

Jarah. G. Van Cleve
my Mother -
ESSAYS Clara A
D. T. Baker

ON THE

TRUTH

OF THE

Christian Religion:

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BEAUCHAMP.

Come and see.

PHILIP.

MARIETTA:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

BY JOSEPH ISRAEL.

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Above is the handwriting of
five generations of
the family.

B. Van Cleve's

Clara Day

Wella Van-Cleve Baker.

DISTRICT OF OHIO TO WIT :

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the twenty-sixth day of September, in the thirty-sixth year of the Independence of the United States of America James Quinn of the said district, hath deposited in this office, the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit :

“ Essays on the Truth of the Christian Religion.

“ By the Rev. William Beauchamp.

“ Come and see.

PHILIP.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors, and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned.” And also, to an act entitled “ An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned. And extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical, and other prints.

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Clerk of the district of Ohio.

*Presented to Laura Baker
by her Sister Clara A*

March 11 1898

*Presented to L. Baker by her
Sister, Clara Baker, Jan 10. 1916*
PREFACE.

THE Truth of the Christian Religion, from its infinite importance, demands the serious & candid attention of every man. For the happiness of this life, and the interests of the life to come, of an inconceivable extent and boundless duration, are intimately connected with this Truth, and depend on our receiving it, so as to love and practise righteousness.

At a time like this, when the principles of depravity operate with so much violence, as to throw the world into a state of high fermentation; when the scum of human society, and the dregs of corruption, are thrown up to public view; when the sense of moral rectitude is so lost, that even this scum and these dregs, instead of being seen with abhorrence, have become objects of public admiration; when so many false doctrines are advanced, and infidelity, libertinism, vice and impiety make such a bold stand against truth and righteousness; when the judgments of God are collecting from almost every quarter, and bursting on the earth in almost every direction; when the last plagues designed to exterminate the mystery of iniquity are

poured out ; when revolutions, greater than have ever taken place in the world, are apparently at hand ; at a time like this, how necessary the study of the Christian Religion ! Danger seems increasing every moment : caution should keep pace with it. But whence, in this eventful day, can we draw the principles of caution, of prudence and wisdom, if not from the Gospel of Jesus Christ ? And can we with diligence seek these principles, and with confidence exercise them, unless we have firm faith in the Truth of our Holy Religion ?

The author of these Essays, impressed with these ideas, has employed some of his spare hours, in committing a few thoughts to paper on this subject. He has attempted to show—that objections against Revelation in general, are groundless—that Christianity contains nothing contrary to the nature of God—that it is impressed with the Divine character—That external evidences of an incontrovertible nature demonstrate its truth—and that these evidences are so handed down to us, as to exclude the possibility of deception.

In the execution of this work he has endeavored to be brief and perspicuous ; being fully persuaded that a few good arguments, placed in proper light, are sufficient to produce conviction, and generally with more facility and certainty, than a multitude of arguments, among which, if free from confusion, there will necessarily be some of incon-

considerable weight. Whether these Essays are calculated to meet the approbation of the public, and please and profit the reader, is a question which does not fall within his province to decide. He is far from thinking that they are free from imperfections. However, he is persuaded that their imperfections are not so great and numerous, as to render them useless. He humbly hopes that they will advance the glory of God, in promoting the salvation of some of his fellow beings. This is his great desire; and if this should be effected, in some good degree by these Essays, the purpose of giving them publicity will be accomplished.

He would avail himself of this opportunity of acknowledging his obligations to those of his friends, who have given him assistance in this work. They are requested to receive them through this channel, as though they had been made in person.

ESSAY I.

The Importance of understanding the Evidences of Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY is of the highest moment to man, with respect to his present and future state. By the truth and moral excellence of its doctrines, it is adapted to enlighten the understanding, and purify the heart. The intellectual powers of man, illuminated by its radiance, are enlarged, and enabled to form just and grand ideas of God and his works. Error and ignorance are dispersed before it ; truth appears in a pleasing light ; and knowledge and wisdom flourish under its happy influence. The awful sanctions with which it is armed, put a powerful check on the violence of passion, and raise a strong barrier against vice. Softening the rugged and savage nature of man, it polishes not only his exterior, but his very heart, and gives him the best qualifications for intercourse with human society. By considerations of everlasting weight, it inclines his soul to faithfulness in discharge of duty. It powerfully inspires sentiments of dignity, firmness, justice, moderation, benevolence, and generosity ; and through supernatural aid it enables him to resist, in full confidence of success, every temptation to evil, and to

form dispositions of virtue and piety—habits of mind worthy of his high destination.

The Christian Religion, which has such a powerful and happy influence on the minds and passions of mankind, must be properly calculated to meliorate the circumstances of human society, to establish order and harmony, and to promote both private and public happiness. Therefore our Holy Religion, when considered in relation to this life only, is incalculably valuable.

But if it is valuable on account of its influence on this life, it is infinitely more so, as it influences our destiny in the life to come. By breathing its pure and generous spirit into our hearts, it not only qualifies us for our present mode of existence, but it prepares us for the happy and glorious society of saints and angels.

It is therefore indisputable, that a knowledge of the Truth of Christianity, is an acquisition of infinite value; and that an impression of this Truth made on the mind in early life; must be attended with the best of consequences.

Such an impression would hardly fail to produce the happiest effects. Its direct tendency would be to give the passions of the heart a sacred bias, a divine inclination to virtue; to give in the days of prosperity, a joyful sobriety, and in the years of adversity, fortitude and dignity; to season the whole life with a divine savour, by putting the

soul into possession of a heavenly nature, and by giving it resignation to providence in all things ; and to afford peace and consolation in the hour of death enabling the soul to enter eternity with a confidence unshaken, and a hope full of glory. A knowledge of the evidences of the Christian Religion, qualifies us to be useful to society, to be useful to the Church, to defend the Religion of the Holy Jesus, against the attacks of infidelity and libertinism, not with the weapons of error, but with the invincible arms of truth.

The importance of understanding these evidences, is no less obvious from the evils arising from ignorance, with respect to the Truth of the Christian Religion. How often has Christianity a friend—without an advocate able to defend her ! How many real Christians are not able to give the grounds of the Truth—the reasons of the Faith—the evidences of the authenticity of the Gospel !

But let us consider this ignorance, as it affects the Christian world in general. The natural tendency of this ignorance, is to disregard a future state. No doubt a variety of causes combine to produce such a disregard ; but the want of a lively and rational faith in the Truth of the Christian Religion, is first among those causes. Can it be expected, that men will concern themselves about another life, when they have not faith in the doctrines which relate to it ? Not a great many, it is true, profess infidelity.

But can we believe that all who give their assent to christianity, have faith in its truth? They are evidently ignorant of its doctrines, and the arguments which establish its divinity: and faith is not the offspring of ignorance, but a rational and lively conviction arising from evidence impartially applied to the mind.

Hence it is, that we are generally so much more affected with the gross objects of sense, than with the pure and spiritual doctrines of the Gospel.—Neither the acquisition of christian knowledge, nor the practice of christian virtues, is our favourite and fashionable pursuit. Worldly pleasures, riches, and honors make deep and lasting impressions on our hearts; and, yielding reason to the blind impulse of passion inflamed with these objects, we engage in worldly pursuits with an ardor worthy of better things. Thus we labor for the trifles of a day—and neglect the concerns of eternity! If we do not pass the Gospel by with open contempt, we seem to compliment it only as a system of great excellence, without troubling ourselves further about it.

Were an inhabitant of some celestial region, who is unacquainted with the history of mankind, introduced into human society, and informed, that they had received a Religion from heaven so highly interesting, that their eternal destiny is to turn on their understanding its doctrines, and obeying

its precepts ; he would undoubtedly expect to find every one of them engaged, with all possible attention and assiduity, in the study and practice of this Religion. But with what astonishment would he be filled, when on examination he should discover, that such study and practice make no part of the plans of life adopted by the majority of mankind ! What horror, mingled with indignation and pity, would he feel on beholding reasonable beings, destined to everlasting existence, entirely devoted to the little concerns of a momentary life—at the expense of eternal interests ! And how would his astonishment and horror increase from perceiving, that these heirs of immortality, by neglecting Religion, risk not only life everlasting, but also the reasonable happiness of their present existence, since the enjoyment of this life is best secured by a proper regard to a future state !.

He would readily perceive, that though powerfully pressed to look forward to a better world, by the force of innumerable evils, and an inherent love of existence, we apparently confine our wishes and hopes within the narrow compass of a life of three score and ten years ; that we thirst after happiness with an intense desire, and yet manifest, by our opposition to the Gospel, that we are greedy of misery and destruction ; and that we madly presume, that we may with impunity transgress the laws of our Maker, despise the mercy of our Re-

deemer, and with an arm of flesh successfully oppose Almighty God!

He would, indeed, find something to mitigate his indignation and horror, in contemplating those noble few who dare to be good—who through firm faith in the doctrines of Revelation, stem the torrent of corruption, and take the kingdom of heaven by force. For although inattention to Religion is very general, yet it is not universal. There is, it is hoped, especially in the United States of America, a goodly number, who deliberately choose to be genuine Christians in faith and practice.

From these considerations it seems necessary, that the friends of Christianity should manifest themselves friends of mankind, by zealously disseminating the truths of our Holy Religion, and especially the evidences of its Divine origin.

ESSAY II.

The Possibility of Revelation.

BEFORE we particularly enter on the consideration of the Christian Religion, it will be necessary to offer some observations, calculated to obviate objections against Revelation in general—to excite a spirit of enquiry, by discovering the ne-

ecessity of caution in the examination of Religion claiming Divine authority—to place the subject on proper ground, and to state a few Rules by which we may judge of the Truth of revealed Religion.

To obviate objections against Revelation in general, we shall endeavor to show—that the Revelation of the will of God to man is possible—that it is necessary—that it is not derogatory to the glory of God—and that it is highly probable that God would give such a blessing to mankind.

We come then immediately to consider the possibility of Revelation. The Revelation of the will of God to man, must have for its end, the glory of God in the salvation of mankind.

The possibility of such a Revelation admits of the most positive proof. Man has capacity to receive it. God has power to give it. To deny the first of these positions would be absurd; and to deny the second would be blasphemous. Yet it is plain, that every objection against the possibility of Revelation, must be grounded on the denial of one of them.

It is evident that man, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, without suffering any violence in the physical constitution of his nature, can receive a Revelation from God. For such a Revelation coming from a being of infinite goodness and wisdom, must contain truths and obligations adapted to the powers of human nature. Being the will

of God concerning man, it must be obligtory on him; and therefore possible to him. For nothing impossible to man, can be obligatory on him, either as a principle of faith, or a rule of practice.

By all those who acknowledge the existence and attributes of Deity, the possibility of Revelation, as it respects the power of God, will not be denied. Men, who are absolutely dependent and very imperfect beings, can communicate their sentiments to each other. The supposition that God, who has an immediate access to all spiritual beings, or more properly, who is essentially present with them through every moment of their existence, cannot give a Revelation of his will to man, is so absurd and blasphemous, as hardly to enter the wildest imagination. For it would follow, that the God of infinite power and wisdom, who gave being to the beautiful and stupendous system of nature, is circumscribed by bounds extremely narrow; and that man, an effect of Divine power, is greater than the cause which gave him existence! Dreadful blasphemy! we turn from it with abhorrence. Atheists who have renounced their reason to deny the existence of their Maker, may also deny the possibility of Revelation.

But thanks be unto God, we have not to deal with many men of such character. Atheism is too absurd to show its head in our day; and all, it is,

apprehended, will acknowledge the possibility of Revelation.

ESSAY III.

The Necessity of Revelation.

THE inability of human reason to form a perfect system of Religion, and to enforce known obligation by proper sanctions; and the condition of man as a sinner, which renders the knowledge of natural law insufficient for him, strongly argue the necessity of Revelation.

But lest any should mistake our meaning, it may be proper to remark, that we do not mean by the necessity of Revelation, that salvation without it is utterly impossible. Nor do we mean, that God is under necessity of revealing his will to mankind. Necessity has nothing to do with the actions of the Divine Being. But we mean, that the condition of human nature since the fall, requires Revelation—that it must be highly useful to mankind, so much so, that salvation without it, though possible, must be very difficult.

Revelation is necessary with respect both to the principles of faith, and the rules of morality.—
This is evident from a number of arguments.

Unprejudiced reason will at once discern, in its own inability to form a perfect system of Religion, the necessity of a Revelation from heaven. The imbecility of human reason, when applied to the discovery of religious truth and moral obligation, has been acknowledged in all ages of the world, even by those who possessed the strongest powers of mind.

Indeed, we do not doubt, that on all the works of creation remaining in their original state, the Divine character is gloriously impressed. Even in this world, where the disorder arising from the fall of man greatly defaces this impression, there still remain many traits of the glory of God. Were this disorder removed, and the world restored to that state of perfection, in which it came from the hand of the Creator; were the intellectual and moral powers of human nature elevated from the depravity and degradation, which they have suffered by the influence of moral and physical evil, to primeval purity and strength; then, it is highly probable, man might ascertain, with great precision, the obligations of natural law. In such circumstances he would not need supernatural assistance. But in existing circumstances, where man, weakened in his intellectual constitution, biassed by the misrule of passion, and perplexed with the mixed state of good and evil, meets with a thousand impediments in searching after truth, it is not to be

supposed, that from the mere dictates of reason, the obligations of natural law can be universally and certainly known.

This is not mere speculation ; it is a matter of fact. It is capable of direct proof from the history of mankind, in all ages of the world. In the portraits of ancient and modern heathens, which are faithfully drawn by history, reason is exhibited in a state of deplorable weakness, with respect to the discovery of religious and moral truth. In the religious systems of the pagans, there are, indeed, many glorious and important truths. But they are so distorted by error and superstition, that instead of appearing in the lovely form of intellectual and moral beauty, they seem more like hydras, monsters with many heads, disproportionate and terrible ! What confusion, absurdity, and contradiction, do we find in their ideas of God ; of creation and Providence ; of man and his duties ; of his designation, and the duration of his existence ; of human happiness, and the means of obtaining and securing it ! The general traits of their character were strongly marked, with gross ignorance, and barbarous and shocking superstition. In the heathen words none could boast of genius, and the cultivation of reason with more propriety, than ancient Greece and Rome ; and yet the greatest of their philosophers were not able to form a consistent system of morality and Religion.

The truth is, the bulk of mankind unilluminated with the beams of the Gospel, have been involved in great darkness; and even those who by their uncommon genius, and their close application to the study of nature, have elevated themselves to eminence as philosophers, have never been able to rise entirely above the shades of ignorance: they have still been surrounded by the mists of error, which nothing but Revelation can dissipate.

Here it is proper to remark, that the heathen philosophers, whose moral and religious institutions were freest from error, received, it is highly probable, the best of their doctrines from Revelation itself.

The great principles of Religion revealed to the Patriarchs, must have been communicated, in some degree, to all the ancient nations of the earth. This is so natural, that the charge of fallacy can hardly lie against it. The ideas of men on subjects of far less importance than that of Religion, bear a very great resemblance to those of their ancestors. It would be preposterous indeed, to suppose that the ancient nations of the earth, originating from the family of Noah, would not retain, for several ages succeeding the flood, some of the principal doctrines of that great Patriarch. It may therefore be expected, that the further we follow history back into antiquity, and the nearer we approach to the Noevian age, the clearer will the traces of these

doctrines appear. Should we not be disappointed in this expectation, it will afford considerable probability, that many of the best religious ideas of the heathens were derived from the Patriarchs. Many of the learned assure us that this is a fact.

Confucius the famous Chinese philosopher, drew his lessons of moral philosophy from ancient maxims. He seemed to think, that a better system of morality and Religion existed in the west, whence he probably thought his maxims of wisdom originated; or that a source of religious information would be opened there. For he frequently said, "It is in the west where the true saints is found."*

† Zoroaster his cotemporary, the Persian philosopher, who taught, it seems, the best theology ever known among the heathens, derived a great part of his doctrines, according to respectable authority, from the Law of Moses. With this he became acquainted among the captive Jews in Babylon.†

The imbecility of human reason is no less conspicuous, when we consider it as enforcing obedience to known obligations of natural law. For that uncertainty respecting many important religious truths, in which reason left the heathens, must necessarily have precluded the possibility of proper sanctions to enforce those obligations, which were in some degree known by them. The sanc-

* *Paine's Geography.*

† *Prideaux.*

tions of Religion proper to enforce obedience to its precepts, are predicated on a future state. But to the heathens a future state was very uncertain ; therefore the sanctions of Religion to them must have been proportionably uncertain and weak.

Accordingly we find, the most shocking picture of human depravity, in the history of the heathen world. Both sacred and profane writers bear testimony to this depravity. In consulting them, we behold the heathen nations, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized, borne away by an inundation of corruption ; by impiety of an infernal nature, and by vices too atrocious and dreadful to be named. Astonishment seizes us ; our blood chills in our veins ; and from the view we turn away with the utmost abhorrence !

With regard to Religion, where is the boasted power of reason ? How unable to form a perfect system of Religion ! how unable to enforce her own precepts ! She falls before the violence of passion ; and her idolizers, covered with shame, are precipitated into the whirlpool of corruption and misery !

However, let us not carry the weakness of human reason, beyond the bounds of propriety and truth. Reason is a noble faculty ; and though incapable, in any combination of religious and moral principles possible to it, of forming a body of divinity full, consistent, and free from error, or of

enforcing obedience by arming moral obligation with proper sanctions ; yet it certainly can ascertain some important truths respecting God and his works, and can offer some motives to induce man to discharge the duties known to be obligatory on him. And here, without entering into detail on this subject, let it suffice to state, that although the necessity of Revelation is evident from the weakness of reason ; yet this weakness, how great soever, cannot exclude the heathens from the possibility of salvation. For such an exclusion is derogatory to the glory of the Divine character, and contrary to what we esteem Revelation itself, which declares, that “the grace of God hath appeared unto all men.” Such among them as submit to the moral influence of this grace, apply themselves to the study of nature, and walk according to the light which reason receives from it, will, no doubt, meet the approbation of their Maker, and through the richness of free grace, enjoy eternal life. “They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.”

But we return to our subject, the necessity of Revelation. If a perfect knowledge of natural law were attainable by all men ; would Revelation then be unnecessary ? Natural law, it is reasonable to believe, must be suited to the condition of

Innocent and happy beings. Can it then be suited to the condition of fallen man, guilty and condemned? It may be questioned with much apparent reason, whether natural law could give positive decisions on several subjects, which are *now* of the highest consideration to man. For instance: what positive decisions could it give on the subject of the immortality of the soul, or that of pardon of sins? That it gave man in a state of innocence, an undoubted assurance of immortality, is reasonable to believe. But what positive assurance of immortality can he have from a law, which he has violated, and under the curse of which he is to suffer death? Or from such a law, in such circumstances, what certain information respecting pardon of sin?

From the whole it appears evident, that human reason is weak, and unable to frame a perfect system of Religion; that natural law if perfectly known, would not be adapted to the condition of mankind; and that therefore a Revelation from Heaven is necessary.

ESSAY IV.

Revelation is not derogatory to the glory of God.

IT may be laid down as an incontestable proposition, that whatever is not contrary to the attributes

of God, is not derogatory to his glory. For the glory of God is the resplendent lustre of his perfections. It is therefore altogether inconceivable in what respect any thing, not repugnant to the attributes of Deity, can derogate from the glory of the Holy One.

If we candidly examine the subject before us, in the light of this truth, we shall clearly discover, that a Revelation of the will of God to man, cannot be derogatory to the Divine glory. For it will plainly appear, that it is impossible to produce the least degree of evidence, that such a Revelation would be contrary to any of the attributes of God.

What evidence is it possible to produce, that a Revelation of the will of God, would be contrary to the attributes of Deity?—to the holiness of God?—to the wisdom of God?—to the majesty of God?

Revelation to be contrary to the holiness of God, must have the nature of moral evil; but a Revelation from heaven, being the will of God concerning man, cannot have the nature of moral evil; therefore such a Revelation cannot be contrary to the holiness of God. Whatever would be contained in it, could not be inconsistent with the highest degree of holiness; because its source is infinitely and unchangeably holy.

But here it may be urged, “that it is not what Revelation would contain, were it given, but the act of communicating it to man, which would have the nature of moral evil.”

Is this charge of moral evil, grounded on the natural constitution of the human soul, or on guilt and depravity contracted by violations of the law of God? We presume it is not grounded on the natural constitution of the human soul; because it seems impossible to conceive, how moral evil can exist in the act of communicating the will of God to a being possessing the intellectual and moral powers which exist in man. The only ground on which it can be supposed to rest, with any degree of plausibility, is the guilt and depravity of human nature.

The nature of God is, indeed, infinitely opposed to sin. The rebellion of man is daring; his guilt enormous; and his depravity dreadful. But will it therefore follow, that a communication of the will of God to man, must have the nature of moral evil? If so, our condition is deplorable beyond all conception. For if the will of God cannot be revealed to us, because the act of revealing it would be morally evil, it is then absolutely impossible, that any communication of mercy can be made to us, for every such communication must have the nature of moral evil equally with a Revelation of the will of God:—our sins cannot be forgiven; our souls cannot be restored to moral excellence; and therefore our destruction must be inevitable! Hopeless beings! to what a dreadful point of desperation are we driven by this conclusion! No

prospect before us, but that of ruin and horror ! nothing but everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ! Mercy forbid it !

