christianity the religion of whole nations, so to free that religion from the imperfections of its infant state, when it stood closely connected with that inconvenient thing the cross: for no wise man can doubt but it is much more convenient for Christians to be in a condition to chastise unbelievers, than to run the risk of receiving chastisement from them. Besides, he must have a very profane turn of mind, because he laughs at the serious labours of unbelievers to attain to justification by faith without works; and what shows his profaneness to be quite extravagant, is his maintaining, that any church committing that fornication with the kings of the earth, spoke of in John's revelation, may fitly be called an *harlot*, and can have no resemblance to the *virgin daughter of Zion*, or New Testament church, than the persecutor has to a Christian.

An instance or two may serve for a specimen of the reviewer's account of Palæmon's tenets. "What shall we think of Palæmon, who—reproaches and blasphemes the whole work of his Holy Spirit in the regeneration, conversion, and sanctification of believers?"\* Again, "If it can be said, that Palæmon—has any leading sentiment, it is the following, namely: that the Divine righteousness, or the work finished by Christ on the cross, is so all-sufficient for the justification and salvation of the most guilty, as to supersede all necessity of any inward and supernatural work of the Divine Spirit upon the minds and hearts of men," &c.† Yet Palæmon is afterward charged as maintaining the connection between the agency of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of the truth rather too closely for the reviewer, who is accordingly at pains to confute him. "And this, by the way, may serve to confute the strange notion advanced by Palæmon in the following words: *There is no separating the agency of the Holy Spirit from the knowledge of the truth.*"‡—But how much Palæmon hath insisted on the

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\* Review, vol. 1, p. 136.

† Ibid. p. 137.

‡ Ibid. vol. 2, p. 66.

necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in the whole matter of man's salvation, needs not be told to those who have read him. As for those who incline to take his reviewer's account of him, they may do as suits them best.

For another instance, take his 19th article. "A believer has no occasion to consider himself as being under any obligation to yield obedience to the Divine law, nor can it be of any advantage to him in regulating his practice and conversation." To evince this he begins thus; "I do not remember that Palæmon has anywhere, in express terms, denied the obligation of the Divine law with regard to believers; that would have been too plain dealing; but I do not find that in any passage of his letters he has clearly asserted it;" yet he cites Palæmon saying, "The gospel was never intended to make void the law, in any respect, yea, it establishes the law on all sides in the strongest manner." He cites him again, saying, "I consider the perfect law, the law that requires godliness and humanity in perfection, as the sacred and invariable rule of correspondence with God." And in his 8th article, which states a charge of equal truth with the present, he cites him saying, "The obligation of the law is eternal so can never be loosed." But what signify such assertions as these? they can give us no right information about Palæmon's tenets; for, says the review, "We must not take an estimate of his principles from any assertions we find occasionally dropped in his letters," &c.—If ever the old tyrant the solemn league should arise from the dead, and his inquisitors set up their tribunal, we should find curious rules established for convicting heretics. They would find room for conviction, not only on what a man says, but also on what he says not; yea, they would find him guilty of meaning the very contrary of what he says; for suppose they could not find him guilty of a wrong word, they would hear him thinking amiss.—Notwithstanding the great obscurity of Palæmon's book, the reviewer frequently finds him *plainly insinuating* the reverse of his repeated assertions, and expresses no small confidence that the intelligent unprejudiced reader must *easily* see this.

But the reviewer's account of Palæmon's tenets is very harmless and excusable, when compared with his treatment of the Scripture. He allows not the persuasion of the truth already ascertained in the gospel to be justifying faith, but along with Marshall, Hervey, and others, makes it essential to that faith, that one believe what cannot be called true till it be believed. What indignity is hereby done to the great

scope of all the Scriptures, must be evident to those who hope to be saved by the truth already certified there. But then the Scripture insists on the *receiving* of Christ, and receiving must mean more than persuasion, even accepting, embracing, relying, &c. ; be it so, still the Apostle's argument is good, however the expression be varied, How shall they receive him on whom they have not believed? The privilege of sons is bestowed on them that receive Christ, "even them that believe on his name." So salvation is bestowed on them that call on the name of the Lord, "even them that believe;" for the argument runs thus, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?"

So, then, they who advert to this argument of the Apostle, can be at no loss to understand why it is sometimes said, "He that believeth shall be saved;" and at others, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."—Again, Christ is said to be "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him." But how shall they obey, till they believe? So Paul again argues, *But they have not all obeyed*;—for Esaias saith, *Lord who hath believed?* Again, as men feed upon a happy event they have been assured of, by often calling it to remembrance; so Paul, speaking of his gospel says, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." And he says of himself, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." What he testified to others about Christ, he constantly kept in memory, as the spring of his daily comfort, or as the food he daily fed on, because he was well assured it was true; and by the effect it had on him he knew, that "Christ loved him, and gave himself for him."

In like manner we may easily understand all the expressions about coming, eating, drinking, &c. ; for how shall men go to feed till they be persuaded where food is to be found, either by feeling the savour of it, or hearing credible testimony? Now, the savour of the knowledge of Christ is spread abroad by the apostolic report; that savour prevents men, and they are led to resort whither the savour directs; for "wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Now, the eagles are at first prevented either by the welcome savour or sight, and thereby led to find the carcass. The fathers of old embraced the promises; but how came this to pass? "Having seen them afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them."—The two passages, Mark ii, 23, 24, and James i, 5, 6, 7, cited in the



Review, vol. 2, p. 27, cannot prove that the Scripture requires me, or any other person to believe what is not absolutely true in itself previous to our belief, and whether we shall be found among the faithful or not; unless it shall be said, that because Christ makes promises of benefits to those who continue in the faith, which shall not be bestowed on those who draw back; or because he promises seasonable help to those disciples who depend on him in their straits, and bids them be assured of receiving it in their praying for it, therefore he calls us to believe what shall not prove infallibly true, believe we or not; or whether any of us who hear these words, shall be found among the faithful or the apostates! Will this consequence hold? Nay, for Paul plainly repels it, saying, "If we deny him, he will also deny us; if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself."

Let us now observe what account of the *gift* and *promise* of God is made by the reviewer and his worthies. From such texts as these, John vi, 32, and 1 John v, 11, they would persuade us that God hath given eternal life to all the hearers of the gospel, yet so as, by that giving, he in reality bestows nothing upon them, or conveys no real benefit to them, since it is allowed, that, notwithstanding that giving, they may yet perish eternally; and that accordingly multitudes, to whom God is said to have given eternal life, do in reality perish, through some defect in their receiving, or their not performing aright the appropriating act of faith. And what a blind task, what a sad labyrinth he enters upon, who seriously essays to perform that act, needs not now be told to those who have read our reviewer and his worthies, at least by Palæmon. Now, reader, what thinkest thou of the *giving* now mentioned? Is it possible that thy heart can reverence the Scriptures, and not resent such abuse of them?