When we contemplate the Father of eternity, as we approach an object awfully glorious and infinitely mysterious, modesty and humility are highly becoming us. In the presence of such a Being, dreadfully luminous with the rays of majesty, to confess our imperfection, to acknowledge we cannot comprehend the nature of God, is both our wisdom and glory. Although it is evident from this consideration, that rash decisions respecting the perfections of Deity, are very unseemly in the mouths of mortals; yet inferences drawn with modesty from what we know of God, cannot be condemned when they are such as clearly follow from indisputable truths. Now, from the most certain ideas which we have of God, it seems necessary that infinite holiness should be equally just and merciful—that the beams of mercy should give grace to those of justice, and that the rays of justice should give majesty to those of mercy. Accordingly mercy may be exercised, within certain limits, toward erring and guilty mortals.

But besides this consideration, we have other evidence of the mercy of God. Our God is the God of mercy—Though he is gloriously holy, he can abundantly pardon. We confess, for the cer-

tainty of this truth, we are indebted to that Revelation, whose cause we have undertaken to plead. However we may gather some probability of the pardoning mercy of God from the intimations of conscience, and the dispensations of Providence. Besides the secret intimations of conscience, by which men are universally inclined to hope for mercy in the forgiveness of sin ; the forbearance to execute the sentence of the law, and the communication of ten thousand blessings to man, bear witness to the goodness of God. On the ground of this evidence, it seems proper to conclude, that as God actually bestows unnumbered blessings on man, he may reveal his will to him, without infringing on the rights of infinite holiness.

And here let it be remarked, that the tendency of Revelation, would be to stop the progress of moral evil. For containing a system of truths flowing from the eternal source of righteousness, it must be in opposition to all sin. Hence it is plain, that a Revelation from heaven cannot be contrary to the holiness of God ; because it would, in a very great degree, manifest the Divine holiness, by opposing its influence to the progress of moral evil.

We pass now to consider Revelation with respect to the wisdom of God. In what light is it possible to consider Divine wisdom, in which it will appear opposed to our receiving a Revelation.

from heaven? Is it with respect to the means necessary to be employed, and the ends which may be accomplished, in revealing the will of God to man? Are the purposes which may be accomplished so trivial and insignificant, as not to justify the use of such means, as seem necessary to communicate to man the will of the ever blessed God? We shall not attempt to oppose even the most enlarged notions, respecting the greatness of the means. For the salvation of man, his present and eternal happiness in the knowledge and enjoyment of God, connected with an everlasting display of the Divine perfections, are sufficient to justify infinite wisdom, in the use of the most expensive means possible for us to conceive.

To pour light into the understanding of man, and grace into his heart; to deliver him from sin, and the misery inseparably connected with it; to elevate him to true dignity, by putting him in possession of wisdom and virtue; to comfort and support him in all the sorrows and dangers of mortal life; to give him courage and fortitude in the hour of death; and to prepare him for the enjoyment of happiness commensurate with his desires and existence: these are purposes which may be accomplished by a Revelation from heaven, and which are worthy of the God of infinite wisdom and goodness.

If it be rational and wise to afford man, the pow-

ers of whose heart and mind indicate, that he is capable of extensive improvement in knowledge and virtue, such information as will enable him to answer the great design of his creation—to know God and enjoy him forever ; if it be wise in the Governor of the world, to adopt measures to operate against moral evil, to obstruct its progress, to diminish its unhappy influence, and eventually to restore the system of moral existence to order ; if a Revelation of the will of God would be calculated, as it most certainly would in a very great degree, to effect these purposes, by opposing truth to error, and motives of eternal weight to the impulse of passion—then a communication of the Divine will to man, beyond all doubt, must be perfectly consistent with the wisdom of God.

But it will perhaps be said, “that a Revelation from heaven, though not contrary to the wisdom and holiness of God, would be inconsistent with the majesty of his character. The God of nature, enthroned in light inaccessible, is too great and glorious to concern himself with the affairs of mortals : it would dishonor him to reveal his will to so mean and insignificant a creature as man.”

But this objection against our receiving a Revelation of the will of God, carries its own refutation with it. For it may be fairly argued, that if a Revelation of the will of God, would not be contrary to his wisdom and holiness, it cannot be inconsis-

ent with the majesty of his character. For it seems impossible to consider Revelation, as being inconsistent with the latter, and not contrary to the former, without setting the majesty of God in opposition to his wisdom and holiness. Besides, infinite wisdom, comprehending all things, must perceive, in the most perfect manner, what is, and what is not, consistent with the nature of Deity ; and must, therefore, absolutely reject whatever is not perfectly consistent with the majesty of Almighty God. Therefore it cannot be inconsistent with the majesty of God to reveal his will to man, because it is not contrary to his wisdom.

God is, indeed, the glorious author of nature, and infinitely exalted in the possession of his own unutterable perfections. But will it therefore follow, that it is beneath him to concern himself with the affairs of mortals ; or that it would dishonor him to reveal his will to them ? No : for it cannot be beneath God to regard what it was not beneath him to create : it cannot be dishonorable to reveal his will to a being, whose existence is the effect of his almighty power, when the capacity of such a being is suited to receive such revelation, and to improve it in promoting his own happiness, and the glory of his Creator.

God is, indeed, enthroned in light, holding as absolute sovereign, the government of the universe in his almighty hand.

therefore follow, that it is beneath him to regard mortals, or that it would dishonor him to reveal his will to them? No; just the reverse: for his dignity, as governor of the world, seems concerned in exercising a constant superintendence over not only man, but the least of those beings, which are under his glorious government. And therefore it appears, that it must be conducive to his honor, not dishonor, to reveal his will to man.

What kind of majesty does the objection, which we are now considering, attribute to the infinite God? Is it not the majesty of an Eastern idol, sitting in solemn and stately sloth, on an awful throne encircled with the rays of glory, but without the least interposition in behalf even of its own worshipers?

But the majesty of our God, is the majesty of an infinite Spirit, who is essentially and equally present in every place, pervading, filling, and actuating all things. The whole frame of nature is full of him. There is no being, whether material or immaterial, however distant, little or insignificant, which he does not essentially inhabit.

All finite beings are the effects of infinite power, and therefore, immediately dependent on it. Created out of nothing, and, therefore, tending in themselves to nothing again, they require an unintermitted exertion of almighty power to preserve their existence.

Therefore, God, who essentially inhabits all things, and constantly exerts his power in their preservation, can, without dishonor to his character, reveal himself to man.

ESSAY V.

The Probability of Revelation.

WE do not intend to offer arguments in this Essay to prove, that there is a probability of truth in Christianity. We are far from submitting the Gospel to such ground, when we have proof of the most positive nature, that it is from God.

But we design to consider Revelation in general, as being probable—we mean to show that it is highly probable, that God would reveal his will to man.

This probability may be argued from the foregoing Essays. For as a Revelation from heaven is not impossible, nor derogatory to the Divine perfections, and as it is strongly solicited by our necessity, it seems very likely that the goodness of God would prompt him to bestow such a gift on man.

Can there be any doubt of the goodness of God? If we open our eyes on the works of nature and

Providence, we shall see ten thousand arguments in favor of the goodness of God. The existence, arrangement, order and beauty of creation, give testimony of Divine goodness. God is infinitely and eternally happy in himself; and could therefore be moved by goodness only to create the universe, and to give being, and the means of happiness, to the innumerable orders of creatures contained in it. The vicissitudes of day and night, of winter and summer, of spring and autumn, with all that abundant production of rich and various fruits, so necessary for the support and comfort of animated existence, are so many arguments in favor of the goodness of Almighty God. The condition and circumstances of every living creature, as far as we can judge, are properly adapted to its nature; and the supply of sustenance necessary for its existence and comfort, is placed within its reach. This manifests the goodness of God. Another proof of this goodness, we may draw from the endless variety of beauty, which adorns the earth and the sky. This is an inexhaustible source of pleasure: it affords pleasure even to the most unobserving, and rapture to the contemplative mind. This doctrine may likewise be proved from the operations of Divine Providence. In them, however dark and mysterious some things may appear, there are evident marks of the goodness of God. The unremitted exertion of almighty power, by

which the existence of the universe is maintained ; the established laws of nature, so accurately suited, and so wisely applied to the beings on which they are imposed ; and the intervention of the Divine hand, which gives the operations of these laws various directions, and sometimes even suspends them, to increase the happiness of his subjects ; carry with them strong marks of the infinite care, and unbounded goodness of the Governor of the world. Therefore as the creation, with all its orderly arrangement and exquisite beauty, took its rise from this unbounded goodness ; and as the operations of Providence are all directed by it, is it not highly probable, that the same fund of goodness would afford man a Revelation of the will of God ?

Additional weight of argument, in favor of this probability, arises from a consideration of the influence of such a Revelation. Proceeding from God, it would contain a system of doctrines and obligations founded in truth, and enforced by considerations of the greatest weight. It would, therefore, operate in opposition to moral evil, which is the offspring of error. It would raise a powerful barrier against the torrents of iniquity, which threaten to inundate the world. The principles of rectitude essential to such a Revelation, could not but obstruct the progress of sin, weaken its influence, and finally exterminate it from the earth.

The consequence of this would be, that a Revelation from heaven would promote order in the moral government of God. It would be calculated, by the light of its truth, to dispel darkness and disorder from the mind of man ; and by the energy of its obligations, to arrest the passions of the human heart, and reduce them to the government of reason illuminated from above. Thus laying hold on the principles and springs of action, it would have a powerful influence on the conduct of life ; it would lead us to live soberly, righteously and godly in the world. Personal, social and religious duties would be performed, and order would be established in the earth. But to have this effect, it must be received as coming from heaven : the mind must be firmly persuaded of its truth, and the heart must be deeply interested in its importance. We therefore conclude, that a Revelation from God is probable ; since God is the God of order, and is infinitely opposed to moral evil.

But let us consider this subject in another light. The advantages, which a Revelation from heaven would produce to the subjects of the government of God, are incalculable. This position may be argued from the foregoing observations. Misery is the legitimate offspring of sin. There is nothing that strikes, with such violence and effect, at the happiness of mankind, as the transgression of the law of God. While on the other hand, order,

that order which establishes Religion in the heart is the true parent of happiness substantial, and without end. Life, without Religion, is only a scene of vanity and vexation of spirit. The riches, the honors, and the pleasures of the world, are at best extremely vain. Without goodness, the most elevated situation can afford no real satisfaction. Our hearts, unseasoned with virtue, contain within them a thousand sources of grief, and open ten thousand avenues to misery from without. Our passions, ungoverned by piety, push us into extravagance, and plunge us into floods of sorrow. When fortune favors us, in such circumstances, it is often only to increase our disappointment: we are elevated to make our fall the greater. When unfortunate, and without the safeguard of virtue, we do not feel the shafts of adversity alone: those of guilt pierce us through. And the anguish of guilty conscience, is infinitely more to be dreaded, than all the evils of adversity, collected and discharged at once upon our heads. If ~~under~~ the influence of moral corruption, life is so miserable, what will death be! O death! how dreadful art thou unto the sinner loaded with transgression! for thy sting is sin. O eternity! how art thou covered with horrors to the mind, darkened and corrupted by moral evil!

But virtue, piety, order, knowledge and wisdom enriching the mind, moral excellence reigning in

all the passions of the heart, and purity in the manners of life, are never failing sources of pleasure. An attempt to rob their possessors of happiness is vain. They defy all the united powers of earth and hell. Under their benign influence, the soul acquires self possession and dignity. In the day of prosperity, it can therefore rejoice without vain glory ; and in the day of adversity, it can consider without distraction and remorse. Before them death drops his dreadful aspect, and puts on the form of a angel. Eternity presents the most pleasing prospect ; it is, to the man possessed of these graces, an object of desire and hope. The soul purified and ennobled by them in this world of probation, is, after death, translated to a world of everlasting happiness and glory.

Since moral evil is productive of so much misery, and order, the right government of our minds and hearts in the exercise of virtue and piety, affords so much happiness to mankind ; and since a Revelation from God would diminish the first, and increase and establish the last ; we conclude that such a Revelation would be of infinite advantage to mankind. And as God, from the goodness of his nature, must ever desire the happiness of the subjects of his government, we infer that a Revelation of his will concerning us, is highly probable.

Mankind stand in need of a Revelation of the will of God ; God is infinitely good, and disposed

to grant such a favor unto them ; a Revelation would have a happy influence in diminishing moral evil, and in promoting and establishing order in the moral government of God ; and for this reason, it would produce infinite advantage to mankind. From these considerations we discover the probability of Revelation in general.

ESSAY VI.

The necessity of caution respecting Revelation.

WHEN objects of great moment appear probable, they naturally excite in us desire and expectation : we wait for them with some degree of earnestness and impatience. Hence, when Religion comes unto us in the character of Divine Revelation, and we are impressed with its probability and importance, we give it a ready reception, if there be nothing in its aspect disagreeable and forbidding. And such a degree of carelessness and precipitation too often attends our reception of it, as is inconsistent with the importance and majesty of the subject. Caution in matters of Religion, most certainly, is absolutely necessary ; especially where the truth of Religion is concerned. For there is nothing in which we are so deeply interested as

Religion; and there is nothing in which mistake may be attended with consequences so fatal to our peace and safety. A few observations will make it evident, that caution, in the examination and reception of any Religion claiming Divine authority, is indispensably necessary.

Great multitudes of impostors have appeared in the world; some of whom have practised the arts of deception with too much success. Designing men, of great talents, have an astonishing superiority and influence over the common part of mankind, and carry their insidious designs into execution with facility. When an impostor has a brilliant imagination, a comprehensive and energetic genius, ornamented and enriched with all the treasures of literature, and these great and shining qualities are directed and applied by superior address, he is able to make such deep and lasting impressions on his fellow beings, as to establish himself in a kind of dictatorial supremacy. A declaration, without the least shadow of argument, dropping from the lips of a man of such credit and authority, is likely to be received with as much readiness, as if it were attended with all the evidence of truth.

Besides this consideration in which the necessity of caution is evident, we may remark, that a false religion claiming Divine authority, would probably be calculated, in a very high degree, to

deceive mankind. For framed by such an impostor as has been above described, we may expect to find it in the garb of truth, with a smiling and pleasing aspect, accommodating itself to the corruption of the human heart. Overlooking the real wants of human nature, and shunning its aversions, it would probably reduce to a very low condition, if not to destruction, the tone of moral obligation, and if demanding any sacrifices at all, it would give indemnity for them, by opening the avenues to soft and sensual gratifications. Thus insinuating itself into our affections, by its smiling form and its offers of indulgence, it might impose itself upon us, though containing doctrines palpably false, and dangerous in a very high degree. And it might even do this in presence of true Religion. For true Religion, descending from above for the purpose of redeeming mankind, must present some disagreeable truths, and impose some mortifying precepts.

But above all, the necessity of caution will appear, from our natural or acquired inclination to precipitancy, in forming our judgment on any subject whatever. For in vain would the accomplishments of impostors, and the fine colourings and delusive insinuations of false religion, address themselves unto us, if we loved investigation as much as we do its opposite. But unhappily for us, we have great aversion to thorough investigation :

we choose rather to form an opinion on the first appearance of an object, than to suspend our judgment until we have considered and examined it on every side. This dislike to investigation may arise, from love of self, from vanity, or from indolence. Self love naturally prompts us to think highly of our own abilities; to apprehend that we can form correct ideas at once. Vanity leads us to desire others to think highly of us; to believe that our minds, great and comprehensive, can perceive truth intuitively as soon as a subject offers, although it may be extremely abstruse. But unto indolence, perhaps, we ought more often to attribute it. To enquire and examine, to turn over a subject and view it on every side, to advance step by step until we ascend to truth, is too laborious for us: we choose rather to be deceived, or at least to run a great risk of deception, than to undergo such labor. This precipitance in judging of objects, is a fruitful source of error: it is the parent of deception. From hence we may learn, that caution in matters of religion, is evidently necessary. It is demanded, in the strongest manner, where danger is so great, by every consideration of advantage relative to this life, and that which is to come. A multitude of impostors, erroneous systems of Religion highly calculated to deceive, and our natural inclination to be precipitant in forming our opinions, argue in the most conclusive manner, the indis-

pensable necessity of caution; and teach us to be upon our guard, and to examine with care and diligence any Religion, which may offer itself as Revelation from heaven.

ESSAY VII.

The Ground on which we ought to examine Revelation.

IMPRESSED with the truth of the last Essay, we conceive it is highly necessary to occupy proper ground, whenever we attempt to examine any Religion, which claims the character of Divine Revelation. We must do this, if we would avoid error and deception, and would know the authenticity of Revealed Religion.

The ground on which Revealed Religion ought to be examined, according to our humble opinion, is, what may be known of God from the works of creation.

To establish this position, it may be necessary to prove—that some knowledge of God may be obtained from the creation of the world—that this knowledge cannot supercede the necessity of Revelation—that this knowledge affords sufficient ground for the examination of Revealed Religion—and that this knowledge is necessary for the reception of Revelation.

Some knowledge of God, may be obtained from the creation of the world. There are first principles in all sciences. The existence of God is one of these, in the science of theology. And this principle is not restricted to a few, but is universally known to all mankind. Men of corrupt hearts, from a desire of becoming famous by works of destrustion, or from a wish to free themselves from the restraints of Religion, have denied the existence of God. But time was, when this principle was impressed upon their minds ; and it may reasonably be doubted, whether it was ever fully erased from the mind of any rational being. The universal impression of this principle argues, that God may be known from the works of his hands.

It is not a matter of doubt, that the existence of God, with several of his perfections, may be infered from the works of God. For the existence of a First Cause, is engraven on all the works of creation. Throughout the vast volume of nature, which lies open to the inspection of every reasonable being, it is written in legible characters. The most inconsiderable being, within the bounds of the universe, affords a demonstrative evidence of the existence of God ; since it is absolutely impossible, that that being, however insignificant, should have originated from nothing. Every effect must have a cause. And the First Cause must be eter-

nal ; for if there had ever been a time, when there was no being in existence, that time would be now, nothing would still remain—because nothing cannot produce something.

Let us never suppose, that the works of God do not give, at least in some degree, a manifestation of some of his perfections. The almighty power of God, may be seen in the creation of the world.—That the world existed from everlasting, is a supposition too absurd to be admitted ; because mutability and imperfection are the known characteristics of it. But these are altogether inconsistent with every idea of eternal existence. Hence, in some past period of eternity, the world began to exist : it was created, brought forth out of nothing, by the God of nature. Now, if we admit the creation of the world, we must admit the omnipotent power of God. For nothing less than unlimited power, can create the most inconsiderable being.—No bounds can be set to the power of that Being, whose will has once been self-efficient, in the production of existence from non-existence. The immensity of the works of God, which astonishes and confounds us, corroborates this truth.—We see in the inconceivable greatness and number of the worlds, which roll through the vast expanse, a manifestation of almighty power.

From the omnipotence of God, we infer other attributes : we infer the knowledge and wisdom of

God. For it is difficult for us to conceive a being independently powerful, without intelligence. The intelligence of God is infinite ; for if a being be unlimited in one attribute, he must be so in all.— If God be unlimited in his power, he must be unlimited in the rest of his perfections ; because infinitude in any one attribute, utterly excludes all imperfection. This inference of the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God, we have confirmed unto us by the works of the Almighty. What wisdom do we see displayed in the frame of the universe ! What unbounded understanding, in the formation of animals ! What astonishing and infinite intelligence, in the creation of reasonable minds !

If God be almighty and omniscient, he must possess unbounded moral excellence ; because he must be infinitely happy. He must be infinitely happy, for unlimited intelligence will always distinctly perceive what happiness is, and almighty power can always easily maintain the possession of it. Now a being infinitely happy, must be perfectly holy. For he who enjoys, independently in himself, unbounded and unalterable happiness, can have no temptation to moral evil, no possible inducement to depart from the purest rectitude, and the highest moral excellence.

From these considerations we are led to conclude, that some knowledge of God is communicated to mankind, through the works of creation.

It is indeed true, that God is a being of infinite magnitude, the perfect comprehension of whom exists only in the Divine mind. For the highest order of created beings, necessarily limited in their intellectual powers, cannot fully comprehend an object, the nature of which is infinite. It is impossible in the very nature of things, for Revealed Religion itself, and much more so for natural Religion, to communicate unto us such a knowledge of God as is absolutely perfect. However it appears evident, that a degree of the knowledge of God is possible to man, even independent of Revelation.

If the arguments which have been offered in support of this truth, should be thought insufficient, we have others at hand. But since modern unbelievers will not deny it, and therefore all objections against it, must come from believers in the Christian Religion, we shall leave the field of nature, to appeal to higher authority—the authority of inspiration. As this authority will not be denied by those who may make such objections, we shall expect that they will readily yield unto it. The following remarkable passage, with many more of the like purport, is direct to the point in hand. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen; being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.”*

* *Rom. 1. 20.*

The knowledge of God, which reason may deduce from the works of nature, cannot supercede the necessity of Revelation. In proof of this, take the following considerations.

Whatever truths respecting the Divine Being, human intelligence may discover by studying the magnificent fabric of nature, it is utterly impossible for it to form, without supernatural inspiration, a perfect and consistent system of theological truth and moral obligation. This is a matter of fact.—How imperfect are all the productions of human reason, on the subject of Religion!

Again, the imbecility of human reason with respect to enforcing known obligation, by proper motives and sanctions, is remarkably great; because these motives and sanctions must be drawn from the world to come, of which reason can form little more than conjectures.

Further, if human reason could discover all the obligations of natural law, Revelation would not then be unnecessary. For as we are in a state of corruption and rebellion against God, we need more than the knowledge of natural law; because this law, suited to the condition of innocent and happy beings, must be deficient, when applied to creatures in a state of transgression, unless it be to curse them with destruction. We are now suffering misery and death for the violation of this law. What assurance of immortality, of pardon,

and of endless happiness, can we derive from a law which curses us with death? These considerations will suffice here, because we have already obviated objections against the particular now under consideration, in the Essay on the necessity of Revelation.

The knowledge of the Divine Being, deducible from visible objects, affords sufficient ground for the examination of Revealed Religion; because it places before us the character of God. When Religion claims the character of Divine Revelation, and we have some knowledge of the character of God, of his natural and moral attributes, we can determine the justness of its claim, by inquiring whether it be consistent with the Divine character—whether its internal constitution of doctrines and obligations, and the external evidences with which it may be attended, agree with the perfections of God manifested to us by the works of creation. For a Revelation from heaven cannot contradict those truths, which God has communicated unto us through the works of his hands—because he cannot contradict himself. The finest idea which can be formed of God, is, that he is an infinite Intelligence in perfect harmony with himself. Hence, the communication of religious truth, given by supernatural inspiration, though it abundantly transcends, must harmonize with the manifestation of divine things through the works of crea-

tion. The God of Religion is the God of nature.

The knowledge of the Divine Being, which reason collects in the light of nature, is necessary for the proper reception of Revealed Religion. For on what ground, if we know nothing of God, can we receive the doctrines of Revelation from inspired men?

We do not deny, that if man were intirely without any idea of God, the Almighty could intuitively communicate unto him the knowledge of his moral character, attended with such light as would remove all doubt respecting his truth and goodness. But then, in this case, such communication must be made unto each individual. But is it not a matter of fact, that each individual has not the inspiration which intuitively communicates the will of God. Besides, could we reasonably expect, that an intuitive communication of divine things, would be made to each individual, when it would be more analogous to the proceedings of providence, more consistent with the nature of man and the advantages of human society, to give such communication to a few holy men, and through them to the world.

In this last method of divine communication, which appears to be more reasonable than any other, some knowledge of God previous to it, is in-

dispensably necessary. For if we have no knowledge of the moral character of God antecedent to Revelation, there seems to be no ground on which we can reasonably receive, with any degree of confidence and satisfaction, the will of God communicated unto us through men divinely and intuitively inspired: there is no ground, on which evidence, given in attestation of the doctrines of Revealed Religion, can rest, so as to produce conviction of their truth and goodness. If absolute darkness involve the attribute of divine goodness, if the character of the purest rectitude, and the most unbounded benevolence, which the Deity sustains, be entirely hid from us prior to the light of Revealed Religion, what inducement could we have to embrace Revelation? In absolute ignorance of the truth of God, and consequently without assurance that it is impossible for him to deceive, there seems the highest degree of difficulty to receive his testimony with confidence. In such ignorance, we might apprehend the danger of deception, and fear that Revelation, instead of bringing us advantage, might discharge upon our heads incalculable mischief.

Being fully persuaded, after repeated reflections on this subject, that Revealed Religion ought to be examined on the ground we have taken, even what may be known of God from the works of creation,

we shall endeavor to keep this ground, in the prosecution of this work.

ESSAY VIII.

Rules as tests of Revelation.

THE necessity of some Rules, in judging of the Truth of any Religion which claims the character of Divine Revelation, is evident ; particularly from that caution which is indispensably necessary, in a matter of so much moment. Therefore on the ground assumed in the last Essay, we lay down the following Rules, which we conceive to be necessary and sufficient.

I. A Revelation from God cannot contain any thing contrary to the Divine nature.

II. A Revelation from God must resemble its Author ; it must bear the impression of the Divine character ; it must be good, great and perfect.

III. A Revelation from God should be attended with external, positive, incontestable evidence, addressed to the senses of mankind.

IV. In a Religion revealed from heaven, there should be some method, by which this positive evidence of its Divine authority, may be conveyed

down to posterity, without the possibility of deception.

The Religion which will bear the test of these Rules, has sufficient proof, that its Author is God. Nothing can have stronger demands on our credence ; and we cannot withhold our faith from it, without violating the best principles of human intelligence. But it is presumed, that we are under no obligations to receive, as of Divine authority, any Religion which will not bear examination by the above Rules.

The two first of these Rules regard the nature of Religion ; its internal constitution of doctrines and obligations, taken both separately, and in connection as constituting a system of theology. As Religion, in its internal parts, agrees with these Rules, we ought to judge favorably of it ; or as it disagrees with them, we ought to condemn it. For it is impossible that any proposition, or system of propositions, on the subject of theology, can be true, and yet either stand in opposition to the attributes of God, or want a resemblance to the Divine character.

The two last of these Rules respects the external positive evidence, which a Revelation from God, intended to benefit mankind, ought to possess. For a system of natural Religion, though weak and imperfect, will contain some doctrines consistent with the nature of Deity ; and it may,

perhaps, even be possible for human reason to throw together some of the doctrines of natural Religion, in such a manner, as to contain nothing contrary to the attributes of God, but to bear some resemblance of the Divine character. But such an assemblage of religious doctrines, would not be a Revelation from God. Besides, external evidences in attestation of the Truth of Religion, addressed to the senses of mankind, are better calculated to convince and affect the common part of the world, than arguments drawn down from the nature of Religion. Therefore, when Religion is derived from above, we have reason to expect, that it will be not only a system of truth consistent and harmonious, possessing a glorious excellence in the impression of the Divine character; but we have a right to expect, that it will also be attended with positive evidence, of an incontrovertible nature—with ocular demonstrations of its divinity.

Revealed Religion, we have reason to expect, should possess some method suitable to perpetuate its authority, to convey to posterity, in a manner not susceptible of deception, the evidence by which its Truth and influence are established and enforced. For when once Revealed Religion is fully confirmed unto mankind, with supernatural operations of God, it seems necessary, that the interruptions of the laws of nature, given as proofs of Revelation, should cease; lest from becoming common, they should lose their effect. Were mira-
cu-

ious operations to take place with regularity and uninterrupted, would they not soon lose the nature of miracles? The principles of these operations would become established laws of nature. For instance : it would certainly be miraculous for fire to cease to burn, to consume combustible substances. But were it to be regularly and constantly so, it would cease to be miraculous : it would become a law of nature for fire not to destroy combustible bodies.

When we examine Christianity, and find that it will bear the test of these Rules—that it contains nothing contrary to the nature of God—that it bears the impression of the Divine character, and is full of goodness, greatness and perfection—that its Truth is established by proofs the most demonstratively conclusive—and that these proofs have been conveyed down to us, in such a manner, as to secure us against even the possibility of deception—we hope that our faith will receive confirmation in an increased conviction of the Truth of our Holy Religion. Our hope of glory, grounded on this Truth, will become more vigorous ; and, the principles of action being drawn into consent, we shall feel the influence of the Gospel affecting our hearts more forcibly, and producing the happiest reformation in our lives. Thus being conscious of our great interest in Religion, we shall defend Christianity with that firmness and vigor, which its importance demands of its votaries.

ESSAY IX.

Christianity not contrary to the Nature of God.

WE come now to examine the claim of Christianity to Divine authority, to the character of a Religion revealed from heaven: we come to apply unto it the first Rule we have before laid down. “A Revelation from God cannot contain any thing contrary to the Divine nature.”

The Truth and glory of the Christian Religion, will appear the more evident, as this Rule is the more strictly applied. For the further we go in the examination of the Religion of Jesus Christ, the more we shall perceive, that it perfectly accords with the nature and attributes of God.

It may be asked with much confidence, in what part of the Christian Religion, is there any thing contrary to the nature and perfections of the eternal Being? Is it in that part, which displays with so much energy and sublimity, the existence and perfections of Jehovah, and sets in such pleasing light, the government which he maintains over the world? Is it in that part, which exhibits with admirable perspicuity and propriety, the physical and moral nature of man, and that degrading condition

of guilt and corruption into which mankind have fallen through transgression? Is it in that part, which discovers, with everlasting praise to the wisdom and goodness of God, the method of redemption through Jesus Christ, as Mediator between God and man? Is it in that part, which contains the purest morality and piety ever delivered to the world; where the duties of man are set in the fairest light, and forcibly pressed upon the heart by motives of eternal weight, so that the dullest understanding may perceive, and the grossest heart must feel, the plain and powerful obligations of the Gospel? Is it in that part, which gives the obligations of Christianity the fullest sanctions, by the manifestation of the world to come; by the promise of everlasting life, glory and happiness to the obedient, and by the denunciation of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, against them who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Christ? It cannot be found in any of these parts of our Holy Religion. In what part then, can any thing be found contrary to the nature of God? Is it in the history of the life of Christ?

The historical parts of the Gospel have the character of truth indelibly and evidently enstamped on them; and such admirable consistency is maintained throughout every page, though written by different men, at different times, that they carry

the strongest evidence, that their authors were inspired. And from this very consideration, they have a right to demand of us the greatest regard, and the firmest faith.

It is true, indeed, that objections have been raised against Christianity, on the supposition, that the history of the life of Jesus Christ is not consistent with itself. If this supposition were, indeed, grounded in truth, there would be some reason to doubt, that the Religion which is founded on the facts contained in the history of the life of Christ, is not of God; because inconsistency is contrary to the nature of God. But there is not the least shadow of evidence, by which such inconsistency can be supported.

The charge of inconsistency, in the history of the life of Christ, has been repeatedly urged by the enemies of Christ. They have gathered up with much assiduity, and magnified with some ingenuity and more venom, every appearance of inconsistency; that they might raise objections against Christianity, and throw disgrace and contempt on its advocates. But as often as they have repeated the objections, they have been answered, in a masterly and satisfactory manner, by able and learned ministers of the Gospel. Their insidious attempts to blacken our Holy Religion, have only given occasion for an increase of glory to it. For its Truth and consistency have appeared more evident,

in proportion to the severity with which it has been examined and scrutinized. The evidence of the facts on which it rests, has been pressed upon the understanding with irresistible force ; while every shadow of inconsistency has vanished before the severe investigation it has undergone ; and while the mind of the candid enquirer has felt a full conviction of the following truth : the authors of these objections, have given abundant proof, that they are grossly ignorant of historical facts, of the laws, customs, and practices of the nations cotemporary with Jesus Christ, or that they have a malignant intention to pervert the Holy Scriptures.

But, perhaps, it may be urged, that although against the Christian Religion, on the ground of its historical parts, there can lie no objection ; yet it contains some doctrines not reconcilable to the dictates of reason respecting the Divine nature.—Which are these doctrines ? Perhaps the Mosaic account of the introduction of moral evil into the world, the incarnation of the Son of God, the atonement which was made on the cross for the sins of the world, and the doctrine of the Trinity, may be objected unto, as being irreconcilable to the dictates of reason respecting the perfections of God ?

The dictates of reason. What are we to understand by a doctrine reconcilable to the dictates of reason ? Is it a doctrine, that presents no object incomprehensible to human reason ? or a doctrine

which produces sufficient evidence of its truth? If we are to reduce all doctrines to the level of the mind of man, to the perfect comprehension of human reason, so that no object is presented in them incomprehensible to the understanding of man, we must strike out at one dash all our knowledge human and divine. For where is the doctrine, within the whole circle of science, which does not exhibit an object incomprehensible to human understanding?

It is the glory of our Holy Religion to exhibit many objects infinitely mysterious. Among these, as the first Truth in Religion, it presents unto us almighty God, as a Being of infinite mystery.

But if, by a doctrine reconcilable to the dictates of reason, we are to understand one which has sufficient evidence of its truth; then we assert, that the doctrines before mentioned are perfectly reconcilable to the dictates of reason, respecting the attributes of the Divine Being. For in the account given us in Revelation respecting the introduction of moral evil into the world, the incarnation of the Son of God, the expiatory sacrifice made on the cross for the sins of the world, and the doctrine of the Trinity; we see no inconsistency and contradiction, nothing repugnant to the known perfections of the Divine nature. But we see in the Christian Religion, abundant evidence of the truth of these doctrines. The question is not, whether we can

perfectly comprehend them in every respect, and solve every difficulty which may arise respecting them, in relation to the Divine nature ; but the question is, whether we have sufficient evidence, that they are true, that there is no real manifest repugnance in them to the attributes of God. Taking up the subject in this light, while we refer these doctrines to a particular consideration in the four following Essays, we do not hesitate to declare, that it is our full, firm and conscientious belief, that there is nothing in these doctrines irreconcilable to the dictates of sound reason, and that Christianity is not, in the least degree in any respect, contrary to the nature of God.

ESSAY X.

Christianity not contrary to the nature of God as to what it teaches respecting moral evil.

THE introduction of moral evil into the system of creation, is a subject of great difficulty, when we consider it in relation to the Divine Being. That infinite wisdom foresaw the effects and consequences of the existence of sin on the physical and moral parts of the universe, is a question that does not

admit of a doubt. It is alike certain, that the means to prevent its entrance into the world, lay open before the eye of the same Divine wisdom, and that adequate power to use such means, or to accomplish its end without means, to the most perfectly effectual prevention of the introduction of sin into the creation of God, existed in the arm of Omnipotence. Had an intelligent being, limited like man, stood anterior to the existence of moral evil on these incontrovertible propositions, he most probably would have reasoned thus : " Sin can never enter into the world. For the same unbounded goodness which gave existence to creation, will, it is readily apprehended, prompt infinite wisdom and almighty power to raise insurmountable barriers against the introduction of sin." This reasoning, however plausible and apparantly just, is erroneous. For the existence of moral evil is not now problematical ; it is a matter of fact. Almighty power did not exert itself ; and sin came into the world.

Although it does not appear inconsistent with the character of man, to think on this subject ; yet it certainly becomes him to think modestly on a subject, the majesty and profundity of which overawe and confound him.

That the all-good and wise Being chose that plan of creation which has actually taken place, we do not doubt, although it involved, as one of its

consequences, the existence of moral evil ; not a consequence necessarily and unavoidably resulting from it, but a consequence arising from the abuse of a power of self-determination, given unto rational beings for the grand purpose of extensive virtue and unbounded enjoyment—and, therefore, a consequence which *might not* have resulted from the creation of the world. For that God unconditionally determined, that sin should come into the world, is, in our apprehension, a proposition full of extravagant absurdity, and monstrous impiety.

When we attempt to consider some questions arising from this subject, we find ourselves surrounded with impenetrable darkness. And, indeed, there is nothing strange in this. For it is not possible for the narrow limits of the human understanding, to take in the reasons of the Divine government, and discover all the consequences resulting from the present system of creation, through all the ages of eternity. On the brink of the abyss which rises before us, we have reason to exclaim : “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out ! ”

But one side of this subject is all luminous. The existence of sin in the world, is a matter of fact ; a sad deplorable fact. The mind of man is morally perverted, and his heart deeply corrupted. In consequence, darkness and error have taken

place in the former, and the worst and basest passions have gained the ascendant in the latter. The noble power of intelligence, placed in man as a governor, has been reduced to the basest subjection to blind and furious passion. Of course the conduct of man, the illustrious and distinguished possessor of reason, has been, beyond all computation, extravagant, outrageous and wicked.

The truth of this is confirmed by the universal experience and acknowledgement of mankind, in every nation under heaven, as is abundantly evident from history. Indeed, history is little else than a public record of the crimes of mankind. Through all ranks in human life, from the lowest condition to the most elevated, from the meanest peasant to the most illustrious character, the principle of corruption works its dire effects.

Against the existence of moral evil, no objection can be raised, unless on the ground of the doctrine of absolute fatality, with its blind and resistless power extended not only to every part of creation, but to God himself. But this doctrine, infinitely absurd in its nature, and abominable in its consequences; this doctrine horridly impious, and dreadfully vicious, carrying in its bosom death to all that is great and good in human society; this doctrine of absolute fatality, can never find place except in the brains of the visionary sons of philosophical fanaticism.

But no objection can be raised against Christianity, on account of its teaching, that sin is in the world, which will not lie with equal force against natural Religion itself. For it is not the exclusive prerogative of the Christian Religion, to teach this doctrine : we find it taught also in natural Religion. Neither can any objection lie, on this ground, against either the one or the other, so long as vice and impiety, like mighty inundations, overflow the world, and sweep away the sons of men from peace and happiness, to misery, destruction, and death ; or so long as this shall stand on the records of time or eternity.

But it may be pretended, that Revealed Religion, not because it teaches that sin is in the world, but because of the account, which it gives, of the introduction of moral evil into the system of creation, is liable to objection.

What in the Mosaic account of the fall of man, and the entrance of sin into the world, is liable to objections ? Can any thing be found, in that account, not readily reconcileable to the dictates of sound reason, in relation to the attributes of God ? does not that very account give unto Christianity an infinite superiority over natural Religion ?

Heathen philosophers, on this subject, were surrounded with midnight darkness. They wandered in the labyrinths of conjecture, and only lost themselves the more in proportion as they advanced.

But behold, on the approach of Revealed Religion, this darkness vanishes away ! conjecture and error give place to certainty and truth. Led by Moses, we behold our first parents innocent and happy, placed by their gracious Creator in a garden of pleasure ; enjoying the most unbounded liberty of gratification, with only one exception, one only interdiction, as the trial of their faith, as the exercise and confirmation of the virtues of their hearts, as the test of their obedience—as the external evidence of the full submission of their hearts to the moral obligations of their nature. “ Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat ; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it : for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” or “ dying thou shalt die.”* Then we behold them approached by a fallen angel in disguise, in a serpent, or in the form of a serpent, and by him deceived ; first led to distrust the truth of their maker, and then to violate his express commandment. “ And he said unto the woman, ‘ Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ? And the woman said unto the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden : But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, ye

* *Genesis*, 2. 16, 17.

shall not surely die : for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened ; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good from evil. 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 thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.* Thus sin entered into the world. Now what candid man can find any dissatisfaction, in this natural and rational account of the introduction of moral evil into the world ?

The futile objection, that Moses is not worthy of credit, because he attributes unto the trifling action of eating an apple, the most dreadful consequences, death and all our woes, is scarcely worthy of notice. Moses no where says, that the forbidden fruit, eaten by our first parents, was an apple. Giving no particular description of the interdicted tree, he distinguishes it only from the trees of the garden, besides its local situation, as being the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While man, in obedience to the law of God, touched it not, he was happy in the knowledge, the experience, the enjoyment of good ; but when he put forth his hand, in violation of the Divine law, he fatally acquired the knowledge, the experience, the misery of evil. In forbearing to touch the fruit of this tree, he gave external evidence of obe-

* *Genesis* 3. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

dience, in which he enjoyed the experimental knowledge of good. But in eating that fruit, he gave external evidence of disobedience, by which he basely sunk into the experimental knowledge of evil. Hence we may discover the reason, why this tree was called, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Neither Moses, nor any other inspired writer, gives any intimation, that there was any difference between the nature of this tree, and that of the common trees of the Garden ; nor do they declare, that it was the eating of the fruit of this tree, as a natural action, but as a violation of the law of God, which brought death and all our woes into the world.

The Christian Religion may here be accused of exaggerating, in stating the consequences of moral evil. "Is not the loss of immortality and happiness, a consequence too great and dreadful to result from the transgression of the law of God ? Is not moral evil insufficient to produce death and endless misery ? Are not these punishments too severe to be inflicted on ignorant man, by a gracious God, for the transgression of his law ? And, therefore, is not Christianity, which assumes these as the effects of transgression, extravagantly severe, and inconsistent with the character of the God of mercy ?"

We answer, Christianity is not extravagantly severe, because it declares that death and endless

misery are consequences of sin, nor is it inconsistent with the character of the God of mercy. For the loss of happiness and immortality, is a direct consequence naturally arising from the violation of the law of God. The transgression of the law, is a violation of the relations between God and man. In the act of transgression, fidelity and allegiance are broken, independence is assumed, and the transgressor withdraws himself from his maker. What must follow? The loss of happiness, of rational enjoyment, arising from the manifestation of the Divine perfections, and the love of God. In this only the true felicity of an intelligent being consists. When the mind sinks into corruption and misery, it is reasonable to expect, that the body will participate in its degradation—will also sink in the arms of corruption and death.

It may likewise be observed, that an intelligent being can be happy in those pursuits only, which are consistent with his nature, and in which the end of his creation will be accomplished. Now the transgression of the law of God, is an act of violence done to the constitutional powers, and original feelings of the transgressor, since every law, obligatory on him, necessarily grows out of his nature. Such violence offered to the nature of a moral being, and in direct opposition to the end of his creation, must naturally sink him down to the gulphs of mis-

ery. Under it, there can be no possibility of happiness.

Therefore, as it is possible, yea probable, that the transgressor may sink so far into error and corruption, as to render it impossible for him to return to his fidelity and allegiance to God, endless misery, independent of Divine vengeance particularly expressed, may be the natural consequence of sin.

But we are not to forget, that the God of mercy, is the God of justice, and the governor of the world. It therefore becomes him to support the dignity and authority of his government, by inflicting such punishments on the delinquent sinner, incorrigible in transgression, as the principles of Divine justice may demand.