These writers treat the Scriptures, speaking of God's gift and promise of eternal life, suitably enough to their notion of Christ's connection with the whole human race by his birth, and much in the same manner as the opposers of particular redemption do the universal expressions about the extent of Christ's death; but if we are desirous to hold the Scripture consistent with itself, we may easily observe, that Christ has his world, and that Satan has his world, yea, each his *whole world*, as we find in the second and fifth chapters of John's first epistle. So Christ has his *all men*, and antichrist has his *all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond*. And as antichrist has his *all nations*, so Christ has his *nations of them that are saved*. Now, to those who love the Scrip-

ture account of God's grace, Christ's peculiar connection with his people, in his birth, death, resurrection, &c., will appear to be very naturally set forth in such expressions as these: 1. As to his birth,—“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,—I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day a Saviour. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. They shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.” 2. His death and resurrection; Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.” 3. Intercession; “who also maketh intercession for us. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. Neither pray I for these (*the apostles*) alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

With God's gift of the elect to his Son well corresponds his gift of his Son for them or to them.—“God so loved the world, that he gave his Son, that whosoever believeth, &c.—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!”

The great blessings conveyed to men are said to be given both by the Father and the Son; so John vi, “Labour\*—for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.—My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.—For the bread of God is he who cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.—The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Again, chap. x, “The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.—And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” And chap. xvii, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.—And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them.” So 1 John v, 11, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life.”

These, and many such passages, clearly ascertain the peculiar and inseparable connection between Christ and his people, in his incarnation, and all that follows upon it; unless, disre-

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\* They who laboured in following Christ, according to this text, upon the persuasion that he was the giver of eternal life, or the bread of life, were certainly influenced in all their labour by faith. So we find by what follows in this chapter, that those who understood him not in this character, *went back, and walked no more with him.*

garding the connection of the Scripture doctrine, we would play fast and loose with the pronouns *you* and *us*, according to our own fancy. They also show, that all to whom God gives eternal life, are in reality, by his giving, put in possession of it. The Scripture affords no ground for that equivocal notion of giving, which confers no benefit, nor serves any purpose, except it be to lay a foundation for what is called the *ministerial offer*, and give some countenance to the little self-seeking views of many preachers. Paul, speaking of the certain salvation of all the true Israel, adds, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," so can never prove ineffectual, through any defect in the hearer or receiver, because the unchangeable God, who gives and calls, will not repent.

This leads us to think of God's *promise* and *call*; see Acts ii, 37—39. Peter seeing God's power leading many to repentance by the truth he had testified, encourages them to proceed, as he saw God leading them, thus, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise\* is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many"—as any preacher shall call? nay,—“but as the Lord our God shall call.” Who these are, Paul tells us, Rom. ix, 24, when speaking of “the vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory,” he adds, “Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” And Rom. viii, 30, he says, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, justified, and glorified.” If it be said that many appear to be saints and faithful,

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\* Even the promise of the gift he had just now mentioned, the gift of the Holy Ghost, which God is said to give to believers, Acts xi, 17, or to them that obey him, Acts v, 32, even the same gift which Christ promised, John v, 39, that believers should receive, as the Old Testament Scripture, to which he refers, had foretold. Accordingly we find it was written in Isaiah, chap. xlv, “I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring;” the consequence of which is said to be, “One shall say, I am the Lord's,” &c., even as in the close of the next chapter, the redeemed church, every tongue, or all the seed of Israel, are represented as saying at last, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength,” there being no foundation in the text or context for the supplement *one* before the words *shall say*.—The blessing mentioned by Isaiah, chap. xlv, is the same that is spoken of in Acts iii, 26, which is conveyed thus, “Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities,” or as our critics of first repute warrant us to render the last words, *in*, or *upon*, *each of you turning away from his iniquities*. Let the reader choose which of the two he finds most convenient.

partakers of the heavenly calling, who yet fall away; so likewise it may be said, that the promise seems to belong to many who yet come short of it. But still it must be said, that the promise is only "unto as many as the Lord our God shall call;" and none can appear to us to be the called of God, but such as appear to believe the gospel Peter preached, and to comply with his exhortation to repentance.—Those who have read the reviewer's 10th and 14th articles, may see how widely this doctrine differs from his, and it concerns them as much as the disputants to judge which of the two agrees best with the Scripture.

The promise of the earthly inheritance to the nation of Israel, and the faith answering to that promise, are figures of the spiritual promise, and the faith answering to it. But this subject is fully handled in Glas's works, vol. 3, p. 402–406. Those who read the passage now referred to, and what our reviewer says upon the same subject in his 10th article, may judge for themselves. Meantime it is needless to enlarge farther on that subject till the passage referred to be answered.

As to general calls or invitations with promises annexed, such as, "Come unto me,—and I will give you rest;" it may suffice to say, that all who are led to understand who it is that calls and invites, and how well it becomes him to say, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save," are so taught of the Father; they are his called and chosen, to whom the promise belongs.\* And none but those who understand who

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\* Accordingly we read, Isa. lii, 6, "Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak; behold, it is I." And chap. liv, 13, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." And Psal. ix, 10, "They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."—If any preacher, by means of the Scripture, shall lead his hearers to understand the character of him who speaks there, addressing the consciences of all sorts of men, then such hearers may be said to be the called of God by that preacher's ministry: for such hearers *have heard and learned of the Father*, and they have learned to distinguish the voice of the true Shepherd from that of all strangers, and they understand the propriety of these words, "This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."—But what shall we hearers think of a sinful mortal like ourselves, having no new message from heaven, nor any pretence to inspiration, yet standing up with great assurance, endeavouring to possess our minds with a high notion of his own dignity and importance, and accordingly lifting up his voice, saying, I call, I offer, I invite; you may never get such a good offer again; up, therefore, and be doing; Divine power is at hand to assist you; I have a message from heaven to you, and wo to the man who hearkens not to me; for by slighting me and my message, he slights his Maker!



it is that calleth, will ever understand what it means *to come*, or *to whom*, or yet have a proper relish for the *rest* promised to those who come. So before it be disputed whether there be any blessings promised to unbelievers to encourage them to come to Christ, it may be proper, first to inquire, whether an unbeliever can have a relish for the blessings Christ promises; for unless this point be first cleared, it is not manifest how they can bear the aspect of encouragements to him. But the common doctrine about equivocal gifts, promises, offers, calls, and invitations, however insignificant or prejudicial to the hearer, is very convenient for the preacher or ambassador, who will not therefore easily part with that doctrine. The reviewer's account of this subject may be seen in his 9th article.