Death and misery are in the world; and unto what cause can they be imputed, with so much propriety, as to moral evil? Is any thing else adequate to their production? And shall Christianity be reproached with extravagant severity, because it discovers the true and adequate cause of all the evils existing in the world? because it declares, that endless misery will be the consequence of incorrigible corruption and wickedness? and because it gives us assurances, that God will let loose his indignation on those who shall continue to transgress his laws? And shall it be represented, as being inconsistent with the character of the God of mercy, when it does all this, with the benevolence

design of warning us against the danger of sin, and of inducing us to return with repentance and faith unto God, that we may escape the everlasting misery resulting from transgression, and that we may enjoy, through the riches of free grace, that immortal happiness which is inseparably connected with obedience? This would be the highest degree of extravagant folly, and a species of baseness worthy of the severest execration.

On reviewing this subject, we are fully persuaded, that Christianity is not contrary to the nature of God, on account of what it teaches concerning moral evil.

ESSAY XI.

Christianity not contrary to the nature of God in respect to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

THE son of God was indeed manifested in the flesh. The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, in whom the Godhead dwelt bodily, was veiled in humanity.

We do not deny, that the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, is a mystery—a mystery so great that the angels desire to look into it. But deny, we do that there is any thing in it irrecon-

cilable to the dictates of reason respecting the nature of God. We grant that it is truly astonishing, that the Only begotten of the Father should so humble himself, as to take on him the form of a servant in the likeness of man—But are not all the works of God astonishing?—Greatness, grandeur, and incomprehensibility, mark all the operations of the Divine hand, and distinguish them from the works of second causes.

Reason has received from the manifestation of the Son of God, her present accuteness and vigor. By it she has been elevated from the dismal vales of error, to the mountain of truth, where she enjoys the mildest beams of mercy, and a flood of day from the Sun of righteousness. What then, shall she object against the incarnation of the Son of God? Will she dictate any thing against the source of her strength, vigor and honor?

We are taught by the purest dictates of reason, that the great First Cause essentially inhabits the whole universe. There is nothing, physically considered, but what is full of him. God fills all things, from the highest intelligence, who triumphs in exalted excellence, down through all the gradations of creation even to dull matter. His presence gives reality and support to nature. From being united to God, as its Creator, it subsists in all its various forms—Separated from him, it would sink to nothing again. Shall reason, then, revolt at the idea of a particular union formed between God and

man, in the person of Jesus Christ, for the glorious purpose of redeeming myriads of intelligent beings, whose existence can be measured by eternity only ?

Creation was an act of Divine power, by which nature arose out of nothing. Hence the various orders of created beings, from the highest to the lowest, have one common origin. All their excellence is derived ; and the degrees of glory by which they differ, arose from the will of their Creator. There is no such thing as physical baseness, in a positive sense, in creation. All positive baseness must exist in moral depravity. It seems therefore, that it cannot be dishonorable to God to form any union, which he may think proper, with any of his creatures, when they are considered in respect to their physical constitution ; and that every objection, which maintains the least shadow of reason, brought against such union, must be grounded on moral depravity. But it is not expected, that those who rise up against Christianity, on account of the incarnation of the Son of God, will make this the ground of their objection ; because they seem unwilling to allow the existence of moral depravity.

However, should any take this ground, they will not be able to maintain it ; for the Gospel teaches us, that the man, Christ Jesus, in whose person God has united himself with mankind, was not

brought into the world by natural generation, but by an immediate act of Divine power, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; and that, therefore, he was free from moral depravity—He was without sin.

It may be said, “that the Christian Religion is not worthy of credit, on account of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which is represented as affecting God with the alteration of his nature, and communicating the essential properties of Deity to humanity.” If the Gospel did, indeed, communicate any such ideas as these, we should have reason to doubt of its truth. But it teaches no such things. It is far from teaching, [that Deity suffered any change, or that the essential attributes of God were communicated to human nature, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ—It teaches just the reverse. We are taught by it, that there are two distinct natures in Jesus Christ, the human, and the Divine. The first of these, though greatly exalted in excellence and glory, is however still human. The Divine nature is gloriously incapable of mutability—“Jesus Christ, as God, is the same yesterday, to day and forever.”

Here it may be objected, “that the Gospel in teaching the doctrine of the Incarnation, represents God in a very mean and contemptible light, by making humility a part of his character.” We ask: Is humility mean and contemptible? Is it in no sense compatible with the character of God? Is

not pride its opposite? Would the objector have the Gospel to represent Deity under the character of an imperious and haughty tyrant?

But what is humility? Is it not modesty, condescendingly and prudently withholding the manifestation of the lustre of real excellence? Is not this consistent with the character of God? Does he not withhold from us the greater part of the lustre of his perfections? The Son of God, when he came into the world, in condescension to our weakness, and in prudence with respect to the purpose of his mission, made himself of no reputation: he covered the glory of his Divine nature, which would have been insufferable to the eyes of mortals, by taking on him the form of a servant, the nature of man.

We do not deny, that humility is ascribed, in other respects, unto Jesus Christ in the Gospel. But is it not then always with respect to his humanity, and not to his Divinity? Jesus Christ, who as God concealed the lustre of his glory, humbled himself as man, in obedience unto the death of the cross.

Therefore, as the Gospel, respecting the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, does not confound Deity with humanity; and as no dishonor can arise to God from his uniting himself with man in the Person of Jesus Christ, either on the ground of the natural constitution of human nature, or its depravity; we conclude that no objection can lie against our Ho-

ly Religion, because it teaches that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh. And especially, as it is manifest, that reason has derived great strength, and abundant light, from this manifestation, she can never oppose the Christian Religion—It is not reason, but folly, which rises in opposition to the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

ESSAY XII.

Christianity not contrary to the nature of God respecting the doctrine of the Atonement.

THE doctrine of the atonement, is of great consequence in Religion. What the sun is to the solar system, this appears to be to the Christian Religion: It is the connecting principle in the system of evangelical Truth. With it the Gospel is full of light, beauty and energy; but without this doctrine, it would be void and without form, and darkness would cover the face thereof, as it did the face of the great deep in the beginning of the world.

We may therefore expect, that all the ingenuity and energy of infidelity, will be directed against this doctrine. The objection may run thus: "The doctrine of the atonement, intimately connected with all the doctrines of the Gospel, and particu-

larly with that of the incarnation, affords a strong argument against Christianity. For it represents the impassible God as suffering; the Governor of the world, as being unjust and cruel, punishing the innocent instead of the guilty; and the God of all wisdom, as acting the part of folly in employing the most expensive means for the accomplishment of no valuable purpose, the atonement being useless, as pardon must come, after all, from Mercy, and not from Justice."

This is a bold and daring objection, as destitute of truth as it is of modesty. However we will examine it.

It is a truth unto which we cordially assent, and which we wish to be deeply impressed on every mind, that there is, indeed, an inseparable connection between the doctrine of the incarnation, and that of the atonement. For the Gospel teaches us that the express purpose of the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh, was to make an atonement for the sins of the world, by offering himself to Divine justice as a sacrifice on the cross. If, therefore, this doctrine were absurd, we would not contend for that of the incarnation. But, it is not absurd. There is nothing in it contrary to the nature and character of God.

The doctrine of the atonement, contains nothing inconsistent with the impassibility of Deity.—For where this doctrine is taught in the Gospel,

there is not the least intimation given, that the Divine nature suffered. But on the contrary, we learn from Revealed Religion, that God is blessed forever more—that the eminence of his perfections, raises him infinitely above all possibility of suffering. We are taught by the Gospel, that Jesus Christ is truly man, and truly God. His humanity suffered—his Divinity could not. The Divinity supported the humanity, and enabled it to bear the intolerable weight of the sins of the whole world; to suffer what in the eye of Divine justice, was fully equivalent to the curse of the law of God, against the delinquent sons of men. For let it be remembered, that the law cursed man with death, endless death, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his power. But Christ did not suffer this: he did not suffer everlasting destruction. But he suffered in that degree, and with that merit, which in the view of Justice, made perfect satisfaction for the sins of the world. The sufferings of his humanity, voluntarily offered, became infinitely meritorious from his Divinity. Hence we conclude, that the doctrine of the atonement does not represent Deity as suffering; it is not contrary to the glorious perfection of God, which exalts him to infinite and inviolable happiness. Therefore, the accusation against Christianity, now under consideration, is the offspring of gross ignorance and presumption.

With respect to the assertion, "that the doctrine of the atonement represents the Governor of the world, as being cruel and unjust," we not only deny it, but are able to prove the reverse.—Without entering into detail on this proof, we shall just remark, that the Governor of the world by the atonement has manifested himself infinitely merciful and just—so merciful, that he was not willing to destroy the guilty ; and so just, that he would not save them without satisfaction for the breach of the holy law.

In the sufferings of the blessed Jesus, no cruelty, or injustice, was offered unto him, by the Divine government ; for he suffered willingly. Had he been dragged to execution, and sacrificed against his own will, it would have been cruel and unjust. But he did not suffer from compulsion, but he suffered of choice. He offered himself freely as a sacrifice for us, and when he had purged our sin he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. For he said : "I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, I lay it down of myself : I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Hence it is evident, that Christianity is not objectionable on account of the doctrine of the atonement, as charging the Governor of the world with cruelty and injustice. For although the holy and innocent Jesus did suffer in the place of guilty

men, yet nothing cruel and unjust took place in his death and passion, with respect to the Government of God; because it was the choice of Christ, to die for the sins of the world.—He lay down his life of himself.

That the wisdom of God used expensive means for the redemption of the world, we are not disposed to dispute. But we are far from admitting, that no valuable purpose was effected by them.—The manifestation of the glory of God, in the salvation of a multitude of reasonable and immortal beings, was effected by the use of those means; and we apprehend, that it is difficult to conceive a purpose of greater value.

We also readily acknowledge, that pardon must still come from the hand of Mercy. But it will not therefore follow, that the atonement was useless. We cannot infer, that because the pardon of sin arises from the bowels of Divine mercy, the satisfaction made for the transgression of the law is attended with no advantage; for it may be infinitely more advantageous to remit sin on the ground of satisfaction made for it, than to pardon it without any satisfaction.

Let us remember, that God is in heaven, and that we are upon the earth; and that, therefore, his ways are inscrutable to us. It is impossible for us to see all the reasons of the Divine transactions, or all the consequences resulting from them. If we had no other argument except this

to justify Christianity from the charge of the inutility of the atonement, we should have sufficient to satisfy reasonable men. For the utility of the proceedings of God, is not to be determined by the scanty line of the human understanding. But we have other arguments, as will presently appear.

We shall not assert, that it was impossible for God to have redeemed the world, in any other way than by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For it would be presumption in us to limit the Holy One of Israel, to prescribe bounds to the infinite God. But we do not hesitate to declare, on the ground of the Gospel, that he chose to redeem the world by the death of Christ ; and we hope, we shall not depart from that modesty which becomes human nature, when we affirm, that, among other reasons the utility of the atonement was an inducement to that choice.

One use of the atonement, apparent even to our weak understanding, is, the honor which the law received by it. Jesus Christ fulfilled the law by a life of perfect obedience, and made it honorable by a death perfectly meritorious, and every way suited to support the dignity of the law.

It became God, as the Ruler of the world, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. It became him to support the honor of the law, to see

that it was not broken with impunity, by requiring that Jesus Christ, who had undertaken the cause of man to answer for the transgression of the law, should be made perfect, as an atoning priest, through suffering the curse of the law. Had the Almighty pardoned the transgressions of the world, without any satisfaction, it would have seemed to us, that even the foundations of his everlasting Kingdom were loosened. But by demanding satisfaction, the honor of his law, the firmness, of his kingdom, and the establishment of his authority, so necessary for the welfare of his subjects, and the glory of his name, are evidently maintained.

Hence, we may discover another use of the atonement; its powerful, extensive and happy influence on the minds of moral beings. Truth, goodness, and justice, are eminent traits in the character of God, as the Father and Sovereign of the universe; and in that proportion in which moral beings discover and feel these Attributes, they are induced to walk in the paths of virtue, to honor, and to happiness. And where shall we find truth, goodness, and justice, displayed with so much effect, with so much glory and power, as in the magnificent and awful transactions of Calvary? It is impossible for us to conceive the extent of the influence, now under consideration, not only on mankind, but also on higher orders of beings, who may have been astonished spectators, or may have

received just views, of the sufferings with which Christ atoned for the sins of the world. The happy and glorious effects of the atonement, with regard to its moral influence, as well as with respect to the removal of the guilt of the world, may be experienced by countless myriads of immortal beings through the ages of eternity.

Whenever we candidly examine the doctrine of the atonement, as it stands in the Gospel, we shall find it to agree with the character of God ; to be gloriously declarative of mercy and justice, and extensively useful to the subjects of the Divine government. We shall see, that Christianity, from the atonement, derives much of its excellence; and

at, instead of being objectionable on account of this doctrine, it is worthy of our highest estimation, as being perfectly consonant to the nature of God, and happily accommodated to the necessity of mankind.

ESSAY XIII.

Christianity not contrary to the nature of God, on account of the doctrine of the Trinity.

TO attempt an explanation of inexplicable and incomprehensible subjects, is a mark of weakness or ostentation, and frequently of both. But the

discovery of our weakness, is not the only consequence resulting from such attempts. For when we launch out into unfathomable deeps, with a design to sound them to the bottom, we involve ourselves, and those who are encouraged to follow us by our example, in great and dangerous difficulties. While we apply the whole of our power to accomplish our vain design, we are swept down by the current, and lost in the fogs of error. At length, we know not which way to steer our course. Mistake follows mistake ; and error succeeds error. Truth and wisdom vanish out of sight ; and darkness and night close upon us.

The truth of these observations is often exemplified, in a very striking point of light, in many who undertake the consideration of the subject now before us.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery of God—a mystery concerning the mode of the Divine existence, which is altogether inscrutable to man; yet vain men have frequently attempted to explain it, and thereby have darkened counsel with a multitude of words. Instead of nourishing faith, they have generated doubts, in the minds of many, on this important subject.

Therefore it will not be expected, that any attempts to explain the Trinity will be here made : it is sufficient to state it as it is found in the Gospel. In the New Testament we are taught, that there are the Father, and the Son, and the Holy

Ghost; and that these Three are One. This mystery concerning God, I believe, not because I comprehend it, but because I am persuaded that God has revealed it. It is not my province to try to explain, or even to conceive, how the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, constitute one eternal and ever blessed God.

We would have it here remembered, that Christianity is not concerned in any idea merely human, which may have been advanced respecting the doctrine of the Trinity. But we are to take this doctrine as it stands in the New-Testament, and not as it may have been represented by the pens of weak and visionary men.

Now in this light, on what ground can any objection lie against the doctrine under consideration? Is it that of mystery? But we have already answered this in a former Essay; where it has been shown, that mystery, when it does not respect evidence, is not a sufficient reason to reject any doctrine whatever.

That there is but one God, one eternal Being of infinite perfection, is evident. For the idea of two different beings of infinite perfection, involves a contradiction; because infinite perfection can admit of no difference. What constitutes two or more beings, distinct individuals? Is it not the difference which exists between them? Therefore, there is only one God.

But the doctrine of the Trinity, does not appear to be objectionable, on the ground of the unity of God. For we can perceive no absolute repugnance between the doctrine of the unity, and that of the Trinity of the Holy One. For if the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, possess infinite perfection, they must be one ; because infinitude, not admitting of any difference, necessarily constitutes the unity of the Divine Being. And who will deny, that they are infinite in perfection ? What reason can be offered, why they may not be one in nature, in happiness, in will, in power, and in action ? Who will deny, that there exist in man, a body of matter, and a soul of intellectual power, possessing a spirit of natural, social and moral disposition ? Yet these make only one man.

We see no reason, therefore, to condemn Christianity, because it teaches us to believe in the Trinity of God ; for it does not appear on this account inconsistent with the Divine attributes, as we learn them from the works of creation.

Hitherto we have found nothing in the Religion of Jesus Christ, which is repugnant to the attributes of Deity. It has fully borne the test of the first Rule, which we proposed to apply unto it. And, indeed, the further any one may go in making application of this test the more will the excellence of our Holy Religion appear : it will come forth from the severest trial with increased lustre, more precious than gold seven times tried in the fire.

ESSAY XIV.

Christianity is of God, because it bears the impression of his hand.

WE always expect to find an agreement between causes and their effects ; a resemblance between authors and their works. The work of a wise and good being will have the marks of wisdom and goodness. Therefore, "a Revelation from God must resemble its Author ; it must bear the impression of the Divine character ; it must be good, great and perfect." This second Rule which we have laid down, as a test of Revelation, let us now apply to the Christian Religion.

God has impressed himself on all the works of his hands. His footsteps shine in creation and providence, but particularly in redemption. In redemption the glory of his perfections astonishes the mind, and melts the heart. There the majesty and loveliness of his character, are clothed in splendor altogether unparalleled in any of his other works.

The majesty and grandeur of God appear in the greatness of his works. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handy work. He stretched out the north over the empty place, and hung the earth upon nothing. He mea-

sured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and
 meted out the heavens with a span; he has deco-
 rated the immeasurable expanse of heaven with
 shining worlds and burning suns; and he upholds
 the vast fabric of nature by the word of his power.
 But it is on the cross, that magnificence and gran-
 deur appear in superior pomp, and milder lustre,
 being softened by the rays of more lovely perfec-
 tions. There God effected a work more glorious,
 than the creation of the universe. There he ma-
 nifested goodness and mercy, in charms irresisti-
 ble; while he discovered justice clothed in glory
 awfully majestic—an object of the profoundest re-
 verence and fear.

The eternity, wisdom, and power of God, we
 may behold in the light of nature, beaming through
 the amazing frame of the universe. And though
 the spirituality, omnipresence, unity, and immuta-
 bility of God, apparently lay more remote from the
 eye of reason, than the perfections which were just
 now mentioned, yet they may be discovered, in
 some degree, in the same light. But it is the glory
 of Christianity, to discover all these attributes in
 their full lustre, and to exhibit them in truly
 pleasing and lovely light; while it alone possesses
 the prerogative of manifesting the doctrine of the
 Trinity.

Although the moral character of God may be
discovered, in some degree, through the medium

of visible objects ; yet it must be attended with obscurity in some degree, on account of the disorder existing in the natural and moral world. But this obscurity vanishes before the Christian Religion, and the moral character of God appears in beauty divinely splendid. The holiness, love, mercy, compassion, long-suffering, justice, truth, and faithfulness of almighty God, are manifested by the Gospel in light as clear as that of noon-day. "For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath," through the Gospel, "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

From this comparative view of natural Religion with Christianity, respecting the nature and character of God, it is evident that the latter possesses an infinite superiority over the former : and it is also equally evident, that the Religion of Christ, which gives us such a distinct manifestation of God, must resemble him.

Indeed, that Religion which Jesus has published unto the world, bears, in every part, evident marks of its Divine origin. It resembles God in the dignity, harmony, and connection of its doctrines, in the purity, extent, and proportion of its precepts ; and in the glory and power of the sanctions, with which it is armed, and by which it enforces obedience with so much energy.

Our Religion is of God ; for it resembles him in greatness. There is a greatness in it, which is

found in no other theological system. The compositions of men resemble their imperfection ; they are always in some degree little and imperfect. But the Religion, which came down from heaven, is great throughout. It astonishes us with the magnitude of the objects, which it holds to view ; and the boldest imagination, and the accutest thought, are confounded and entirely lost, in the extent of that duration which it embraces in the sanctions of its obligations. In vain do we try to grasp the magnitude of those objects, and to measure the extent of that duration.

The character of goodness, deeply impressed on Christianity, is an evident mark of its divinity.— Goodness in relation to law, may be considered as either positive or relative. Positive goodness respects the nature of law abstractly considered, without any reference to those beings whom it is designed to govern. Relative goodness regards law, as being properly adapted to the state of those for whom it is made. Now where shall we find positive goodness in such richness, as in the Christian Religion ? And as to relative goodness, it is found there in the highest degree of perfection ; the Gospel being perfectly accommodated to the nature and condition of mankind.

Christianity is from heaven ; because it is perfect. It is the work of a perfect Being ; it is full and complete in every part. It is a system of principles and duties without defect ; a rule of faith and practice full of perfection.

We should more evidently discover, and more sensibly feel, the truth and weight of the foregoing observations, were not our knowledge of Christianity so very superficial. The true cause, why we do not estimate the Christian Religion above all price, is, we know it not. Were we to enter into the view of Jesus Christ, the Gospel would be unto us a never failing source of delight. The richness of the materials, the grandeur and elegance of the composition, and the symetry, dependence, and connection of the parts of this noble superstructure, astonish and enrapture the enlightened believer; he is never tired in contemplating an object so exquisitely beautiful, so incomparably magnificent, and so infinitely important.

The true disciple of Jesus, who studies the Gospel with attention and sincerity, is not insensible of its excellency: it opens unto him the treasures of truth and grace: it discovers to him the indubitable marks of its Divine origin—it shows him God. The more he studies it, the more he is delighted with it; for his conviction, that the Religion which he has embraced, is truly from above, increases as he becomes more acquainted with it.

Evidence of the truth of this remark, will be given in the nine subsequent Essays; where we intend to consider Christianity, as being impressed with the Divine character in its doctrines and laws. In these we shall notice perspicuity, sublimity and consistency, holiness, proportion, and energy,

propriety of conditions, promise of Divine aid, and the doctrine of Providence.

ESSAY XV.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Perspicuity of Christianity.

THE great purpose of Religion is the instruction of mankind in the Knowledge of their duty. It is designed to teach us, what we owe to ourselves, to one another, and to God; to teach us to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; to discover the reasons of duty; and to induce us by proper motives, to engage in the performance of it. Therefore a Revelation from God, on the subject of Religion, should be perspicuous, plain, and easy to be understood. For it is not only a few learned men, a few philosophers, a few extraordinary geniuses, who are concerned in Religion, but the whole of mankind. When the God of wisdom and goodness reveals his will to the sons of men, he will bring it down to be level with the understanding of the common part of mankind, in all things which concern their duty.

Now, such we find Christianity to be. It is plain and easy to be understood, in whatever materially concerns our duty: so plain, that he that runs may read.

Behold the precepts of the Gospel ! What admirable simplicity do we see in them ! How happily accommodated to the weakness of the human mind ! Can any thing be imagined which is better calculated to instruct mankind, and to teach them their duty ? These are not obligations drawn as consequences from a long chain of propositions, which none but men accustomed to reasoning could understand ; but they are plain and positive commandments, given by the Lord of life himself.

The institutions and obligations of the Gospel, are indeed comprehensive, yet they are minutely particular ; they are full, but not profuse. There is, in this respect, a beauty in the Gospel unexampled in the finest productions of human wisdom.

The reasons of our duty, are attended with equal perspicuity. The great truths, which form the bases of the law of God, brought down to the sense of mankind, and delivered in all the simplicity of divine eloquence, carry irresistible conviction to the mind. For we are not treated in the Gospel as machines, but as reasonable beings, who ought to understand the propriety of the duties required of them.

There is also a pleasing and happy perspicuity, in Evangelical motives to obedience. The consequences of obedience, and of disobedience, are set before us in the plainest light. The curses of the law of God flash around the transgressor, like lightening from heaven ; while the blessings of the

faithful performance of duty, are portrayed in the mild splendor of celestial light.

We do not exceed the truth on this subject. The proof is at hand: If any man will attentively study the Holy Scriptures, he will see it there; he will see it particularly in the New Testament, and especially in the language of Jesus Christ, and that of the beloved disciple st. John. There he will behold perspicuity in the happiest union with sublimity, manifesting the truth, the beauty, the excellence of Religion; the rights of God, and the privileges of man; the nature and extent of virtue and of piety, and their exceedingly great rewards.

The voice of rejoicing is heard in the tabernacles of the righteous, and lamentation and mourning in the tents of wickedness. For the Gospel, fair as the morning, and clear as the sun, has risen, and poured a flood of day on the world, as terrible to the sons of darkness as an army with banners.—The shades of night vanish: truth stands confest in native excellence; righteousness is exalted; and peace comes down to dwell with man.

ESSAY XVI.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Sublimity of Revealed Religion.

THE sublimity of the Christian Religion, is an evidence, that it came not by the will of

man, but by the inspiration of God. In this we see the character of divinity, the impression of the hand of God.

Christianity never descends to creep and grovel in the dust: but it soars aloft in elevation of thought, and dignity of expression. And when it comes down to the comprehension of man, in a delightful perspicuity, even there it is truly sublime.

It soars aloft. It bears its true votaries on the wings of the sublimest thought, and the boldest imagination, to the regions of light, unto the foot of the throne of God.

Listen attentively unto the voice of Religion, the offspring of inspiration, and she will make thee great. If thou wouldst be eloquent and sublime, learn to imitate her: for her words are as the pure light of heaven; sublime as the flame from the departing cloud; awfully majestic as the voice of thunder that shakes the world.

Hear her speak: "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." How beautifully sublime is this expression of Moses! We may search the pages of human wisdom, for a passage of equal sublimity: but shall we not search in vain? Moses was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, and was mighty in word and deed. But he was more mighty, as he was inspired of God.

Behold the sublimity of the language, in which God speaks unto Job! "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 ?” “ Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion ? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season ? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons ?” What greatness in this language ! It is suitable to the character of him, whose habitation is lofty eternity.

Lips taught with the fire of inspiration, we should expect, would be opened in angelic sublimity. So the Prophets and the Apostles opened theirs. Do they speak of God ? Behold how seraphic is their language ! “ God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”* This is altogether inimitable in beauty and sublimity.

Do they speak of the grandeur of God ? They astonish us with the boldness of their figures, and the elevation of their style. “ O Lord my God, thou art very great ; thou art clothed with honor and majesty : who coverest thyself with light as with a garment ; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain. He layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters ; who maketh the clouds his charriot ; who walketh upon the wings of the wind ; who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.”† Can any thing more bold and elevated than this be conceived ?

*1 *John* 1. 3.

†*Psalm*, 104. 1, 2, 3, 4.

When they speak of the eternity and omnipresence of God, they are equally sublime. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world; from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."* "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me."†

If they speak of the love of God, and the glorious administrations of grace under the everlasting covenant, they are enraptured with the richness of the theme; they would inspire nature with the passion they feel: their words fall as the dew from heaven; as the gentle showers of spring; they are as sweet as western breezes, and as mild and sublime as the morning without a cloud. "Sing O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."‡ "Behold what manner of love

* *Psalm*. 90. 2, 4. † *Psalm* 139. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

‡ *Isa*. 44. 23.

the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is!"*

When they represent God, as holding the reins of government, and dispensing judgments with a sovereign hand, or coming to judge the world in the last day, how terribly sublime are they! "God come from Teman, and the holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, and the perpetual hills did bow."† "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead

* 1 John 4. , 2.

† Hab. 3. 3, 4, 5, 6.

were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their work.”*

These specimens of the sublimity of the Sacred Writings, are sufficient to establish our position. But were it necessary, we could swell them to a volume ; for the Bible is full of sublime passages.

It is indeed true, Religion does not stand in need of the power of eloquence. The importance of the matter contained in it, is sufficient to engage the attention of the world. But coming from God, it must be sublime, because it must partake of the elevation of his character.

ESSAY XVII.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Connection and Consistency of Christianity, as a perfect body of divinity.

GOD is a perfect Being. His work is perfect. Imperfection cannot come from his hands. If Religion emanates from God, it must, therefore, be a perfect system, a body of divinity closely connected in all its parts, firmly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplies.

Now Christianity is such a body of divinity. It is therefore of God.

* *Rev. 20. 11, 12.*

We need only attentively examine the Gospel to be convinced of this. We shall there find, two sorts of truths ; truths of speculation, and truths of practice. We shall discover, that each truth is connected not only with truths in its own class, but with truths of the other class ; and that of these parts, thus connected, is composed that admirable body of doctrine, which forms the system of Evangelical Religion.

Speculative truths are closely connected, in the Gospel of Christ. God is. This is the first truth in Religion.

God only hath immortality : he exists independently and eternally in himself.

All creatures must, therefore, have derived their existence from him, and they must be dependent on him.

God who is independently immortal, whose essence is life, eternal existence, must necessarily be full of all perfection.

God who is full of perfection must be holy.

Then the moral evil, which is in the world, did not arise from him, but from the abuse of power delegated to some of his creatures.

God, as a holy Being, can have no intimate communion with unholy creatures.

As God can have no intimate communion with unholy beings, he can have no intimate communion with men who are unholy.

Unholy men must, therefore, be entirely miserable, because they can have no communion with the holy and happy God.

Mankind reduced to a state of absolute misery, became objects of the compassion of God : for he is as merciful, as he is holy and happy ; as naturally inclined to relieve the miserable, as he is to support the rights of holiness.

The infinitely merciful God, moved by his inclination to relieve the miserable sons of men, sent his Son into the world to redeem it : for it was fit, that the remedy chosen of God to relieve the miseries of men, should bear a proportion to the causes which produced them.

Therefore it was necessary, that the Spirit of God should be given unto men, to enable them to embrace the truths taught by Jesus Christ; because it is impossible for fallen men, unassisted by the Holy Spirit, to discover, feel and obey the doctrines of the Gospel.

Therefore we are objects of the tenderest love of God : he gave his son for us, and his spirit unto us. “ God commended his love unto us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Hence no bounds can be set to our bliss ; for if God “ spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?”

Now it is evident, that the preceeding propositions are intimately connected, and perfectly con-

sistent with each other. And to every one, who diligently searches the Gospel, it will appear equally certain, that these truths of speculation are doctrines of Jesus Christ. We do not pretend, that this chain of doctrines, contains all the speculative truths of the Christian Religion. But we would have it understood, that there is a connexion, a consistency, a harmony in the speculative truths of that system of Religion, which Jesus has given to the world.

These truths of speculation are closely connected with those of practice.

If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for our sins, it is our indispensable duty to hate sin, to forsake it, and truly to repent of it.

If God has given us the strongest demonstration of the richness of his mercy, by the death of his Son, we ought to believe that "he can abundantly pardon:" it is our duty "to believe with the heart unto righteousness, and with the mouth to make confession unto salvation."

If the love of God towards us is so great, "that he sent his own Son to be a propitiation for our sins," we ought to love him with all our hearts.

"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

If unholy men are entirely miserable, because they cannot have communion with the holy and happy God; we ought to seek purification in the

blood of the Lamb : it is our duty to live “in all holy conversation and godliness.”

If no bounds can be set to the happiness of those, who are faithful disciples of Christ ; we should “be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

These are some of the practical truths of the Gospel, directly deducible from the truths of speculation contained in it. And were we to go fully into this subject, we should find that every practical truth of Christianity, is a natural consequence of its speculative doctrines.

In like manner, all the practical truths of the Gospel, are closely connected with each other ; being so perfectly dependent, and giving such support to each other, that we cannot renounce any of them, without materially injuring the system of Evangelical morality. In this system three objects are assigned to our virtues. The first is God ; the second is our neighbor ; and the third ourselves. To live soberly in regard to ourselves, righteously in regard to our neighbor, and godly in regard to our Maker, is the sum of Christian duties.

But to live godly, is at the same time to live righteously and soberly ; because to live godly, is to take that holy Being for our example, to whom Religion conducts and unites us. Now, to imitate God, is to live righteously with our neighbor, and soberly ourselves.

Such, indeed, is the absolute connection of the moral parts of the Gospel, that “to offend in one point, is to be guilty of all.” “The law of liberty in Christ Jesus,” is a chain of religious truths, one link of which being broken, the whole falls to the ground.

If we studied this law of divine liberty more, if we entered more fully into the spirit of Christianity, we should more clearly see, that there is indeed a connection, a consistency, a harmony, a dependence in all the parts of the Christian Religion ;—that there is a perfect body of doctrines in the Gospel. There is nothing wanting, nothing superfluous, nothing misplaced, nothing contradictory, in our Holy Religion. It is a system of infinite beauty and perfection, worthy of its Divine author, the God of goodness and wisdom.

This is one of the best arguments in favor of Religion, arising from the internal constitution of its parts ; the weight of which increases with us, in proportion as we become more acquainted with Christianity. But unhappily for us, we feel too little of the weight of this argument ; because we are too much engaged with things of this life, to enter deeply into the study of Religion, although we confess, perhaps, that our present peace, and our eternal happiness depend upon it.

ESSAY XVIII.

The impression of the Divine character in the Holiness of the Gospel.

THE perfect wisdom, and almighty power of God, in union with the rest of his attributes, must constitute him infinitely happy. For such wisdom will always distinctly perceive, what happiness is, and such power can most easily maintain the possession of it. Therefore God must also be infinitely holy. For a being who enjoys, independently in himself, unbounded and unalterable happiness, can have no temptation to evil. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

Hence Religion descending from God, must be strongly marked with the character of holiness. But Christianity is holy. This is one of its distinguishing characteristics. The morality of the Gospel, is very extensive, and exceedingly pure.

The tone of moral obligation, in the Christian Religion, is very high. The moral character of God, is there made the standard of that moral perfection, which we are required to possess. "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."* "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."† "Be ye therefore

* Lev. 19. 2.

† Matthew 5. 48.

followers of God, as dear children.”* “And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.”†

It is not to be supposed, that we can fully reach this standard of moral excellence ; for as we are finite beings, our holiness must be limited. But the holiness of God, is the holiness of an infinite Being, and therefore is unlimited. But the holiness, which the Gospel requires of us, is consistent with our nature : we are to be holy as we are men, as God is holy as he is God.

The obligations of the Gospel extend to every power of human nature. We are required to bring our actions and words, the passions and dispositions of our hearts, and the thoughts and imaginations of our minds, into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

In all the relations in which we stand to God and his creatures, we are bound by the Gospel to govern ourselves, by the strictest rules of order. The moral principles of Christianity are not loose, so that we may bend and twist them to suit our own inclinations ; but they are the inflexible and unalterable principles of right.

We stand related to God as our Maker and Preserver, our Father and Friend, our Governor, and our covenant God in redemption through Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, commanded by the Gospel, to give him our first and great regard, our

* *Ephes. 5. 1.* † *John 3. 3.*

supreme affection. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all mind. This is the first and great commandment."*

We stand related to mankind, as branches of the same common stock, as being possessed of the same nature, as occupying the same place in the scale of being, having the same power of intelligence and feeling, the same desire for happiness, redeemed by the same blood, enlightened and influenced by the same Spirit, and called to the same hope of immortality and glory. We are, therefore, commanded to give them our strong affection. "And the second" commandment "is like unto the first." "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."†

To all conditions, states, ranks and orders in human society, the obligations of the Gospel extend themselves. Rulers and subjects, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies, acquaintances and strangers, masters and servants, and ministers and people, have rules laid down for them in the Gospel, perfectly adapted to the places which they severally fill. And were the Gospel universally obeyed, our world would be as completely happy as the present natural state of things would admit. Then Rulers would rule with diligence, justice and mercy ;

* *Mat.* 22, 37, 38.

† *Mat.* 22, 39, 40.

and subjects would obey with cheerfulness. Then husbands would be attentive and tender ; and wives would be faithful and prudent. Then parents would be affectionate, discreet and just, bringing up their children in the fear of God, and the admonition of divine wisdom ; and children would be humble and submissive, gladly obeying and heartily honoring their parents. Then brothers and sisters would live in the bonds of tender charity. Lasting friendship would exist between friends, and reconciliation take place between enemies. Strangers would behave respectfully, and be treated with hospitality ; and neighbors would live in friendly intercourse, peace and harmony. Masters would treat their servants as brethren ; and servants obey their masters with fidelity, doing service heartily as unto the Lord. The people would be teachable, receiving the word of God with meekness ; and ministers would be zealous and diligent, faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God. The knowledge of God would cover the face of the earth, as the waters do the great deep.—Peace would spread her balmy wings over the world. “ Nations would beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks : nation would not lift up sword against nation ; neither would they learn war any more.”

The spirit of forgiveness is highly important to the world. For when injuries are retaliated with

injuries, there is a succession of crimes, attended with an increasing vengeance, spreading horror and desolation over the earth. The Christian Religion is remarkable with respect to this. While heathen moralists hold up forgiveness of injuries as meanness of spirit, the Gospel points to it as the way to glory, making it a condition of pardon from God.

The Gospel is incomparably excellent, on account of the purity of its moral obligations. Where shall we find any thing to compare with it? What moralist, unassisted by inspiration, has given such excellent lessons of moral duties, as we find in our Lord's Sermon on the mount, or in the last part of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans ?

Indeed, in whatever point of light we may consider the Gospel as a system of morality, we shall find it altogether excellent ; pure, extensive and perfect ; worthy of the God of absolute holiness. " Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise ;" we find them all in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our admiration and esteem of the morality of the Gospel, can never exceed the bounds of propriety. It has been held in the highest veneration by the wisest and best of men in all ages of

the Christian Church ; and it will be held in the highest veneration to the end of time. Even the enemies of Christ have been constrained to write eulogiums on the Gospel, on account of the excellence of its moral obligations. *

“ All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”* This single precept exhausts the subject of moral obligations between man and man, and is worthy of all praise. There is nothing like this in the compositions of human reason : it infinitely transcends them in excellence and worth. There is no relation in which man can stand to his fellow beings, which is not embraced by it ; neither is there any case, however difficult, which the meanest understanding is not able to determine by this divine Rule of right. The truth of this obligation is so evident, that none can doubt it ; and its application so easy, that none can mistake it. To determine our duty by this Rule, we have nothing more to do, in all cases whatever, than to exchange places, in supposition, with our fellow beings ; and then to ask ourselves, what we would have them do in like circumstances unto us : that we are to do unto them.

How excellent is the Gospel ! How deeply impressed with the moral character of God ! Is not this impression the highest recommendation of Christianity, and a very convincing evidence of its Divine origin ?

* *Mat.* 7. 12.

ESSAY XIX.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Proportion of Christianity.

PROPORTION in Religion, may be considered in three points of light. First, as it respects the principles of Religion considered among themselves ; secondly, as it respects the nature of obligation, arising from those principles, considered in relation to the nature of man ; and thirdly, as it regards the measure of obligation, respecting each individual.

Proportion in the first point of light, is an agreement, a connection and dependence, between the principles which constitute the system of Religion. This we have already noticed in a former Essay, where we considered Christianity as a body of divinity.

Proportion in the second point of light, is an agreement, a similarity, between the nature of man, and the nature of obligation ; in which every duty arises from the relations of human nature to God and his creatures. This is holiness, which we considered in the last Essay.

Proportion in the third point of light, is an agreement, a similarity, between the measure of obliga-

tion, and the capacities of every individual. This is also holiness: but we wish to make a few observations upon it in particular, as it sets the Christian Religion in a very pleasing and favorable light.

Perhaps; we shall not err, if we divide capacities into natural and acquired. There is in every man a natural capacity; a certain measure of intellectual and moral ability. This measure can be vastly increased by improvement. This increase of ability, is acquired capacity.

Now the natural capacities of men are vastly different, and their acquired capacities, perhaps, are still more so. That measure of intellectual and moral power, bestowed by nature on one man, may exceed, by a thousand times, the like power, bestowed on another man. The opportunities and means of improvement, in knowledge and virtue, are also very different. Hence a great difference must exist between men, with regard to acquired abilities. Therefore, among an infinite number of reasonable beings, each differing from every one of the rest in ability, there must be an endless variety of capacities, which cannot be governed by the same measure of obligation. Between the soul of one of the lowest among mankind, who barely possesses rationality, and the soul of an eminent philosopher, there is an infinite disproportion. It is not possible, that the same extent of knowledge, of faith, and of virtue, can be reasonably required of these two men.

Now the Gospel is accommodated, in great wisdom and goodness, to human nature in this respect. There is a relative fitness in it; an exact proportion between power and obligation, between duty and the ability to perform it. Of him who has received much, much is required; and of him who has received little, little is required. Our Lord has taught us this doctrine of proportion, in a very distinct and particular manner, in the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Gospel by Saint Marthew, in the parable of the talents. He who has received one talent, is required to improve one talent, and no more. He who has received five talents, is required to improve five talents, and no more. And he who has received ten talents, is required to improve not less than ten talents.

This sets the Gospel in a very favorable light. By this doctrine Christianity represents the Governor of the world as dispensing the distributions of justice and grace, in infinite wisdom, goodness and equity. This doctrine of proportional economy, represents God as a wise and good father, equally concerned for the welfare of all his offspring, and requiring each one to be wise and good, in proportion to his ability.

In another respect, this proportion of evangelical obligation, places the Gospel in a very pleasing light. By it Christianity is calculated to unite the world in one great social body; by holding up

each individual as being important in his place ; by giving encouragement to all, and withholding motives of pride from all. The primitive Church is described by Saint Paul, in all the beauty of this proportional economy ; where, in the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians, he exhibits God as working all diversity of operations, in all differences of administrations, dividing to every man severally as he will. Here all Christians are considered as being assimilated into one body, partaking of the same nature, and called to answer the same great purpose, the happiness of the whole. The meanest Christian who is faithful to the grace given to him, is not to be despised by the greatest, neither is he to be discouraged, because he does not possess the abilities given to others. The greatest is not to be vain and proud, on account of his abilities and virtues, for what has he which he has not received ? and for what shall he not account unto God his Master ? Every man is hereby taught “ not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Peace among men, and glory to God, must result from a Religion so happy in its tendency.

Thus the Gospel, impressed with the Divine character in the doctrine of proportional obligation, and so happily calculated to unite mankind and extend the peace of society and the glory of God, is wor-

thy of our highest esteem and firmest faith, as a system of Religion, the evidence of the divinity of which, accumulates as we advance in the examination of it.

ESSAY XX.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Energy of the Christian Religion.

ENERGY as it applies to the Gospel, arises from a combination of causes. The Spirit of God is the prime efficient cause; motives are secondary causes.

Energy as it respects the first, is the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit on the soul, restoring it to moral agency, and enabling it to perceive and feel the truth of God. The consideration of this we shall refer to another place.

The energy of the Gospel as it regards motives, is the weight or power of evidence applied to the mind, producing conviction of religious truth, and the force of interest applied to the heart, and inlisting the passions in the cause of truth.

We discover in man a faculty of intelligence, a power of sensibility, and a self-determining principle. Without the first, truth could not be discovered; without the second, it could not be felt.

loved or hated; and without the last, there could be no virtue or vice, as there could be no voluntary action in receiving, or rejecting truth, either as a principle of faith, or a rule of practice.

Therefore the energy of Religion, ought to be proportioned to the powers of human nature; it ought to be fully sufficient to overcome the fallacious motives to vice; but it ought not to carry irresistibility with it, because then it would destroy the purpose it is intended to effect—the restoration of man to order and happiness, in the possession and exercise of true virtue. For actions good abstractly considered, arising from an irresistible impulse, cannot have the nature of personal virtue in them. Moral excellence not being found in mechanical actions, and all actions resulting from uncontrollable necessity being purely mechanical, and inconsistent with the moral powers of man, it seems impossible for our salvation to be effected, by the application of an irresistible energy. The application of such an energy would destroy, not save us.