The reviewer\* corrects Palæmon for ascribing our impotency to do good to our aversion to it, and our readiness to do evil to our love of it, in this manner: "The Apostle Paul would have taught him another lesson; for, says that inspired writer, "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not." Paul's next words are, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." And James says, "Every man is tempted (*with evil*) when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Therefore, before Palæmon receive a new lesson, he must first be taught how to reconcile Paul and James, and not only so, but Paul with himself; for Paul says, Gal. v, 17, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." And he says of himself, Rom. vii, 25, "So then with the mind, I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." If the one side of the contrast, by the word *lust*, intends to signify any notion of love, desire, or inclination, so must the other; and it may well be asked, how can a man have any conviction of the guilt of sin, if it be done in no sense by his will? If the reviewer's devoutest readers shall receive this new lesson, then they will have an additional defence against the conviction of sin, at least of any sin exposing them to wrath, or needing remission by the atonement; for no sin that men commit need remission by Christ's blood, but such as make the guilty obnoxious to the wrath to come. We may call this lesson new, not only as unknown to Paul and James, but also to our modern Henry,

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\* Review, vol. 2, p. 257.

and other commentators of repute for orthodoxy, though our reviewer triumphs not a little upon it.

As the reviewer is no less displeas'd with Palæmon's doctrine about works, than with his doctrine about faith, he accordingly censures him\* as taking part with Papists, because he frequently utters such assertions as these: "No man can enjoy that life which lies in God's favour farther than he loves God, and keeps his commandments; no man can be assured that his sins are forgiven him, but in as far as he is freed from the service of sin, and led to work righteousness." Palæmon had used that noted text, Heb. vi, 11, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence (*in the work and labour of love*) to the full assurance of hope unto the end." The reviewer having done his best to accommodate these words to his doctrine of assurance by the appropriation, is still sensible that they convey an unhappy sound for him; so he ventures to offer an amendment of the translation, which, so far as I can learn, is altogether new; for though I have looked into Poole's *Synopsis*, and Wolf's *Cura*, I cannot find that ever it entered the mind of any critic before. Our critic, however, finding the Greek preposition for *to*, in some other phrases rendered *with*, and *according to*, proposes to read our text thus, *with*, or *according to, the full assurance of hope*. His intelligent reader may judge of this amendment at his leisure. But Palæmon's simple reader would do well not to pay much regard to it, till he be able to show it to be as suitable to the context as the present version is, and till he get many other texts likewise amended, such as 2 Pet. i, 10, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." 1 John ii, 4, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Chap. iii, 14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death."

By what temper and conduct the first believers made their calling sure, is plainly enough described in the New Testament; but what shall we think of that assurance of Divine favour which is acquired at first by an appropriating act, and retained tenaciously to the last, by one who is all the while walking after the spirit of the solemn league and covenant! and what strange notions must one have of the influence of the Holy Ghost, who imagines it coincides with the spirit of

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\* Review, vol. 2, p. 185.

the solemn league! and who accordingly prays, that the purposes of the latter may be promoted by a plentiful effusion of the former! Say, my simple readers, is this the true Protestant doctrine that we ought to hold fast as our preservative against the errors and spirit of Popery?

Before we have done with the review, it may be proper to take some notice of one important topic, as to which it highly concerns the reader to be upon his guard.

Palæmon is charged with laying a foundation for idolatry by his doctrine about worshipping HIM who is with propriety called *the man Christ Jesus*, and whom Palæmon, after the apostles, constantly maintains to be no other than a Divine person, and the IMAGE of the invisible God, even the person respected by the heavenly proclamation, "Let all the angels of God worship HIM." The Jews said, John x, 33, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a MAN, makest THYSELF God." That the man Jesus made this account of himself, was not disputed, but only how justly. The Jews charged this account with blasphemy. If the reviewer can find means to justify this accusation, the same means will serve him for condemning Palæmon, who at present cannot see how his doctrine on this head is affected by anything advanced in the review, unless it be meant in support of the Jewish accusation, or to convict the apostle Paul of impropriety in calling Christ *the image of the invisible God*.

As the reviewer is not the only person who opposes Palæmon's doctrine on this head, I shall lay before the reader an extract of a letter sent me on the subject, dated May 10, 1762.

"Romaine, exclaiming from his pulpit against the worship of a glorified man displaying every Divine perfection, acts very consistently with his believing that man to be a human person, so united with the Son of God, as to be disjoined and separated from him, and left to suffer death by himself for the sins of men, when he said, *My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* The worship of that man's person must be creature-worship and idolatry in his account; and he can have nothing to do with the man Christ Jesus, when he would worship what he calls the Son of God in his revealed emblem, the light of this world, wherein he is no more visible to him than the Father is in the fire. To him, therefore, all who believe the Son of God to be the very person of that glorified man, and so worship that man's person, are infidels, (disbelievers of Hutchinson's Hebrew revelation,) and crea-

ture worshipers; and it behooved him to show his Hutchinsonian zeal against them.

“But it is not so easy to reconcile what Wilson, the seceder, writes on this subject with his creed. He believes, that Christ the Son of God became man, taking to himself a true body and reasonable soul, and that he is both God and man, in two distinct natures and one person, forever. This he maintains against all heresy about the person and natures of Christ; and so it is his creed, that this body and soul, which the Son of God took to himself, is no other person but that Divine one. What, then, should make him exclaim so against the worship of that man? or what could move him to charge the presenting of the true object of worship to him in that man with no less than a denial of the Divinity of his person?

“In his education he had learned something about this question, *An Christus qua mediator sit colendus?*\* agitated among the orthodox, and had been taught that the most orthodox denied that Christ should be worshiped as *Mediator*, or as the Lamb that was slain; for as such he was but a creature, and should only be worshiped as God, abstractly from his manhood and Mediatorship, though therein he appears and acts as both God and man, in two distinct natures and one Divine person. Thus, by his school-divinity, he has learned to know, that, in worshiping, he must carefully abstract the Divinity of Christ’s person from his human nature, and from his office, so as to have no idea of him as man, or as representing either his Father to us or us to him.

“What knows he, then, for the object of his worship? what thinks he of, or toward what are his prayers and praises directed? Has he no idea of what he worships? Why, he sets his mind upon a very abstract idea he supposes he has of an infinite, eternal, immutable, and immaterial substance, which he calls a spirit. In this pure object of his worship he beholds the Son of God, not as the person of the man Jesus; and his Father, not as manifested in him; and the Holy Ghost, not as dwelling in him, and from him animating his body the church; and from this immaterial substance he seeks a spirit to prepare him for conversion and faith, and so make him fitter for acceptance than other men, by convincing him of the sin of unbelief before he be persuaded to believe; a spirit that may persuade him to believe what is not true till he believe it, and assure him in the hope of salvation, without any work of faith or labour of love. This is his

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\* Is Christ, as mediator, to be worshiped?



God, with whom he has thus to do, who forbids us to worship toward the glorified man displaying every Divine perfection."

About the end of May, 1761, was published in Edinburgh, a small pamphlet, called *Nymphas to Sosipater*, containing, after a short introduction by Sosipater, extracts of nine letters wrote by Nymphas, remarking on the Letters on Theron and Aspasio. Having mentioned the author of the last mentioned letters, Nymphas says in his second sentence, "I think I don't understand him sufficiently, nor know exactly wherein we differ." This may serve as an apology for Palæmon in declining the trouble of particular animadversions on his remarks, though it be sufficiently evident, that he understands as much as to dislike it. As the introduction claims some attention, I shall transcribe it. "Sosipater publishes the following extracts from nine letters without the consent of Nymphas who wrote them. To those who shall read them with a candid desire to know what is truth, he persuades himself no apology will be necessary; sober reasoning will be acceptable to such, though it wants that polish which the pen of Nymphas would undoubtedly have given it, had he designed it for public view. A moral certainty that Nymphas cannot be hurt, and a probable prospect that many may reap benefit from the publication, is all the apology he can make to his friend. He would not, however, be understood to adopt every sentiment in these remarks. An assent to the gospel, flowing from spiritual discoveries of its Divine glory, is, in Sosipater's opinion, the whole of what the Scripture means by saving faith; and the trust, of which Nymphas speaks in the third letter, in so far as it contains anything different from assent, is not faith but a fruit of it. But as he intends, when he can commend leisure, to venture abroad his thoughts on that subject, he chooses at this time to say no more of it."

As Sosipater is supposed to be a minister of some note in the church of Scotland, I should be glad, on account of the hint now given, how soon he could find leisure to publish his thoughts on this important subject. I would fain hope he will not keep us so long in expectation as Mr. Wither- spoon has done, who, in his *Essay on Justification*, first published half a dozen years ago, near the close of his prefatory letter to Mr. Hervey, says, "The greatest part of what follows was first delivered in two sermons; but it is now thrown into the form of an *Essay*, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some, and that it might the better admit of several additions, both in the body of the piece and in the notes,

which could not have been properly delivered from a pulpit. Some of these regard the philosophical principles which have of late been published among us; of which I propose, in a short time, a much fuller discussion, as there is no way in which the truths of the gospel are more perverted than by what the apostle calls *philosophy and vain deceit, and oppositions of science falsely so called.*"

As it is reasonable to suppose, that when men of character endeavour to awaken the expectation of the public, they have, then, some prospect of gratifying it in a short time, I would fain hope that Sosipater will entertain a shorter idea of a *short time* than Mr. Witherspoon has done. However, as it is proper to give a good measure of time to the consideration of an important subject, we have reason at least to say, that the more time is allowed, the more ample and accurate discussion of the subject may be expected, especially while it cannot be said that the subject is of a nature foreign to their daily studies. While one labours to illustrate the truth of the gospel, by exposing the sophistry of philosophical objectors, the other will be employed in showing how properly the truth, which we call the *gospel*, answers to its designation, and proves in reality to be *good tidings of great joy to all people* who are favoured with the knowledge of it, in opposition to all those preachers who darken the joyful aspect of the saving truth, by the gloomy task they propose to the hearer, as necessary to make the truth become gospel to him. And thus the labours of both our expected writers will happily coincide.

As Paul is allowed to be an authentic teacher, and well-experienced pattern in this kind of labour, and as many mistakes have arisen through inattention to his great ministerial charge, it can be no loss to our writers to be reminded of that charge, as a proper pole-star to direct them in their studies, by one who wishes their labours may be both unexceptionable and successful.

Paul, speaking of the gospel revelation, which he emphatically calls *the commandment*, and which he is very anxious that Timothy should preserve in its greatest purity, says, "I give the charge in sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that thou keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." The good confession, to which all Christian teachers are strictly bound to give heed, as they shall be answerable at Christ's appearing, is recorded in John xviii, 36, 37,

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.”

By the stress Paul lays on this good confession, and the solemn charge he gives every Christian teacher in regard to it, it plainly appears that he no longer expected the gospel to be preserved in its purity than while sincere regard was paid to this good confession. And he seems to take pleasure in calling it a *good confession*, as foreseeing how universally it would be set at nought by Christian teachers. In how many respects Christianity has been corrupted among its professors, and exposed to the reproach of its avowed enemies, by the discarding of this good confession, needs not be enlarged on at present; but one may see at first glance, what a capital grievance it would be to the clergy if they had none to support them, and none to submit to them, but those who are of the truth, and accordingly hear Christ's voice; therefore, it nearly concerns them to devise such a scheme for gospel as may maintain their credit and influence among numbers who are strangers to the Divine evidence of the truth; and, then, it is easy for them to persuade themselves, that the credit of the gospel is inseparably connected with that of gospel ministers. It must, therefore, be very hard for a popular parish minister to understand what it means to preach Paul's gospel; for take every thing from him but that, and he must be greatly perplexed in what manner to address his people, unless he should become resolute, and, taking Paul's advice, become a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel.

But such ministers find, that numbers who cannot see the free mercy revealed in the saving truth, may yet be sensible of the Divine favour displayed in sending them a zealous minister, to furnish them with good means and rules, in the diligent use of which they may yet hope to become a good and happy people; and though they cannot value the Bible for the good tidings it brings to the utterly undeserving, yet they may value it as the minister's text-book, or as a sacred collection of such good means and rules, as, under the minister's direction, may be of the highest service to them. The Jewish multitude were once struck with an apprehension that Jesus was their expected prophet, and were accordingly disposed to depend on him as their director and assistant, in using the means by which they might become both good and happy; but Jesus scorning the great object of the clergy's attention,

or to have a retinue of followers not drawn or taught of the Father, soon explained himself in such a manner, as that even "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him," John vi.—Hence we may find the reason why Nymphas does not understand Palæmon's doctrine sufficiently, while yet he seems to have a strong suspicion that truth stands on that side:\* for, in his last letter, where he gives us the substance of a sermon on the use of means, he says, "1. It is infinitely gracious and kind in the offended and abused Majesty of heaven, to come out after his rebellious creatures, and use means to reclaim them. 2. God's using means with us, as he does, obliges us to use means ourselves; nay, the very means that God uses are of such a nature as calls for activity on our part. Nay, farther, the external means God uses can be of no use without our activity. Does he put the Bible in our hands? it will be to no purpose if we never read it. Does he send preachers? it will profit us nothing if we will not go to hear them."