It is likewise certain, that an energy insufficient to overcome the delusive motives to error and vice, would be equally ineffectual.

Now as God is perfectly acquainted with the nature of man, we have a right to expect, that Religion coming from him, will be sufficiently energetic to effect our salvation, but not to destroy our

moral agency. And upon examination we shall find Christianity to be such.

The Gospel is gloriously powerful to reclaim the erring mind, and wayward heart of man ; to rectify his thoughts, govern his passions, and reform his life ; and, by reducing him to a state of order, to lead him to peace and happiness, to dignity, glory, and life everlasting. The motives to faith in the Christian Religion, are uncommonly strong. The weight of evidence in favor of the Gospel, is abundantly sufficient to produce conviction full and perfect, in every man who attentively considers it, without having wilfully determined to remain in unbelief. This will be evident unto us, when we reflect that no reason can be given, why God should not bestow on man a Revelation of his will ; that such a Revelation is probable ; that there is nothing in Christianity contrary to the nature of God ; that it bears throughout a very striking impression of the Divine hand ; that it is attended with positive incontestable proofs of its divine origin, addressed to the senses of mankind ; and that these evidences are conveyed down to posterity in the Gospel, in such a way as not to admit the possibility of deception. But as this is the subject of these Essays, and as it is hoped, it will appear evident from them, that the weight of evidence in favor of our Religion, is abundantly sufficient to produce unshaken faith

in all reasonable men, nothing more with respect to this will be particularly offered here.

The motives of the Gospel addressed to the heart, are altogether powerful, and nothing can resist them but blindness, and absolute obstinacy of will. If any thing can consistently with the nature of Divine Providence, interest the heart, engage our natural passions, fear, hatred, hope, and love, in the cause of virtue, it is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we need assurances of Divine mercy, to encourage us to hope for success in our attempt to be religious? Do we need assurances that we shall find justification from our sins, and an inheritance among the Saints in light? Behold the assurances of Divine mercy in the Gospel! Whichever way we turn, we are met by such assurances, expressed in the strongest terms, and confirmed by actions most unequivocal.

Is it necessary to our becoming virtuous, that our indignation should be raised against sin? What is calculated to raise our indignation against sin, like the consequence of sin seen in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ? There God has manifested the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and its dire effects. If the Son of God suffered so greatly for sin not his own, what must be the misery of the sinner suffering for his own transgressions?

Is it necessary that our fear should be called forth, and put into activity, in the cause of virtue?

The Gospel is divinely powerful to this purpose. It presents God unto us, as the God of justice and power unlimited ; whose will is self efficient ; who can act immediately on our souls, and excite in them unbounded pain or pleasure, as he shall see fit ; and who can arm in a moment all nature against us. It exhibits this God as denouncing everlasting vengeance against the transgressor.

Is it requisite, that our innate aversion to misery, and our inextinguishable desire for happiness, our abhorrence to contempt and shame, and our love of glory and immortality, should be called into action in favor of Godliness ? The Gospel is remarkable for its energy in this respect. Heaven and hell are opened before us : all their weight is thrown into the scale in favor of Religion. All the pleasures of Paradise—honors coming from God—and existence perpetuated in a state of happiness and glory forever—are promised as the portion of the godly ; while all the horrors and miseries of hell without end, are threatened as the recompense of the ungodly.

Is it of infinite consequence to us, to see the law of God reduced to practice ? to see obedience exemplified in the actions of a perfect life ? Behold this carried to the utmost extent, in the life of Jesus Christ !

But to give all these motives more weight on the springs of action, is it necessary, that we should

have a sensible manifestation of the moral character of God, particularly of his justice and mercy ? In this respect the Gospel is mighty to move.

It points us to Calvary, and astonishes us with displays of mercy and justice divine.

Man was a criminal before God ; the law cursed him with death ; and Justice demanded his blood. His transgressions had ruined his moral powers : from imbecility obedience had become impossible. How much more so, satisfaction for past transgression ! Mercy beheld the wretch in this hopeless condition ; her bowels of compassion moved toward him ; she threw herself between him and justice ; and while with one hand she covered his head from the uplifted sword of Divine vengeance, with the other she offered to justice a perfect satisfaction in the blood of the Son of God, voluntarily offered for the sins of miserable man !

“ God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—
 “ Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”
 In the exemplification of these great truths, Mercy poured forth the riches of love unbounded, in the blood of the Redeemer ; while justice was manifested in awful pomp, and tremendous glory. He spoke : “ Awake, O my sword against the man

who is my fellow !” The heavens were astonished, and the earth confounded ! The sun veiled his face, and darkness swallowed up the world ! The pillars of heaven did tremble, and the strong foundations of the earth were moved !

On Calvary the Governor of the world, by gloriously displaying his moral character, giving the most astonishing proof of unlimited mercy, and the strongest evidence of inexorable justice, armed the Gospel with mighty energy. “He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us !” Was there ever mercy like this ! “He spared not his own Son,” but punished him for the sins of the world, for which he had undertaken to answer. Was there ever justice like this !

Religion armed with such energetic motives as these must be mighty to command. Its language must be felt by all who attend unto it. “Let the wicked return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and unto our God, for he can abundantly pardon !” But let the incorrigible sinner fear, “for our God is a consuming fire !”

Nevertheless, the energy of the Gospel, however great, is not irresistible ; the application of which depending, in general, on our own will. The Gospel produces its desired effect, as it is applied to the mind and heart. A mechanical instrument, designed to move a body of a given weight, will not move it, unless applied unto it, although its

mechanical power may be a hundred times greater than the resistance of the body intended to be moved. Now the Gospel is an instrument of our salvation. It is almighty to reclaim us when duly applied. But what effect can it have, when no application of it is made? We are affected with the motives of the Gospel, as we perceive and feel them. But can we reasonably expect to perceive and feel them, in their due extent and weight, unless we candidly consider them, and sincerely apply them to our hearts?

The promises of reward, and the threatenings of punishment, contained in the Gospel, relate chiefly to the world to come. Now the apparent distance between us and that world, gives full scope for the exercise of all our powers,—for freedom in choice, and liberty in action.‡

Thus the Religion of Jesus Christ, truly energetic, but not irresistible, admirably fitted to the constitutional powers of human nature, comes recommended unto us, as being strongly marked with the Divine character—with the goodness and wisdom of God.

ESSAY XXI.

The Impression of the Divine character in the Propriety of the conditions of Christianity.

THE obligations of the Christian Religion, seem naturally to divide themselves into three sorts ; the obligations of our moral nature ; the obligations of our condition ; and ritual obligations.

Those of the first sort, are grounded on the original relations of man. On these we have touched in the Essay on the holiness of the Gospel.

Obligations of the second kind, arise from the present condition of man as being distinguished from the condition in which he originally was : such are repentance and evangelical faith. For repentance is obligatory on such only, as are in the condition of sinners ; because it can never be required of those who have never at any time transgressed the commandments. So likewise is evangelical faith. For such faith is a firm belief in, and a cordial reception of, the Lord Jesus Christ, as Mediator between God and a sinful world.

Those of the third kind, depend entirely on the will of our great Law-giver. They have not, from the nature of things, as far as we can see, any absolute necessity in them ; yet, however, they pos-

sess a high degree of propriety : such are baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

We may call faith and repentance, the Lord's supper and baptism, conditions of Christianity ; because on the faithful performance of these duties, through the merits of Jesus Christ, salvation is promised unto us in the Gospel. Not that we are hereby exempted from moral duties ; for repentance and faith are moral duties themselves though distinguishable from moral duties originally obligatory on man. And moreover, they are necessary to the right performance of the rest of our duties. The Lord's supper and baptism being purely ritual and sometimes impracticable, may, in certain cases, be dispensed with by our gracious Law-giver : however, we ought to perform them whenever we can. But repentance and faith are indispensably necessary to all adults, coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The propriety of these conditions. How proper is the requisition of repentance ! It becomes God in the support of the honor of his government, to require the rebel sinner, to ground the weapons of his rebellion, and to return unto obedience with sincere and deep sorrow ; openly confessing and lamenting the baseness, that led him to violate the rights of God and man—to dishonor the name of his Maker—to destroy his own peace, accumulate guilt on his conscience, and ruin his moral powers—to injure the peace and prosperity of so-

ciety—to spread the contagion of rebellion among his fellow subjects—and to provoke Divine Justice to indignation.

Repentance as a condition required of us by the Gospel, is proper ; because it is necessary to our salvation. How could we be saved without repentance ? Were we delivered from the curses of the law by pardon from God, without tasting the bitterness of sin, we should plunge ourselves into the same condemnation, by the reiteration of the same crimes. It is necessary, that the love of sin should be destroyed in us, through a painful sense of the hateful nature and dire effects of it.— To detach us from sin, it is requisite for us not only to perceive, but also to feel, that we are “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” Can any thing less than the deepest remorse, harrowing up our bosoms with excruciating distress, awaken in us holy indignation against sin, and lead us to humble ourselves at the feet of divine Mercy ?

The salutary effect of repentance in a reciprocal influence between returning sinners, and the happy consequences of this influence on others, are additional considerations, which evince the propriety of this condition of the Gospel. These considerations do not, perhaps, generally affect us in proportion to their weight.

With equal propriety faith is required of us, as a condition of Salvation. For none will dispute

that if God has indeed sent his Son into the world, in the character of Mediator, it is a duty with which we cannot dispense, to believe in him as such. For this faith is evidently necessary to our acknowledging his credentials as Minister of the new covenant, and our receiving him in that character. Without such acknowledgement and reception, it is impossible for us to accede to the terms of reconciliation proposed by this Divine minister. And we ought to grant the truth of the mission of Jesus Christ, when we examine the propriety of faith, in relation to the system of Religion contained in the Gospel.

The propriety of faith will further appear from another consideration. Man as a delinquent sinner, can have no claim to righteousness. From the ruined state of his moral powers, he is utterly unable to keep the law of God, until renewed by grace. While in unbelief, he is continually becoming more and more delinquent before God.—But were it not so—were he perfectly able to discharge his original obligations, he could then do no more than his duty; he could never make any satisfaction for transgressions past. However, from blindness of mind, and a perverse disposition to be independent of God, he is tenaciously inclined, even while he seeks divine favor, to depend on his own merit. But evangelical faith lays the ax at the root of this monstrous error, this mis-

chievous evil. For such faith is a strong conviction, and a lively sense of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as the meritorious cause of justification and salvation. Thus the proud, the arrogant, the boasting pharisee, is humbled at the feet of mercy—The mighty Saul, famed in learning, and extensive in self-righteousness, through the operation of this faith prostrated at the foot of the throne of grace, disclaims all righteousness of his own, that he may be found in “the righteousness which is of God by faith.” •

We shall discover the propriety of faith, if we consider that it brings us back to the ground which we left in transgression. The truth of God is a rock, on which man, in a state of innocence, stood, and rejoiced in perfect security. But when he doubted of the firmness of this rock, he plunged himself into the abyss of sin, and was swallowed up in the floods of wo.

“Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”* “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”†

These commandments with the declarations accompanying them, rest on the same ground. They are not, as far as we can perceive, deducible

* Gen. 2. 17.

† Acts 16. 31.

from the nature of things ; but they are positive obligations, deriving all their force from the truth of God. These obligations, it is true, as they require faith in the truth of God, are of a moral nature ; but with respect to the particular objects which they present to our faith, they are undoubtedly positive. Through violation of the first, we fell into sin and death ; by obedience to the last, we rise to righteousness and life. What, therefore, can be more proper than faith ? By it we measure back our steps unto God, and receive his word as immutable truth.

This thought suggests another. Faith is the principle of all virtues. Impiety and vice, in all their forms, arise from unbelief. Virtue and piety, love to God, and benevolence to man, originate in faith. And hence we may discover, how very proper and important, is the faith of the Gospel.

With respect to the ritual institutions of the Gospel, baptism and the Lord's supper, it is very evident there is a high degree of propriety in them. Nothing can represent the things which are intended by them, with greater simplicity, and with more force.

By baptism the invigorating and cleansing influences of the Holy Spirit, are figured unto us ; while in the same ordinance, we are dedicated unto God, brought into covenant with him, and strongly bound to support the cause of Christ.

By the Lord's Supper we perpetuate the memory of that death, on which all our hopes are grounded; acknowledge our gratitude to God for his infinite love; confirm our love to Christ; and most solemnly engage to mortify the corrupt desires of the flesh.

It is very plain, without entering into any other considerations respecting these institutions, that, when taken in connection with the doctrines of the Gospel, they are highly proper, and wisely calculated to promote the salvation of mankind; and especially, when we consider them, as institutions designed to convey to posterity the positive evidence of Christianity.

In the propriety of the conditions of the Gospel, we discover the impression of the Divine character. The Religion of Jesus, corresponding with the perfections of Deity, and accommodated to the nature and circumstances of mankind, comes recommended unto us as the Religion of God.

ESSAY XXII.

The Divine character impressed on Christianity in the promise of divine aid.

FROM that character of perfect wisdom which the Deity sustains, it is rational to infer, that his plans are wise, and that the means which he em-

pleys to carry them into execution, are always sufficient for the purpose. Hence we expect to find in a Religion coming from God, a promise of divine assistance. For the condition of human nature, with respect to its moral inability to discover and properly regard the truths and obligations of Religion, with the external circumstances in which it is placed, strongly argues the necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we are led to expect, that the Divine Being, in effecting the redemption of the world, would afford unto mankind this influence, and in the communications of the purposes of his grace unto them, would give them assurances of it. For without such assurances of aid from on high, of what consequence to us would the most excellent system of Religion be?

With high expectation of the promise of assistance from heaven, we search the Scriptures, and are not disappointed. For this promise is one of the most prominent characteristics of our Holy Religion.

The holy Scriptures ascribe their origin to the Spirit of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."* And hence it is, that the Spirit of God is the prime efficient cause of the energy of Christianity. The Gospel, in the hand of this Spirit, is powerful to reclaim the erring sons of

men; to impress them with the importance of Religion; to call them to the exercise of righteousness, and the possession of joy unspeakable, and life eternal in the kingdom of God.

Christianity, framed with a particular view to that state of moral death in which the children of men lay, contains a remedy fully adequate to remove this evil, in the impulse of life given by the touches of the Spirit of grace. In this excellence of the Christian Religion, we see it distinguished from every other religion, and deeply impressed with the characteristics of infinite goodness and wisdom.

Under the influence of the Spirit of God, according to the Gospel, we have received a degree of moral life, and have been made capable of embracing and improving religious truth. This Spirit is promised to us as the Spirit truth; as the great source of information respecting God, and the things of God.

When man, through this medium of divine communication, discovers that the curses of the violated law, are charged with fiery indignation against him, and resolves to flee from the wrath to come, what a multitude of difficulties and obstructions appear before him! How arduous the work of subduing an evil heart of unbelief! How difficult the work of reducing to order passions long accustomed to perversion and misrule, and of reforming habits of

vice and impiety ! What care and indefatigable labor are here necessary ? And who without the aid of the Holy Spirit, is able to accomplish this ? Nothing can be of more consequence to man in this case, than an assurance of assistance from the Spirit of infinite power and grace.

To highten the distress of such a character, conscience alarmed with the denunciations of the law of God, thunders its curses in his ears, and pierces his heart with the excruciating sense of remorse ! Apprehensions of vengeance fill him with dismay—Standing on the borders of despair, O miserable man ! what canst thou do ? From whence canst thou derive courage and strength ? The powers of darkness within thee, thou canst not scatter with the arm of thy reason. Thou canst not turn the impetuous current of thy nature forcing along the channel of a corrupt heart, and rushing down the precipices of evil habits ! The only hope which remaineth for thee, is the promise of aid in the Holy Spirit. Let thy heart embrace this promise ; and thou shalt rejoice in peace and safety.

Of what infinite value is this promise of divine assistance to the repenting sinner ! Under the happy influence of it, he is enabled to return unto God in true repentance, and in humble hope to seek his pardoning mercy. Enabled by the Spirit of truth, to “believe that Jesus is the Christ,” he feels the transforming power of divine grace, and exults in

the possession of a new nature. Conscience is delivered from a sense of guilt; passion is reduced to the government of reason; and order is established in the soul of the believer.

Introduced by this happy change "into the kingdom of God's dear Son," it becomes his duty to glorify God, and secure his own interests in eternity. He is required to complete the reformation of his heart and life; to mortify the deeds of the body; and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But to effect this purpose, the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary; and the promise of it, is well calculated to inspire him with hope, courage and strength.

Among the most important duties of man, is devotion; which, while it affords the best resources of strength for the accomplishment of the purposes of Religion, inspires the soul with the noblest ideas and purest affections, and communicates the sweetest pleasures to the heart of man. But without the aid of the Holy Spirit, can we perform this duty aright? can we fall at the feet of the great Eternal! and worship him with all the soul? can we attain unto the right performance of this highest of all duties, and most pleasurable of all exercises? Can we, without divine aid, by repeated approaches unto the Divine Being, acquire the perfection of our nature, and the consummation of our happiness, in a conformity to his moral perfec-

tions? The assistance of the Holy Ghost, in this respect, is absolutely necessary.

Possessed of a conformity to the moral perfections of God, we are qualified for the enjoyment "of the inheritance of the saints in light." But before we can enter upon the possession of this inheritance, we must navigate the boisterous ocean of life, and shoot the gulph of death! In this voyage of so much danger, and of such infinite consequence, how important is the agency of the Holy Spirit!

The Gospel gives us the promise of this Spirit as our guide and comforter. "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."* "And I will pray the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter, that he may abide with you or ever."†

Thus we see, that the aid of the Spirit is commensurate with the necessity and wants of human nature; and the Gospel which contains the promise of this aid is strongly impressed with the character of the God of wisdom and goodness. Indeed the promise of divine assistance, is the glory of the Christian Religion. What would the Gospel be without it? A beautiful system of Religion—but unanimated, a mere dead letter—an admirable body of divinity—but destitute of a soul.—This Promise of the Father gives substance, fulness, life and energy to the Religion of the blessed Jesus.

* John 16. 14.

† John 14. 16.

Perhaps it may not be amiss to remark here, that the operation of the Holy Ghost on the minds of men are various. This assistance is communicated in different ways, through different means, and sometimes, perhaps, without any means at all. But it should never be forgotten, that the chief channel of this communication, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On this very account, it ought to be highly estimated; being so greatly distinguished, and so deeply impressed with the Divine hand.

ESSAY XXIII.

The Impression of the Divine character on Christianity, in the Doctrine of Providence as taught in the Gospel.

FROM the moral character of God, we infer this doctrine. The consideration of the goodness and justice of God, seems sufficient grounded for our faith, that he takes on himself the care of the government of the world; and that he is constantly employed in making suitable provisions for every living thing, since every living thing is the effect of his almighty hand. This seems the more reasonable, as from the infinite nature of his attributes, he is perfectly free from labour or weariness,

in the most unintermitted operations in the administration of his Government.

But is not the doctrine of Providence, deduced from the moral character of God, strongly confronted by the present state of the world? Can a world like ours, full of disorder and misery, and where death reigns without control, be under the government of God, who is infinitely wise and good? We must confess, that when we draw conclusions respecting Divine Providence, from nature only, we find ourselves involved in great difficulty, and much uncertainty. The moral character of God argues in favor of this doctrine; and the disorder of the world seems to argue against it. It must indeed be true, that the evidence of the truth of this doctrine, which reason alone can collect, is superior to the objections against it: yet how few, who are guided by human wisdom only, think correctly on this important subject? Natural Religion, though she here scatters a few rays of light on our path, leaves us much in the dark respecting the Providence of God.

But here the Gospel comes to our relief. It sets the doctrine of Providence in the clearest and fairest light. Our doubts are removed as soon as we peruse the sacred Page, and receive the information which it gives. We there learn, that the Government of God extends to all, and is applied with the utmost care and wisdom—with care pro-

portionate to the value of each individual, in the estimation of the Divine Mind—and with wisdom, in perfectly suiting laws to the different natures of created beings.

The Providence of God is extended unto all. The amazing frame of nature, with its innumerable hosts of living creatures, is under the Government of the Almighty. “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over all.”*

The care of Providence is proportionate to the value of each individual being in the estimate of the Divine Mind. “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.”† God cares for the fowls of the air—but more for man, especially for the humble, who trust in his name, and sincerely fear and love him.

The Government of God is applied with wisdom, in perfectly suiting laws to the different natures of created beings. Matter is governed by absolute irresistible laws; and hence so much regularity and accuracy, in the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. But reasonable creatures, being endued with liberty of action, are governed by laws suitable

* Psalm. 109. 19.

† Luke. 12. 6, 7.

to their nature, manifested to their understandings, and applied, by proper considerations, to their powers of feeling—laws which they are bound to obey, but which they have power to violate.

This sweeps away at once, the objections against Providence, arising from the disordered state of the world. For we learn from the Gospel, that through the abuse of this power of liberty, sin came into the world; and misery and death by sin. Misery is the direct consequence of violating the law of God. Therefore, natural evil, though positive disorder, is relative order. When considered abstractly in itself, it is disorder; but when considered in relation to the transgression of the law, it is order. It is just and right, and necessary in the nature of things, that the transgressor should be miserable. Hence, properly speaking, there is no other disorder in the world, but that of moral evil. And, excepting this disorder of moral evil, arising entirely from free agents abusing their liberty, and for that reason not attributable to Divine Providence, “whatever is, is right.”