Mr. Spearman, in his letters concerning the Septuagint translation, p. 46, has been pleased to recommend to Palæmon's serious consideration a passage cited from Dr. Stukely's *Palæo-to government*, and reciprocally requiring the protection of *graphia Sacra*, setting forth Christianity as the truest support to government. Palæmon has considered the passage, but cannot admit the instruction offered, till he see how it can be reconciled with the good confession Jesus made before the Roman governor. He would, therefore, in return, with all due respect, recommend that good confession to the serious consideration of his discreet monitor, who, if he inclines to see that confession illustrated by its connections with many other passages of Scripture, may peruse a treatise called *The Testimony of the King of Martyrs, &c.*, lately published in Glas's works, vol. 1.

As Palæmon hath received great pleasure by Dr. Camp-

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\* His strong suspicion may appear from the first paragraph of his second letter, where, speaking of Palæmon's design, he says, "His grand design is to bring men off from self-dependence to an entire dependence on the naked bare truth, *i. e.* on Christ and free grace, as held forth to view in the gospel. A good design! but unhappily, he had not taken the best method to accomplish it." That is, if the reader will allow Palæmon a word of explication. What an unhappy case is it, that so good a design could not be pursued, saving the credit of the clergy! or, How unhappy is it that the New Testament cannot be so explained as to make the kingdom of Christ and that of the clergy to coincide!



bell's late excellent dissertation on miracles, and as all the gospel miracles were brought to illustrate and confirm Christ's good confession, he apprehends he cannot better show his gratitude than by expressing his earnest wish that the good confession may likewise draw the serious attention of the respectable author of the dissertation. If that author, who is so able to persuade that his every page carries conviction along with it, could be so happy as to persuade a few of his neighbours to enter along with him into the spirit of the good confession, to love one another on that bond of union, and, like the first Christians, boldly become partakers of the afflictions of the gospel, what a serious, what a weighty force would such an event give to the arguments already so well urged in the excellent dissertation?—Cardinal de Retz had reported a miracle said to have been wrought at Saragossa, which yet he himself appears not to believe. On this case our author has a very manifest and easy advantage against his opponent, who had urged the Cardinal's disbelief as adding mightily to the force of the evidence for the miracle.—By the event now wished for, our author would stand clear of all suspicion of his own belief,\* and clear of all hazard of having his own solid reasoning retorted on himself.—It is true, such an event would partake much of the nature of a miracle; yet I cannot think it could, with any propriety, expose him to the ridicule insinuated in the poor sarcasm of his opponent, who alleges that the Christian religion, even at this day, cannot be believed by any reasonable person without a miracle; I rather think it would have a natural tendency to occasion more serious reflection to his opponent than even the very pertinent remarks by which he has already obviated the sarcasm now mentioned.

One thing is evident, that God hath chosen at all times to address the consciences of men by striking facts as well as arguments. The apostles preached, and their lives were a

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\* The reader may perceive, that the mention of the Cardinal is not made to suggest a ridiculous parallel as to the belief of bare detached facts, but to enforce a grave reflection about the connection and import of the gospel-miracles, or the doctrine supported by them.—Bishop Hoadly was a serious defender of the Christian religion in his way, and even bestowed no small attention on the good confession, warmly maintaining as much of it as pleased the court, promoted his worldly interest, and secured his reputation among numbers who were strangers to the grace of the gospel; but what Christian would say, that he understood or loved the good confession in the same sense as Paul and Timothy did?—It is hoped our author understands more about the gospel than the bishop did, and therefore it may be rather be presumed that he will not think the hint above suggested altogether impertinent.

chain of facts enforcing what they said. Our author knows well how to illustrate the evidence arising from this connection. Moreover, as we find the apostles adducing the influence of the gospel on those who believed, as an evidence of its truth, so we find them on all occasions ascribing that influence to the special interposition of God, though they were well persuaded at the same time, that the evidence of their gospel could not be resisted but by men unreasonable as well as wicked.

Paul observes with pleasure, that *the testimony of Christ was confirmed* in the believing Corinthians, even as he calls them in the same view *Christ's Epistle*, wrote in such a manner as plainly to discover the finger of God in the writing. And with fervent thanksgiving he ascribes it wholly to God, that his gospel was understood by the Thessalonians to be God's word, and that it had its proper effect on them, exposing them to the same injurious treatment from their countrymen as the first believers in Judea were exposed to from theirs. The same apostle, reminding Timothy of the treatment he met with from the world, assures him, that all who would live godly in Christ Jesus should meet with the like, while he forewarns him of evil men and seducers, who should wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. It is worthy of remark likewise, that Paul, summing up the proofs of his apostleship, signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, put on the front of them his *patience*, 2 Cor. xii, 12.

Nor should it appear strange, that the evidence of the gospel should be supported in a constant way by something partaking of the nature of miracles, seeing the Scripture assures us, that the *hard speeches* of unbelievers will be at last effectually confuted by the most astonishing miracle of all. These reflections would open a wide field; but why should I enlarge? If our author can but enter into the spirit of Christ's good confession, he will soon perceive what a light it throws on all the Scriptures, and how advantageous the maintaining of it is for enforcing the evidence of the gospel on the consciences of men. And what may give us some hope in this regard, is, that he has already, p. 116, given us a just and fair account of the apostolic tenets so far as he has gone.—The natural desire one has, that an argument of such importance, already conducted so happily to such a length, may be carried to perfection, by receiving every advantage it is capable of, may serve as an apology for these few hints in regard to a writer highly entitled to our thanks.

The following is Palæmon's answer, given February, 1760, to two questions proposed by one of his readers. The first question respects a difficulty the querist found in describing the character of a Pharisee under the Christian form, so as to prevent its being mistaken for that of a sincere Christian. The second respects the strange notions of those, who, talking in a high strain about some sort of union with Christ, and justification before faith, or before the beginning of the world, at the same time speak slightly of justification by faith.

“ I am not surprised at the difficulty you find in drawing a striking picture of the Pharisee under the Christian form. The gospel is best illustrated by facts, and without the proper facts the skill of the best teacher will go but short way.— Here you may recollect a hint in my third letter to Hervey, importing, that the hypocrisy of the Pharisee could never have been effectually demonstrated to the conviction of any, if a righteousness exceeding theirs had not appeared in the world. Their character was undoubtedly the likeliest thing to the Divine law that was to be seen in the world; therefore every attempt to depreciate it must have appeared invidious, and of profane tendency, had not an excelling righteousness appeared. It was their superlative enmity to Christ, the purity of his doctrine, and the perfection of his character, that laid their hypocrisy fully open, yet only to such as had learned of the Father, to understand the excellency of Christ's person, doctrine, and character. Now, that Christ hath left the world, the proper representation of what provoked the Pharisees, and drew the affection of such as were taught of God, is continued in the world by the union of Christ's disciples holding forth his doctrine, united by, and glorying only in the excellency of his person and character. Christ himself refers to this, when praying for the unity of his disciples, he adds, *That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*— The appearance of this union will be found to provoke the world, and to draw the affection of those who have no hope but in the Divine mercy, in the very same manner as Christ's personal appearance in the earth did. Without this, the ablest and soundest Christian teacher will only appear, either as an unintelligible, whimsical refiner of Pharisaical righteousness, or as invidiously depreciating the best idea men have of real worth and excellence. In general, if he is an acceptable affecting preacher, yet without proper zeal for the Christian union and separation, the most zealous Pharisaical professors will still consider him as at bottom their friend; for such men will always be ready to construct the best in

their own favour, till they see all room for such construction utterly cut off by the most plain, striking, and demonstrative facts, that is, till they see the Christian union fairly take place without them, and themselves rejected, and boldly excluded. Then you will have no occasion for laboured descriptions to characterize Pharisees; for you will clearly see their enmity to Christ manifesting itself by the most striking facts in its ancient form. It appears to be God's design, that all the great contrasts established by the gospel, should be evinced in such a manner as sensibly to strike the minds of the meanest believers, and not depend for their evidence on the abilities of men skilful in the use of words.

'As to your next question, about the strange ways of speaking fondly, used by some professors about the time of justification, &c., I persuade myself, that a little reflection will soon convince you, not only of their gross nonsense and absurdity, but also that they are to be ranked among the notable devices of Satan for depriving the plainest words of the gospel of all meaning in the minds of men, and, therefore, to be rejected with the utmost scorn and indignation. When we think of God, we must consider him as the first and the last, the Eternal. Here all notion of time utterly evanishes. We cannot measure the duration of God as we do that of creatures, by the gradual succession of thoughts, works, or facts; which way of measuring is our only notion of time. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.* But when we think of the manifestation of God to his creatures, his acting toward them, dealing or corresponding with them in any respect, (which is the only way we can either think distinctly, or talk intelligibly about him,) we must attend to the gradual, successive progress of his working, and, accordingly, rank his works in their proper order of time; as it is thus only that we can see the works of God illustrating each other, and all conspiring to enlarge our knowledge and happiness; yea, it is thus only that the knowledge and happiness of angels are enlarged. By not attending to this, some have imagined an express contradiction to Scripture, that the new covenant was made before the old, or even before the world; that men are justified, not only before they are sinners, but before they have being; and, by misconstruing John's words, that the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. And with equal propriety they might say, that the hills were united to the valleys before the earth was created; that the eclipses of the sun and moon, calculated in our almanacs for the present year, happened



before either sun or moon was framed: in a word, that the world ended before it began; and all for the same reason, because all these were fixed points with the Deity before the world was, or time began. The Hutchinsonian reasoning about nature serves likewise to unhinge and confound the order of the Divine works.

“Let us now attend a little to the clear and plain simplicity of the Scripture way of speaking about God’s works. Paul, speaking of the present and future constitution of those who are redeemed from among men, says, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body; there is a natural body and a spiritual body.” Then, after pointing out the difference between the first and second Adam, he adds, “Howbeit that was not the first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual.” Hence, we see, that the spiritual or supernatural state of things is all along posterior to the natural in the order of the Divine working.

“The Jewish kingdom (in a good measure similar to the excellency of Adam’s state in Paradise) was an improved state of nature, by a Providence, extraordinary indeed, but not in the highest sense supernatural; yet giving peculiar evidence, that the God of Israel was the author of nature, and at the same time affording a shadow of the truly supernatural and spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, which did not properly take place till the latter period of the former, or till the former waxed old, and was ready to vanish away. God is unchangeably all, that at any time in the progress of his working he appears to be; yet God did not clearly appear by his works to be *just in justifying the ungodly*, till the reign of Tiberius, when Christ died and rose again, nor, then, to any but such as were enabled by Divine teaching to understand the meaning of what was then transacted. And to such as are enabled to understand it only to-day, it is in effect much the same as if the great event had been accomplished only yesterday; since the great benefit of God’s saving work is conveyed to men only by the Divine revelation concerning it, and in proportion to the clearness of that revelation.

“The benefit of Christ’s sacrifice extended backward through the ages preceding his appearance, but still in a manner suitable to the clearness of the promise and its attendant illustrations. Though the Lamb of God did not take away the sin of the world till the reign of Tiberius, yet the faithful of old were comforted believing this, “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.” They longed thus, “O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!”

And they said, "As for our iniquities, thou wilt purge them away." I shall here give a short paraphrase on a few of Paul's words, Rom. iii, 24. Having declared, that all who found favour with God are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, he adds, "Whom God formerly exhibited (in the promises and types) a propitiation through faith in his blood, for the manifestation of his righteousness, in regard to his *passing over* the sins that happened before in the (time of the) forbearance of God, unto (until, toward, or in reference to the farther expected) manifestation of his righteousness which has now taken place in the present time, that he might be just, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus."

"The ancient sacrifices had, in the minds of the faithful, an aspect toward the accomplishment of the promise; and though they could not show God just in justifying sinners, their repetition ever proclaiming aloud their insufficiency, yet they showed God just in passing over, or delaying the punishment of sin, till the appearance of the true sacrifice, by which alone it was to be expiated, and in respect to which God said, he would *remember iniquity no more*, as he had still continued to do in the case of all the foregoing sacrifices. The sufficiency of the future atonement revealed to God's chosen of old, was the ground of their comfort and hope; that sufficiency which they believed, thus becoming their faith, was accordingly imputed to them for righteousness; yet their comfort lay under great disadvantages from the manner in which that sufficiency was revealed to them. You will find this topic handled at length in a treatise you have seen, called, *The Testimony of the King of Martyrs*.

"Since it is evident from the New Testament, that sinners are justified by faith without works, nothing can be plainer, than that the precise time of any man's justification before God, is when the sufficiency of the atonement first appears to his hearty conviction, so becomes his faith. In Paul's time many of the heathen were thus justified. This event was ordained of God before the world was, and many ages before it happened was notified to Abraham. Paul taking notice of the ancient Scripture testimony of this, expresses himself in this manner, "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith," &c.

"When Christ became exceeding sorrowful unto death, he bare the punishment of all his people's sins; and when he rose, he rose in the name of his people, or as their head and representative. As their head he was justified, sanctified,

blessed, glorified, and admitted into fulness of joy in a heavenly eternal life on the other side of death; so that his being thus made happy, effectually secured the like happiness to all his people: "For as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." Christ's people, then, who are raised at his coming, are not delivered from death till many ages after his resurrection, though, when he rose, their resurrection was ascertained and secured.