Moreover, the Gospel assures us, that Providence has adopted means to restore the world to righteousness and happiness; that these means are now in operation; and that the time shall come, when the restitution of all things shall take place. We there learn that the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, which God has established in the world,

by the glorious ministration of righteousness, shall have no end, but shall overturn all opposition, and increase until it shall fill the world; and that, when the fulness of time it come for the accomplishment of the purpose of God respecting the restoration of the world to order and happiness, the Almighty will say : "Behold, I make all things new."*

The doctrine of Providence, as taught in the Christian Religion, is calculated to inspire us, with the strongest affections, and warmest gratitude, for the Governor of the world. For he is there represented as holding the administration of the Divine government in his hands, for the good of his subjects; as the Father of men, tenderly concerned for their welfare, doing good to all men, but espically to them who fear him. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."†

The dispensations of Providence of an afflictive nature, are not the vindictive punishments of Justice; but they are the disciplinary administrations of Mercy. They are the well directed chastisements of our heavenly Father. He designs by them, to teach us, the vanity of the world; to draw off our affections from earthly enjoyments; and to inspire us with a longing desire for the possession of that better world, which he has pro-

* *Rev.* 21. 5.

† *Psal.* 103. 23.

mised to his saints. To teach us humility, patience, meekness, submission and resignation ; to fill our hearts with the tenderest compassion for the miserable ; and to prepare us to meet death with that greatness of soul, which is suitable to our high appointment to immortality and eternal life ; to effect these gracious purposes, our heavenly Father administers unto us the cup of affliction. But in the midst of the sorest afflictions, which, under the direction of his Providence, overtake us in our pilgrimage below, he gives us assurance of his love. " Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Thus he would have us believe, that the distressing dispensations of Providence are tokens of his fatherly regard for us.

The influence of the doctrine of Providence, on the happiness of the virtuous, must be great ; and the restraint, which it lays on the vicious, must be attended with beneficial consequences to the peace and prosperity of society. By it the blessings of this life, are more than doubled to the good man. For he beholds them as tokens of Divine favor ; and derives from a grateful sense of obligation for them, the sweetest and purest pleasure. On Providence he rests himself and all his interests. It is a rock on which he stands, wrapped up in security and peace ; beholding the caprices of fortune, the vicissitudes of life, and the rage of his enemies.

with composure ; and smiles to see their vain efforts curbed, by an Almighty hand engaged to defend him forever. When the storms of life gather around about him, and adversity discharges on him a shower of evil, he feels himself inclosed, as it were, in a coat of mail ; while he hears the voice of him, who holds the destinies of man in his hand, addressing him thus : “ Be still, and know that I am God ! ” “ Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.”

Human society is indebted unto the doctrine of Providence, for the great benefits of order, peace, and worldly comforts, which are enjoyed in consequence of the restraint which it lays upon bad men. It frequently deters the proud, the ambitious, and the revengeful, from carrying into execution their designs of oppression and cruelty. They see in this doctrine the Almighty frowning upon them, and holding a flaming sword over their heads.— Their hearts fail them for fear, and their arms fall nerveless, at this sight of the threatening aspect of Providence. Our world, as it now is, is constantly exhibiting before us scenes of injustice, cruelty, and blood ; but, were evil and ungodly men free from all restraint from the fear of Providence, it would be infinitely worse. If the passions of men were let loose—they would drive peace from every corner of the earth—They would fill the world with the utmost confusion, horror, and distress—

And, in a few years, they would almost, if not entirely, exterminate the race of men.

Thus the Christian Religion, which confirms the best intimations of reason respecting Providence, and clears away all objections against it, possesses an advantage over every other religion which has appeared in the world; by affording an inexhaustible source of consolation to the good; and by presenting a powerful obstruction to the evil machinations of the bad. And hereby Christianity is set in a light divinely pleasing. We clearly discover on it the impression of the hand of God. We here see in the doctrine of Providence as taught by the Gospel, bearing strong marks of the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the Creator and Governor of the world.

Let us now turn our attention, for a moment, to the observations which we have made on the internal constitution of the Christian Religion. We have seen convincing proofs of its Divine nature: we have seen the glorious character of God, impressed upon it. We have seen in its laws and doctrines, such a striking resemblance of the Divine Being, that we cannot, without great perversion, attribute it to any other cause than that of supernatural inspiration. We have seen this resemblance, in the perspicuity and sublimity of the Religion of Christ; in the consistence of its doctrines, and the holiness of its precepts; in its proportion, and energy; and in the propriety of its

conditions, the promise of Divine aid, and the doctrine of Providence. It has fully borne the test of the second Rule, which we proposed to apply unto it.

Let the reader pursue the subject in his meditations. Let him extend his thoughts, and go into a particular and detailed consideration of those objects, which have been held to view. Let him scrutinize, in the severest manner, all the internal parts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And we assure him, that although it will cost him a little labor, yet he will be more than paid for his pains in examining this glorious subject. Light will increase as he advances: evidence of the truth of Christianity will be accumulated. It is true, the cursory view, we have taken of the subject before us, is abundantly sufficient to convince the inquirer after truth—But the particular consideration we here recommend may do more: it may warm his heart, and lead him not only to believe, but also to love, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To walk in its precepts, to catch its spirit, to be assimilated to the moral excellence of its Holy Author, is our great duty, and our glorious privilege.

ESSAY XXIV.

The Testimony of Christ and his Apostles an Evidence of the Truth of Christianity:

THE Christian Religion, by its internal evidences, is strongly recommended unto us. The excellence of its nature, as being free from every thing objectionable, and containing every thing, as far as we can see, necessary to a perfect system of Religion, exalts it above all human productions. For this reason we ought to receive it; to believe it firmly, and to practise it cheerfully.

But to remove all suspicion, all possible ground for doubt, God has added external evidences, most of which are of an incontestable nature, possessing the properties of demonstration. Such, indeed, from the goodness of God, we have some reason to expect, inasmuch as Christianity lays claim, not only to the character of truth, but also to that of being a Revelation from heaven. For although its internal perfection, is above the power of human nature; yet, to remove all ground for unbelief, some external evidences seem necessary; more especially, because the bulk of mankind do not so readily discover the weight of arguments,

drawn from the nature of theology, as they do the force of secular demonstrations.

We now come, therefore, to apply to the Religion of Jesus Christ, our third Rule. “A Revelation from God should be attended with external positive, incontestable evidence, addressed to the senses of mankind.”

Jesus Christ testified unto the world, that he came from God ; and that the doctrines he taught were the doctrines of God. The Apostles also testified, that they were sent by him to declare unto the world, what they had seen and heard concerning him ; and that he had given unto them his Holy Spirit, as an infallible guide to all truth—that they might preach, without any danger of error, the doctrines of his Holy Gospel. They confirmed this testimony—They gave demonstrations of its truth ; they produced the credentials of their mission—in miracles and prophecies.

We shall not, in this Essay, enter on the consideration of these glorious demonstrations, these divine credentials of their high commission. But we will consider several particulars which render the testimony of Jesus Christ and his Apostles worthy of credit, exclusive of miracles and prophecies.

And first, the character of Jesus Christ, and that of his Apostles. The character of Christ shines with unequalled lustre. Such an exam-

ple of moral excellence, the world never saw, neither before or since, as it saw in the life of the Holy Jesus. Such sincerity and integrity, such modesty and meekness, such zeal for God, and such love for man, were never seen in any other person. His life was a perfect transcript of the law of God. And is not the testimony of such a person, independent of every other consideration, highly worthy of credit?

Does not the confession of his enemies establish the credibility of his testimony? "Never man spake like this man?" He astonished the world with the profundity of his wisdom; and with the irresistibility of his arguments, he confounded his adversaries. Never was any man so free from all tincture of enthusiasm and superstition, or so full of all goodness, as was Jesus Christ. And is not his testimony worthy of credit?

The character of the Apostles. Where shall we find men, whose testimony is worthy of more credit? Is it possible to find men, who possess a greater fund of truth, plain, open, honest truth? It is true, as men, they were not free from imperfections. But even these seem to increase the credibility of their testimony, in giving an occasion to discover the great ingenuousness of their hearts, in so honestly relating even their own faults.

They possessed a very high sense of justice and propriety, sweetly mingled with unbounded ben-

evolence and compassion toward mankind. Did they not exercise an uncommon degree of disinterested good will for their fellow beings? What extraordinary distress did they pass through, with unyielding fortitude, to do good to the sons of men! With a mind unruffled, they bore all manner of evils; and retained an ardent charity even for their persecutors! Certainly the testimony of such men, is worthy of credit.

Secondly, the testimony of Jesus Christ and his Apostles is worthy of credit, on account of the motives by which they were influenced. These motives were pure. They testified that they were sent of God, and they preached the Gospel unto the world, to discharge their duty, to glorify God, and to promote the happiness and salvation of mankind. If these were their motives, their testimony is worthy of credit; and that they were, we have no reason to doubt.

Look the world over, and attentively consider all the impostors which have appeared in it. You will find, that all their motives centred in self-interest. The acquisition of a great name, the enjoyment of the pleasures and honors of the world, and the possession of wealth and power, were the objects they had in view. Hence they flattered the passions of men. They made their way to the great and the honorable, to the rich and the pow-

erful, by a smooth and easy ascent, by soothing and flattering their ruling passions.

But the way which Jesus Christ and his Apostles took, was directly the reverse of this. They leveled all the force of their doctrines against the corrupt passions of the human heart, without distinction. They preached the most mortifying precepts. They reduced all men to a mortifying level—to the condition of sinners, “children of wrath.” The blessings they pronounced, descended on the heads of the humble, the poor in spirit, and the pure in heart. But they reserved the curses of God, for the vain, and the proud; for the great and the mighty ones of the earth, who loved riches and pleasures, honors and power, more than God. Could such men as these be impostors? It is impossible. They were men of sincerity and truth; and as such they are worthy of credit.

But thirdly, this will further appear, if we consider the prospects they had before them. What were these prospects? With respect to the world to come, they were truly glorious. They saw in the promise of God, crowns and kingdoms immortal!

But regarding this world, nothing could be more gloomy and discouraging, than what was full in their view—persecution, distress, and death, in their worst forms! Through these their way lay

to that heavenly glory unto which they aspired.—The loss of all things they held most dear on earth, they had reason to expect, would be the consequence of preaching the gospel.

Jesus Christ foresaw, and frequently declared, that the men of the world would persecute him, deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles, and put him to a dreadful and shameful death. He assured his Apostles, that they should be violently persecuted by ungodly men. He said unto them: “They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake.” “Some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.”* “Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service.” ‡

But nothing could deter these resolute men.—The fullest conviction of the truth of the Gospel, and the celestial glory which they had in view, inspired them with more than mortal courage. Neither “tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword,” was able to prevent them from accomplishing the great work they had undertaken—from preaching

* *Luke*, 21. 12, 16, 17.

‡ *John* 16. 2.

the Gospel of Christ. "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, was able" to stop them in their glorious race, or "to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, men of such excellent character, influenced by such pure motives, undaunted with such prospects before them, and persevering in publishing the doctrines of the Gospel untill they fell martyrs to its truth, are worthy of the highest esteem; and the credibility of their testimony can hardly be rated too high. Can any suppose, that their word is not worthy of credit, unless at the same time, they suppose them to be insane? But this supposition will not be admitted as having the least shadow of truth in it, by any but those who are themselves insane. For where can we find the least mark of insanity, or even of enthusiasm, in the first Teachers of Christianity? Are insane persons under the influence of motives of such purity? Do they maintain a character so excellent and praise worthy? Besides, is it not impossible that so many insane persons should so perfectly agree in their testimony? Which of the Apostles ever contradicted himself, or any of his fellow Apostles? They always maintained an unity of testimony.

The weight of evidence, in favor of the credibility of the testimony under consideration, may be increased by considering the place where, the time when, and the persons to whom, this testimony was given. But we shall leave the reader, to extend his reflections to these subjects; and we shall close this Essay with the following remark. If the testimony of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, did not interfere with the passions of men, it never would be called in question by any one. And we challenge the world to produce any one, of any age or nation, the credibility of whose testimony is greater than theirs.

ESSAY XXV.

The nature and character of true miracles.

ALMIGHTY God has impressed certain principles on nature, under the operation of which, constant and certain effects are produced. Some of these are known to us, as the established laws of the material world.

We can have no doubt, that God can suspend the operation of these laws, so as to prevent their natural effects; or that he can give a new impulse

to nature, so as to produce effects, which would not result from the operation of the originally established laws of creation.

Now we conceive, that miracles take place in consequence of the suspension of the established operations of nature, or of the operation of some new principle or impulse given, for a limited time, unto nature by the hand of God.

There is, therefore, nothing in the nature of miracles inconsistent or contradictory. For it is as easy, and as consistent with the Attributes of Deity, to suspend the operations of nature, to give them a new direction, or to produce extraordinary effects by an immediate impulse of his hand, as it was to create the world, with all its properties, laws and operations.

But how shall we know a true miracle? This question requires some caution in examining it.—For we apprehend, that much evil has resulted from attempting to examine it on physical principles. We know so little of the powers of nature, and of the faculties of unembodied spirits, that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine what may, or what may not, be done by these powers and faculties; so as to free ourselves from error, and to ascertain on physical principles, those operations which are truly miraculous.

Is it then impossible for us to know real miracles? By no means. The difficulty does not lie

in the nature of the question, but in the method of examining it. Were a philosopher to attempt to determine the physical and moral powers of a human soul, from the essence or substantial principle of spirit, he would find himself in the dark ; because he could form no idea, at least no correct idea, of the substance of spirit, from which his arguments must be drawn. But this darkness would vanish from around him, on his attempting to determine the spiritual nature of the soul from its known properties. So likewise, if we attempt to determine, what works are truly miraculous, from the physical nature of miracles, we shall find ourselvss in perplexity ; but if we attempt to determine, what actions have the nature of miracles from the characteristic marks of real miracles, our perplexity will vanish : we shall find the subject plain and easy.

What then are the characteristic marks of a genuine miracle ? A genuine miracle is a work—manifestly above all human power—wrought for some great and good purpose—free from all just suspicion of diabolical agency—and addressed to the senses of mankind.

A miracle is a work manifestly above all human power. It carries with it such undoubted evidence of its superiority to the power of man, as to produce immediate conviction in the mind of the candid observer, and always to bear the severest investigation.

A great many singular and strange performances, are frequently played off, by the cunning and sleight of men. But these bear not the most distant resemblance to real miracles. The tricks and feats of the juggler, however they may surprise and astonish the unthinking, require nothing more than human agency to perform them. But a miracle, free from all dark deceitfulness and insignificance, is so manifestly superior to all human power, as to leave no room for doubt; as in the miracle recorded in the following words. "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, inso-much that the ship was covered with the waves." "Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"*

A miracle is a work wrought for some great and good purpose. We have no reason to believe, that the Almighty would interrupt the order and operations of nature, for any insignificant purpose. If he arrest nature in her course, it will be to effect a purpose of great magnitude, highly beneficial to the subjects of his kingdom. The interests of time alone, we can hardly believe, are sufficiently important to call forth the energy of the Divine hand, to break in upon the established laws of creation. But the interests of eternity are of

* *Mat. 8. 24, 26, 27.*

such magnitude, as to afford a sufficient reason for the operation of miracles. To call the attention of mankind to the doctrines of natural religion, and to afford proof of such as are revealed; to give them the enjoyment of eternal happiness, in the exercise of obedience, and the possession of holiness, is of infinite consequence to the world.— Hence we conclude, that a miracle is an action good in itself, and great and good in its design.

Therefore, a miracle is a work free from all just suspicion of diabolical agency. For an operation good in itself, and great and good in its design, cannot be a work of satan. That utter hatred of all righteousness, which ever actuates the prince of darkness, renders it impossible for him to do any thing good. Had he natural power to work miracles, which may with some reason be doubted, he never would exert that power to produce miraculous effects, for the purpose of enforcing the obligations of natural Religion, or of established revealed doctrines of moral excellence.

And lastly, a miracle is a work addressed to the senses of mankind. Without this, of what use could miracles be? Conviction of the Truth of Religion, can be effected by miracles, only when they are wrought in the presence of such as are intended to be convinced, or by the indubitable testimony of those in whose presence they have been wrought.

This address to the senses of mankind by miracles, in attestation of the Truth of Religion, we may be assured, will not be attended with any concealment of any part of the operation, or with any dark unintelligible language or apparatus ; all of which might create suspicion, or leave room for distrust, in the minds of beholders. For when the God of truth and sincerity, stretches out his hand to show wonders in confirmation of Religion, he will attach nothing to their operation, which will render them suspected.

Whenever an operation bearing the foregoing marks, takes place, we may be sure, that it is a work of the omnipotent God. Every action which is manifestly above all human power, wrought for some great and good purpose, free from all just suspicion of diabolical agency, and addressed to the senses of mankind in an intelligible manner, has the character of a genuine miracle, and it must have its nature too.

ESSAY XXVI.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament, demonstrate the truth of the Christian Religion, because they are genuine.

THERE is no evidence of the Truth of Religion more conclusive, than the operation of miracles ; because the proof comes directly from God himself. When God stretches out his hand to show signs and wonders, in attestation of the Truth of any Religion, that Religion receives the highest sanction : God indelibly impresses on it his own character of truth. It is then impossible to reject such Religion, without rejecting reason ; for one of the first principles of natural Religion, one of the best dictates of human reason, is, that God from the eminence of his perfections, is gloriously incapable of deceiving his creatures.

On this ground we conclude, that we cannot reject the Christian Religion, without acting contrary to the dictates of our own understandings, and doing violence to our own consciences. For it comes supported by invincible proofs—by the demonstrative evidence of miracles.

Jesus Christ and his Apostles wrought a great number of genuine miracles. A little attention to

the Sacred Records will convince us, that the miracles related in them, have every characteristic mark of real miracles.

To heal the sick, to raise the dead, to control all nature with a word, is infinitely above all human power. But Jesus Christ did these things. He healed all manner of diseases.—The blind received their sight—the deaf heard—the dumb speak—the maimed were made whole and sound—the lame walked—the lepers were cleansed—multitudes of hungry persons were fed to the full, with a few loaves and fishes—howling tempests were hushed into silence—the threatening waves of the sea instantly sunk quietly to rest—He cast out devils—he loosed the hold of the iron arm of death, and set the captive free from the grave. These astonishing works, he performed with a touch or a word. “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” His word was like the creative voice of the Almighty in the beginning: when Jesus spake, nature felt the irresistible impulse of his word, and immediately obeyed.

To these astonishing works of his life, he added one still more astonishing, his own resurrection. He was crucified; he was dead, and buried; but on the third day, he arose from the dead; and showed himself alive, after his passion unto his disciples for the space of forty days. It was not possible, that he should be held by the bands

of death—He broke them assunder, and arose victorious over the grave.—He ascended up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

But before he left the world, he commissioned his Apostles to preach the Gospel, and gave them power to work miracles in confirmation of its Truth. This commission they fulfilled. They confirmed the doctrines they preached, by healing all manner of sickness, casting out devils, and speaking in a diversity of tongues which they had not studied. All in an instant they knew the arbitrary sounds, by which different nations expressed their ideas, so as to declare unto them the great things of God in their own languages.

But, perhaps, it may be thought, that these miraculous operations may not be the more respectable, on account of their superiority to human power. Perhaps they were effects of diabolical agency. No, that is impossible, The end proposed in working these miracles, is irreconcilable with the principles of the prince of darkness. He is not solicitous to make men good, by establishing the Truth of that Religion, whose holy and excellent nature we have before considered in these Essays. These miracles were wrought to confirm the Gospel of Christ—"to incline men, not to renounce natural and revealed Religion, but to respect and follow both." To make men good and comforta-

ble here, and glorious and happy hereafter forever, is certainly one of the greatest and best of purposes.—It is worthy of the exertion of the power of God, in the operation of miracles. Besides, there is not a miracle recorded in the New Testament, which is of a trifling nature, or is destitute of moral virtue independent of the grand purpose for which it was wrought, the establishment of the Christian Religion. It is, therefore, altogether impossible, that these miracles should have been wrought by the agency of satan.

We very well remember, that the charge of diabolical agency, in the operation of miracles, was brought against Jesus Christ, by the malicious Jews; and we have not forgotten, with what force of argument he confounded his accusers. “But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. But he said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against itself falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.” How extreme is the folly of man, when he gives himself up to furious passion! Did the Jews think, that Satan was fool enough to cast out devils, and desolate his own kingdom? Which was the greatest, their malice, or their folly?

The miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, were not done in secret—they were public appeals to the senses of mankind—they were wrought in the presence of great multitudes, who were eye-witnesses of these astonishing works. These operations were not confined to some dark corner of the earth, destitute of learning and civilization ; but they were wrought among the most polished nations of the age, who had carried literature to a high degree of perfection. They were not confined to Jerusalem, and the land of Judea ; they were performed throughout all the Roman empire. The Jews and the Gentiles, the Christian Church, and the men of the world, were spectators of them.

But, perhaps, it may be suggested, that the gift of tongues, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, do not bear all the marks of genuine miracles ; the first not being above human power, and the last not wrought in the presence of proper witnesses. This, it may be said, is a material defect in the evidence of miracles ; because Jesus Christ particularly rested the whole of his Religion on his rising from the dead. His resurrection ought, therefore, to have been free from all ground for suspicion of deception.