"In like manner must we speak of Christ's sanctification and justification. Paul declares, that Christ's people "are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once;" and, "By one offering he hath forever perfected them that are sanctified." Yet none of them experience *perfection as pertaining to the conscience*, till taught to know the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice; they all continue to come into the world according to the course of nature, defiled with Adam's transgression, and liable to death; under the dominion of sin, and the power of Satan, and exposed to the curse, till God sends his word, and heals them. Christ says, concerning his apostles, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth:" and he immediately adds, with an eye to all his people, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one," &c. Thus Christ intercedes agreeably to the Divine constitution by which he was glorified. He was glorified, receiving power over all flesh, that he might bestow *eternal life* on as many as the Father had given him; and this life eternal he distributes in his proper times, when he prevents the dead in trespasses and sins by the word of his grace. Paul, speaking of Christ as a ransom for all, immediately adds, *a testimony in his own times*.

"At whatever time Christ sends his gospel to any nation, and opens the hearts of men to admit it, then he raises them from their death in trespasses and sins; then, and not till then, they are "raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," and all this only by faith. For while, being at home in the body, they are absent from the Lord, they can have fellowship with him in his joy, only in being persuaded that he is raised from the dead, and that having finished his work, he doth not *stand* ministering, like the priests who could not bring a perfect atonement, but hath forever *sat down* on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Accordingly, Paul describes the believing Ephesians in his time as thus raised and sitting with Christ, while he declares, that in time past they *were by nature children of wrath even as others*. When Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles, he said, "Unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me."

"By faith, then, men are justified, sanctified, obtain forgiveness and freedom from the curse, &c. For though it be true that "Christ hath redeemed his people from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them;" yet it is no less true, that "as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." In like manner must we say, that men are united to Christ, as you see clearly evinced in the same chapter now referred to, Gal. iii. Yet no man can be assured that he is justified, sanctified, or united to Christ, but according to the Scripture, which states the matter thus, Rom. viii, 1, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And as to those who walk otherwise, whatever their pretensions may be, we must still apply what Paul says downward in the same chapter, "Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

"I have chosen the rather to be particular on this subject, because not a few who talk in a high strain about grace, atonement, and union with Christ, have changed the gospel into a most pernicious and ungodly scheme, blunting the conviction of sin, and the impression of the fear of God, loosing the obligation to attend to the perfect law, and serving to lead professors to consider their sins as less displeasing to God and exposing to the curse, than those of other men; encouraging them all the while in some vain confidence of their being united to Christ; whereas, God preserves his people whom he hath chosen in a very different manner, while he follows them with reproofs from his word, enforced by afflictions from his Providence, compelling them to see their iniquity in its proper hatefulnes; that their sins are no less displeasing to him, no less obnoxious to his wrath than those of others; in a word, shutting up their every source of hope, but in that sovereign mercy alone which shines in Christ's death, for the encouragement of the worst of mankind. Thus God deals with those whom he hath not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ their Lord. To



this end are all his fatherly chastisements; to the effect now mentioned he chastens them, that they may not be condemned with the world. The opposite pernicious doctrine, therefore, must be opposed with all confidence, without respect of persons."

Though the doctrine of justification by faith without works has been opposed in all ages from much the same principles, yet it is thought rude in Palæmon to compare the conduct of the Christian with that of the Jewish doctors, in their opposition to that doctrine, and methods of undermining it. However, as a little of the history of that opposition may be both useful and entertaining to my readers, I shall here give it them in the words of a Christian doctor of no small repute for piety. See Dr. Heylyn's Theological Lectures, part 1, p. 138, &c.

"*Abraham believed,\* i. e. had faith in the Lord, and he counted it to him for justice.* From this passage the name *faith*, as a term of theology, bears date: it was delivered down from the Jewish church to the Christian; and Christ, with his apostles, used it in the same sense they found it.

"How the word was then understood, appears very clearly from the Jewish writers themselves, as you will find by the following quotation from a temporary author, I mean Philo, the Jew, who, speaking of Abraham, says, that being born of a father who was an idolater he forsook his family, kindred, and native country; lest, by the superstitions there practiced,

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\* "Gen. xv, 6. The full explanation of this text must be reserved for its proper place: yet, besides what you find in the following quotation from Philo, I would briefly show here, that faith is therefore *counted for justice*, because by faith man does his part towards acquiring it. It has been often said, already, that all duty is comprehended under the name of justice; and very lately I observed, that this justice is rightly distinguished into three principal parts, as it relates to ourselves, our neighbours, and our Creator. The last of these, *viz.* the duty we owe to God immediately, and as distinguished from the other two, is called *faith*. Now, it is universally agreed, that men in their natural state are greatly defective in all these three branches of justice, and the Scriptures declare, that faith is the only means by which we can acquire it: the reason is, because by faith we have access to God, we come under his powerful influence, and receive his gracious communications. Our devout attention to him obtains his favourable regard to us, which operates powerfully upon the soul, to excite its latent abilities, and to infuse new ones, which will gradually dispose it for the performance of all justice. As there are different degrees of faith, so there are different kinds of justice; but they lie beyond our present design, which is only to treat of faith in general, and give so radical a notion of it, as may hereafter be branched out to its various effects and operations."

he should be diverted from his studious search after the only God, Creator of all things; that he was greatly encouraged in this search by Divine inspirations; and that he incessantly persevered in it till he had attained a satisfactory notion, not of the essence of God, for that cannot be known, but of his existence and overruling providence; for which reason he is first recorded for having *faith* in God, because he *first* [of those who had not been taught it by tradition] held a firm and unshaken persuasion, that there was one Supreme author of all things, by whose providence the world, and all things continued in it, are disposed and governed. Abraham having attained this *knowledge*, the most fundamental of the virtues, he at the same time acquired all the rest." And again,\*

"It is said, to the praise of Abraham, that *he believed God*, [or *had faith in God*, both are expressed by the same word in the original.] Some one perhaps may say, do you judge this worthy of praise? What man is there so bad who would not give attention to God when he speaks or promises anything? To such an one we answer, Beware, O sir, beware, that you do not rashly refuse this wise man the praise due to him, nor ascribe to unworthy persons *faith*, which is the most perfect of the virtues, nor censure our doctrine upon this subject; for if you consider this matter, not superficially, but search it to the bottom, you shall plainly see, that it is no easy thing to have faith in God only, without any other pledge: this, I say is no easy thing, by reason of the close relation we bear to what is *mortal*, with which we are yoked, and which forcibly persuades us to have faith in riches, glory, power, friends, health, and strength of body, with many other things. Now, to efface each of these, and put no faith in the creature, which is never to be trusted in, and to have faith in God alone, who alone can be securely relied on; to do this, I say, is the act of a great and heavenly mind, a mind that can no more be ensnared by the things of this world. And it is well added, that *his faith was counted to him for justice*; for nothing is so *just* as to carry ourselves toward God with a sincere and perfect faith in him alone: but this, which is so *just* and agreeable to the nature of things, is accounted a paradox; because of the want of faith in the most of us, to whom, by way of reproof, the sacred text says, that firmly and incessantly to rely upon HIM WHO ONLY IS, seems a wonderful thing to men, who

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\*Vol. 1, p. 485. A large collection of quotations to the same purpose from other Jewish writers may be found in *Christiani Schoettgenii Hora Hebraica et Talmudica*, tom. 2, edit. Drisdæ, 1742, p. 682—687.

possess no *real* good ; but is not wonderful to a true discernment, for it is the proper work of JUSTICE."

"So this Jew explains how the *faith of Abraham was counted to him for justice* ; and if faith had been considered in this light, when the question of justification by faith only was so warmly agitated, the controversy might soon have been composed, and great scandals prevented. But I return to our author, who, in all his writings, speaks of faith in the sense here represented ; and several times finding occasion to quote this 6th verse of Gen. xv, upon which the doctrine of justification is founded, explains it in such a manner, as shows, that it was then an established doctrine in the Jewish schools of divinity ; and yet St. Paul's insisting on it, as he does so copiously to the Jewish converts, was a seasonable and judicious application of a doctrine then commonly understood and admitted.

"But as nothing is more changeable than the meaning of words, and that especially when they come into vulgar use, this word *faith* got a new sense in the first age of the Christian church, and was transferred to signify a belief of the gospel history. Many of the converts took faith in this cheap sense. And whereas St. Paul had in his writings retained the original signification which he had been accustomed to in *the school of Gamaliel*, some mistook his expressions so far, as to assign those high advantages to a notional belief of Christianity, which he had ascribed only to a confirmed habit of piety, even such as Abraham had attained to, and whereby he had merited the title of the *father of the faithful*. When this error spread in the church, St. James zealously confuted it ; and, not standing to dispute about words, which is needless, when we clearly see in what sense the opponents mean them, he used the term as *they* understood it, and severely censured the *nominal faith* with which they deceived themselves ; yet, at the same time, by calling it a *dead faith*, he sufficiently intimated, that the name of *faith* was as improperly applied by them, as when the name *man* is given to a dead carcass, or when a dry stick, resting in the earth, is called a tree.

In the succeeding ages of the church, the signification of the word *faith* degenerated still more and more, and was adulterated to such a degree, that every sect had its own *faith*, as they called it ; so that instead of *an habit of piety*, which is its genuine signification, men came to understand by it some transient acts of credulity to nonsense."

The reader may observe, that this Christian doctor, who



accords so well with Philo and the rest of the Jewish teachers, at the same time falls in pretty well with the sentiments of most Christian teachers. 'Tis true, he inclines to call faith a habit of piety; whereas, those of best repute for orthodoxy incline rather, along with Dr. Watts, to consider it as a little green bud containing the quintessence of piety, in due time to be unfolded and displayed to view. But this difference is not material. Again, as it is likewise thought rude in Palæmon to compare Christian teachers to the ancient philosophers, and the gracious assistance they would have unbelievers hope for to enable them to exert a right act of faith, to the Divine aid spoke of by philosophers, the reader may take another quotation from one of Dr. Heylyn's *select discourses*, called, *The Connection of Religion with Morality*.

"In Plato's first dialogue concerning human nature, Socrates is introduced treating of that necessary fundamental of all morality, *Know thyself*; and he says, "That we can know ourselves only by contemplating the Divine nature, of which our soul is an image:"—and he makes the knowledge of God as necessary to the knowledge of ourselves as that is to morality. He says farther, "But if you act unjustly, and instead of regarding God and the true light, you regard that which is without God, and full of darkness, you cannot but do the works of darkness, *i. e.* works full of iniquity, because you do not know yourself." This is a literal translation of his words, though they sound so like phrases of Scripture.

"Again, Socrates not only teaches the duty of prayer, but shows the necessity of *Divine assistance*, for the right performance of it, the same which, in Christian style, we call *the Spirit's helping our infirmities, because we know not what to pray for as we ought*; and he shows convincingly, that God only can prepare our hearts to pray worthily, by dispelling the darkness of the soul, and purifying it, so that it may distinguish rightly between good and evil."

"From these, and many other passages, it appears, that this pious philosopher, was fully apprised of the connection there is between religion and morality; that they are one and the same in their origin, and will ever thrive or decay together. The same principle, doubtless a Divine one, which so eminently reformed the morals of this egregious man, did as remarkably reform his notions of religion, and inspired him with the sentiments of Christianity near 400 years before the birth of Christ, and that too in a place and age infamous for the grossest superstitions and idolatries."

Here this pious doctor fondly claims kindred in the faith



with Socrates, even as he did before with Gamaliel. It concerns the rest of our Christian teachers, who would seem to decline this alliance, to give some substantial reason. Till then, Palæmon may be allowed at least to compare them all together, and to take it for granted, that there is no fundamental difference betwixt them. For whether we maintain a little green bud, an act, or a habit of piety necessary to acceptance, our doctrine must be equally discouraging to those who can produce neither, and we must be equally disaffected to the doctrine of justification by faith without works, or to that doctrine which exhibits God as considering those whom he justifies as no way differing from, or excelling others.

To conclude, Palæmon ventures to turn the chace upon his adversaries, and to claim the precedence even in point of orthodoxy. It is affirmed in the subscribed standards of orthodoxy, that *justification is an act of God's free grace*. This affirmation is well supported by the New Testament, which likewise affirms, that God justifies the heathen through, or by faith, even as one illuminates a dark room by introducing a candle. If the reader doubts the propriety of this similitude, he may take a grander one from Paul, who says, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge," &c. To the same purpose that Apostle also says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." And James says, "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," &c. — "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth." These, with many like passages clearly solve all questions about the instrumentality of faith in justification, or by whose agency men attain to that justification which is by faith.

Now, readers, after you have heard the orthodox so plainly affirming, that justification is an act of God's free grace, and the Scripture so clearly supporting that affirmation, suffer them not to put the change upon you. Beware of their circumlocutions. Whenever they begin to talk to you of any act you are to exert in order to acceptance, and to call it a justifying act, which you are to exert by the help of God's grace, be you ready to reply, avaunt; none of your tricks. You have already asserted, and we hold you fast by this assertion, that justification is an act of God's free grace.

Remember also, that the teachers of orthodoxy call themselves preachers of the gospel, and that the word *gospel* is allowed to signify good news, or glad tidings; which you know, in every other case, gladden the heart so soon as they are understood and known to be true. Whenever, then, they begin to tell you of any pious act necessary in order to acceptance, you can immediately reply, this is no news, for Moses long ago told us our duty, assuring us of happiness in our compliance; neither is it glad tidings to us in our present circumstances. If, then, you would preach gospel to us, you must tell us something fit to give us joy, as we presently stand unconscious of any distinguishing qualification.

JULY, 1762.