We reply, there is no defect in the evidence, which miracles afford in favor of the Christian Religion ; for this objection is grounded on falsehood. The gift of tongues is, indeed,

altogether above all human power, and the miracle of Christ's resurrection rests on ocular demonstration, given in the presence of proper witnesses.

We readily acknowledge, that it is possible for man, by long and laborious study, to acquire the knowledge of different languages, so as to converse in them. But we deny, in the most absolute terms, that man can, all on a sudden, acquire such knowledge, without being divinely inspired. Could the the Apostles, who were illiterate fishermen, have preached fluently in a great number of different languages, if the Holy Ghost had not intuitively given them the knowledge of those languages?—"Of all the sciences in the world, says a fine writer, that of languages is the least capable of an instant acquisition. The knowledge of languages is the knowledge of experience, and no man can ever derive it from his own innate fund of ability. Yet the Apostles, who were known to be men of no education, all on a sudden knew the arbitrary signs by which different nations had agreed to express their thoughts. Those things, which other men can only acquire by disgusting labor, those particularly, which belong to the most difficult branches of knowledge, they understood without making the least attempt to learn them." And is not this infinitely superior to all human power?

It is indeed, a great truth, that Jesus Christ referred to his resurrection for evidence of the Truth of his Religion. The rulers of the Jews, knowing this, "made the sepulchre sure:" a great stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre,—a seal fixed on it,—and a guard set to watch the tomb of the blessed Jesus, as though they were determined that the kingdom of death should remain forever.

But when the all-important moment arrived, that the Son of God was to break the bars of death asunder, his heavenly ministers descended to be spectators of his triumph over the grave. The watch saw one of these ministers of glory, roll the stone away from the door of the sepulchre, and sit upon it. "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow! And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." But being recovered from their fright, "they came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all things that were done."

However, the Jews, who had before determined to resist God in all the operations of his grace, continued obstinate in their determination. They, therefore, bribed the watch, and gave them large money to say, "His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." O foolish Jews! did ye think that the world would believe such a

story as this ? It carries with it its own refutation. Do sleeping men know, what is transacted around them ?

Jesus Christ arose from the dead, attended by the angels of God ; and afterwards appeared unto his disciples. He gave them ocular demonstration of his resurrection from the dead. “ He shewed himself alive unto them, after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”—They frequently saw him—they handled him—they conversed with him. Now where is the difference, with respect to the force of evidence, whether his disciples saw him arise from the grave, or saw him after he was risen ?—And this ocular demonstration was not to a few only ; for “ he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.”

But here it may be asked, “ why did not Jesus show himself unto the rulers of the Jews ? Why did he not publicly appear in Jerusalem after his resurrection ? Why did Jesus Christ expose all the circumstances of his abasement to the public eye, and conceal those of his elevation ?”

In answer to this we reply : First, after the Jewish rulers had rejected all the miracles of the life of Jesus Christ—after they had denied the Holy One of God, in the face of the most positive demonstrations, and had put him to the dreadful death :

of the cross—is it reasonable to believe, that God would give them any further evidence of the mission of his Son?

Secondly, if Jesus Christ had seen fit to appear in the midst of his murderers, what rational conclusion would they have drawn from his appearance? We have much reason to believe, that they also would have “become like dead men,” incapable of rational reflection. Could they have seen Jesus Christ, whom they had so lately slain on the cross, standing amongst them, without losing the government of their mental powers, in the most overwhelming fear of instant destruction from his avenging hand? And after they had recovered themselves from dismay, on his disappearing, would they not have thought, that they had seen a phantom, a mere creature of their fears?

But again, suppose they would have retained the proper exercise of their intellectual powers, of what advantage could it have been to them? Had not the rulers of the Jewish people, sinned against the Holy Ghost? Was it possible for them to receive the grace of God? Did they not know before they crucified Jesus Christ, that he was sent of God? They had said in one of their public councils, “What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.”* They were not ignorant of the

* *John* 11. 47. 48.

Divine mission of Jesus Christ; they knew that he came from God. But what practical inference did they draw from this knowledge? Why, the most abominable that can be conceived—they determined, that, because he wrought many miracles, they would kill him. “Then, from that day forth, they took counsel together to put him to death.”*

Lastly, Jesus Christ appeared unto those, who were the most proper persons to be witnesses of his resurrection. He appeared unto his intimate friends, who so perfectly knew him, that they could not be mistaken in his appearance; whose honest hearts having nothing to fear from him, were not likely to be thrown into consternation; and who, therefore, were capable of ascertaining the truth of his resurrection—And to give all possible weight to their testimony, to make it equally demonstrative as his showing himself publicly would have been, and in most cases much more so, he gave his Apostles power to work miracles, in confirmation of his resurrection. They said, “God hath raised up Jesus Christ,” “who hath shed forth what ye now see and hear.” They spake with tongues, they healed the sick, they raised the dead, and they cast out devils, in attestation of the resurrection of Christ. Could any way be more proper, any evidence more conclusive?

Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ, was confirmed by the Apostles, who were witnesses of the facts relating to it; God setting his seal to the truth of their testimony, in the operation of miracles. But independent of this seal of God, it is impossible for us, as reasonable men, to reject their testimony. For it is attended with so many characters of truth, that we cannot reject it without renouncing our reason. Consider—the honest character of these witnesses, with their poverty, and want of power, which rendered them incapable of imposing on mankind—the nature of the facts themselves which they avowed, things most easily and certainly known—the tribunals before whom they gave evidence, Jewish rabbies, and Heathen philosophers—the place where they testified the resurrection of Christ; not in some very distant country, but in Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified—the time of this testimony, three days after the death of Jesus Christ—the number of these witnesses, there being more than five hundred—the agreement of their evidence, no one of them ever contradicting himself or any of the others—the motives which induced them to publish the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the discharge of their duty, and the consequences arising from it, distress in this world, and glory in the next—and lastly, the perseverance of these witnesses, in declaring that Jesus was risen from the dead, until they fell

martyrs to the truth, until they sealed their testimony with their blood ! If we consider these characters of truth, belonging to the testimony of the disciples of Jesus Christ, we shall find it impossible to reject it, without renouncing every pretention to reason.

But the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, being of infinite importance in the Christian Religion, and so comfortable to us as the pledge of our own resurrection, it has received confirmation in the operation of innumerable miracles by the hands of the Apostles, and the first teachers of Christianity.

Thus we see, that the miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, have all the characteristic marks of genuine miracles ; and that therefore, they demonstrate the Truth of that Holy Religion, for the establishment of which they were wrought. By these miracles God set his seal to the Gospel of Christ. Christianity is, therefore, a revelation from God ; because it is supported by external, positive, incontestable evidence, addressed to the senses of mankind.

ESSAY XXVII.

The Truth of Christianity is demonstrated by prophecy.

GOD, who is infinite in his nature, must be perfect in knowledge. He must comprehend, in the most perfect manner, all things through eternity past, and eternity to come. Hence he possesses the high prerogative of fore-knowledge; and he alone possesses it.

For created beings, however excellent, are necessarily limited in their nature, and circumscribed in their knowledge. They may have some perceptions of the present, and some remembrance of the past. But what, by their own natural powers, can they know of futurity? By the use of reason, they may acquire some knowledge of God, and of his works. But to reason respecting future events, is only to conjecture; because future events are contingent.

From these indubitable truths, it will follow, that the prediction of future events, is always a work of God. No man, however great, no angel, however exalted, can certainly know, by innate natural power, what events will take place in any periods of futurity. Created beings may, judging

from existing circumstances, form conjectures relative to future events, not far removed from them in point of time ; but they cannot certainly predict things to come, unless they be inspired with the knowledge of futurity, by the omniscient God.

Hence we conclude, that if any Religion be attended with predictions as sanctions of its truth, and these predictions be actually fulfilled, the truth of such Religion is incontrovertibly evident : God sets his seal upon it. We have no more reason to deny the divinity such Religion, than we have to assert, that the heavenly bodies, of such inconceivable magnitude, so perfectly regular in all their revolutions, so exquisitely beautiful, so amazingly magnificent, are the effects of blind fortuitous chance.

Now, if we examine the Christian Religion in the light of this truth, we shall discover, that it is a Revelation from God ; because we shall find its truth demonstrated by the fulfilment of prophecies, delivered to establish its divine authority. These prophecies so accurately describe events, of high importance to mankind, which afterwards at a great distance of time took place, according to authentic histories, that it is impossible not to admit them as demonstrations of the truth of Christianity, without acting inconsistent with the character of reasonable beings.

In the Holy Bible, we find events circumstantially described, ages before they came to pass. There we read predictions, delivered thousands of years ago, which are now fulfilling before our eyes. We cannot therefore believe, that these prophecies were delivered by uninspired men—We cannot believe, that the Religion, the Truth of which these prophecies support, is not a Revelation from God.

The Old Testament, a book of venerable authority, because of its great antiquity and important matter, is remarkable for the vast number of prophecies which it contains. In these prophecies some of the most important events, respecting almost all the ancient nations of the earth, were related long before they came to pass. These predictions are very remarkably particular concerning the children of Israel. There is scarcely one event, highly interesting to that people, which was not predicted before it took place.

In the Old Testament, we find predictions of the slavery of the Israelites in the land of Egypt, for the space of four hundred years—of their deliverance from bondage by the hand of Moses—of the destruction of the Canaanites, and the establishment of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan—of the disobedience of the children of Israel to God—of numberless distresses and sore afflictions as punishments for their sins—of their captivity in Babylon—of their deliverance, and return to their

own country—of their rejection of the Messiah—of the destruction of their great city Jerusalem—and of their utter dispersion among all nations of the earth. There we see predicted—the destruction of the Persian empire, and the establishment of the Grecian on the ruins thereof—the division of the Grecian empire into four kingdoms—the establishment of the Roman empire—the entire destruction of Nineveh and Babylon. There we see predicted, about four thousand years ago, the singular character, and unconquerable spirit, of the Arabians; which, as a distinct people, they have, for that amazing length of time, always maintained—And there we also see foretold, the baseness, slavery, and extreme misery, under which the Egyptians at present groan.

Now these predictions, and a vast number more, delivered for the express purpose of promoting the knowledge and worship of the true God among mankind, have been accomplished, or are now fulfilling, as is abundantly evident from historical accounts of acknowledged veracity. The truth of the fulfilment of these prophecies, is so evident, that every one, who is acquainted with history, must discover it; and he must also see in this an unanswerable argument in favor of Revealed Religion.

The Old Testament, so remarkable on account of these predictions, is still more so, an account of a great number of prophecies, respecting the

kingdom of the Messiah: a spiritual kingdom of truth, which is to have no end. Many of the prophecies, which relate to the birth of Christ, his life and death, the establishment of his kingdom, and his final triumph over all his enemies, are so circumstantial in description, that they appear more like the relations of historians, than the predictions of prophets. However, there is no historical truth more certain, than that they were delivered many hundreds of years before their accomplishment: and, indeed, some of them are now fulfilling.

Hence we may see, that the New Testament is intimately connected with the Old Testament. It contains not only the substance of the types and shadows of the Mosaical economy, but also the fulfilment of the most important prophecies contained in the Old Testament. The prophecies of the Old Testament, go to establish the authenticity of Christianity. For what stronger evidence of its truth can be given, than the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies in its very constitution, and in its establishment in the world.

In the new Testament there are likewise many predictions of future events, of great moment to mankind, some of which have been accomplished, in the most exact manner. There we see the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unparalleled distress of the Jewish nation predicted with circumstantial

description, and the time limited to the then existing generation. There also we see predicted the great persecutions of the Christian Church : the impossibility of expelling Christianity from the world ; and the corruption of the Christian faith, in the working of the mystery of iniquity. The accomplishment of these prophecies with many others, is too notorious to be denied. There are some other predictions in the New Testament, of infinite consequence to mankind, the fulfilment of which appear to be at no great distance from us. Such are those which respect the destruction of the mystery of iniquity, the man of sin ; and those which concern the universal spread of the Gospel in the millenium.

In considering the predictions contained in the Holy Bible, which have been so very exactly accomplished, we find such a concatenation of proofs, such an accumulated weight of evidence, in favor of our Holy Religion, as is altogether irresistible to men of reason. The evidence of prophecy is equally demonstrative, as that of miracles. Miracles, indeed, carry immediate conviction to the mind : their evidence is at once full and complete. But prophecy convinces as it is fulfilled ; its weight of evidence increasing, as its accomplishment is more distant from the time, in which it was delivered. Miracles were addressed unto the senses of mankind, in the ages in which the doc-

trines of Religion were revealed, to establish their Truth. Prophecies, in their accomplishment, are addressed unto the senses of mankind, in the ages in which they are fulfilled, for the same purpose, to establish revealed Religion by ocular demonstration. Therefore, every age, every year, every day, increases the weight of the evidence of prophecy in favor of Christianity : because the predictions of the Holy Scriptures are daily fulfilling.

Thus we see, that God, who sanctioned the Christian Religion when it was first delivered to the world, by the operation of miracles, is still going on to give further demonstrations of its Truth, by the operations of Providence, in the accomplishment of prophecy. Christianity is, therefore, a Revelation from God. Its divinity is established by incontrovertible evidence addressed to the senses of mankind.

The predictions contained in the Holy Bible, are so remarkable, so strikingly descriptive of events long subsequent to their publication, and their accomplishment so exact and full, that they carry irresistible force to convince and persuade the reasonable part of mankind. And hence it is, that this Holy Book, attended with such evidence, and bearing such marks of divine authority, is held in the highest estimation by men of reason ; and that the Religion which it teaches, becomes the chief object of their attention and regard. They know that it is

not bigotry to believe the sublime truths of the Gospel, with the fullest assurance of faith. But should this faith be called the faith of bigots, by those who have not understanding to perceive, or goodness of heart to acknowledge, the force of such evidence in favor of Christianity, they will deem it their glory to be ranked among such bigots—because this will be ranking them among the sons of truth—among the sons of God.

ESSAY XXVIII.

The impossibility of forging, and imposing the Holy Scriptures on mankind, in the ages in which the facts recorded in them are said to have taken place.

THE arguments in favor of the Christian Religion, drawn from miracles and prophecies, are predicated on the Truth of the Records which convey the knowledge of them down to us. If those parts of the Sacred writings, which respect miracles and prophecies, are true ; if the miracles related in them were indeed wrought ; if the predictions recorded there were really delivered, and such of them as concern past periods of time, have been fulfilled ;

then we have evidence of the Truth of our Religion direct, full and complete : evidence equal in force to mathematical demonstration itself ; because God himself bears witness to this Truth.

The narrations of miracles and prophecies contained in the Holy Bible, are the Records of truth. We have hitherto taken this proposition as being indubitable, in our consideration of the external evidences of the Christian Religion ; because the evidence on which it rests is of an incontrovertible nature. But now it is time to produce this evidence ; and to apply our fourth Rule to Christianity. “In a Religion revealed from heaven there should be some method, by which this positive evidence of its authority may be handed down to posterity, without the possibility of deception.”

The external evidences of Christianity have been conveyed down to us free from error. Miracles were wrought, and prophecies delivered, as they stand recorded in the Holy Bible.

To establish this point, we mean to prove, first, the impossibility of forgery and imposition, respecting the Records contained in the Holy Bible, in the ages in which the facts recorded in them are said to have taken place ; and secondly, a like impossibility in any succeeding ages. In establishing these propositions, we shall prove, beyond all dispute, the Truth and authority of the Sacred Records. For if they were not forged, and imposed

on the world, in the ages in which the facts are said to have taken place, nor in any succeeding ages, it is impossible they should have been forged, and imposed on the world at all.

The impossibility of the forgery and imposition of the Sacred writings, in the ages in which the facts are said to have taken place, is the first proposition which we have undertaken to establish.—The Sacred Records contained in the New Testament could not have been forged, and imposed on the world, in the first age of Christianity. In support of this position, we offer the following arguments.

1. To suppose that these Records were forged, and imposed on the world, in the first age of Christianity, is to tax the authors of these supposed forgeries and impositions with the greatest extravagance. Had they been impostors possessed of the least degree of common sense, they would have employed some precautions to conceal their impositions. But the Writers of the Sacred Records employ none. They relate facts with all the ingenuousness and simplicity of upright honest historians. They specify times, places, and circumstances. They declare, that such and such facts passed in such and such places, and in sight of such and such people. They name the public places and assemblies, the cities, and the nations, in which, according to their accounts, miracles were

wrought, and predictions delivered. They declare that they were eye-witnesses of these facts, or that they had them immediately from multitudes of eye-witnesses. Now it is impossible that impostors, possessing such good sense as is every where apparent in the historical parts of the New Testament, should be guilty of such extravagance, as to use no means to conceal their true character, but to adopt that method, which is best calculated to expose themselves and their impostures. Therefore they were not impostors; and their narrations were not forged, and imposed on the world.

2. By supposing that these Records were forged, and imposed on the world, in the first age of Christianity, we tax the whole Christian Church of that age, with the extreme of extravagance. On this supposition we must believe, that great multitudes of men consented to receive these Records as being true, when they knew them to be false. All the first Christians, many of whom were men of high rank in society, and of the first character respecting wisdom and virtue, received the Gospel as containing nothing but truth. They consented to renounce for the sake of Christianity, their riches, their pleasures, and their honors; to sacrifice their prejudices, their passions, and their lives; and all this they did when they knew that the Gospel, according to this supposition, was full of infamous falsehoods! Yea more! According to this supposi-

tion, they agreed to renounce the religions in which they had been educated, with all the interests present and eternal, which they expected from them ; that they might embrace the Christian Religion and place all their hope of salvation on its Truth, as a Revelation from God, confirmed unto them by miracles and predictions ; when they positively knew, that there was no proof of its being a Revelation from God, no miracles wrought, no prophecies delivered and fulfilled, in confirmation of its Divine authority ! This is absolutely impossible. Such extravagance never existed in the world. And, therefore, it is impossible that the narrations of miracles and predictions contained in the New Testament, were forged, and imposed on the world, in the first age of the Christian Church.

3. The supposition under consideration, charges still greater extravagance, if indeed greater can be on the enemies of Christianity. For the Truth of these Records was never called in question, even by the bitterest enemies of Christ, untill a few centuries ago. “ Celsus, Porphyry, Zosimus, Julian the apostate, and Hierocles, the greatest antagonists that Christianity ever had, whose writings are in our hands, never denied the facts” recorded in the Gospel. Therefore this supposition charges the enemies of our Holy Religion, who hated it as they hated misery itself, with the extravagance of intentionally ruining their own cause, by confessing the

Truth of these Records ; when they knew them to have been forged, and imposed on the world. It charges the enemies of Christianity with confederating with its friends, in a conspiracy against truth, against their own interests, their pleasures, honors, riches and power, by consenting to the Truth of these Records ; when they knew that they were absolutely fabulous ; and when to prove this, according to the supposition under consideration, they might have appealed to public records, to whole nations, to their own ears and eyes ! How impossible, altogether impossible is this ! Such extravagance never did, never could, exist in the world. And hence it is impossible that the Sacred Records contained in the New Testament, were forged, and imposed on the world, in the first age of Christianity.

These arguments, we conceive, establish, beyond all doubt, the impossibility of forgery and imposition respecting the Evangelical accounts of miracles and predictions, in the first age of Christianity. To deny this impossibility, is to make a great number of extravagant suppositions, and to plunge into the grossest absurdity.

This method of argument may be applied to all the Scriptural accounts of miracles and predictions ; and by it the impossibility of forgery and imposition with respect to them, may be fully and satisfactorily established. But we shall leave such application to the reader.

To set the impossibility which we have been urging, in stronger and clearer light, if it be possible, we will suppose, that a certain man has written and published a book which he calls, "The history of America," We will suppose, that after filling a thousand pages with chimeras of his prolific brain, he addresses the American people in the following words. "I appeal unto you, ye sons of liberty, for the truth of what I have written. Ye know that ye were a nation of slaves, in the Island of Britain. The great and mighty Washington, wrought many wonders, by the command of the God of heaven, before the British king. He inflicted miraculous plagues upon him and his subjects, destroying all the first born of his kingdom. Then he led you to the western shore of England, stretched out his rod across the great Atlantic, and divided it asunder; and he then marched you three thousand miles on dry ground, through the midst of the great deep, and brought you safely to this land flowing with milk and honey. He miraculously fed you with manna from heaven, untill ye had turned extensive forests into fruitful fields, and had built great and flourishing cities. He also gave you a law of civil and religious polity, under which ye now live and enjoy peace and liberty. He instituted an order of priests, who in the city of Washington, daily offer oblations on your behalf, unto the God of armies. And to keep these

great and mighty acts in perpetual remembrance; he ordained that every son of Columbia should wear his beard from his chin downward, and should keep it dyed of a beautiful crimson colour; and that a solemn feast should be annually kept at the city of Washington, throughout the second week in November, when every American should appear with offerings to the God of heaven. These institutions ye have religiously kept unto this day. Ye know the truth of these things, which are the principal topics of which I have written; and as for all other things contained in this book, I appeal unto the records laid up in the archives of the nation at Washington."

There certainly is nothing more impossible than the imposition of such a book on us, as the true history of the American nation. Every body knows, that though it might be read as a volume of great lies, it never could be received by any one, as a true relation of facts. It would be as impossible to make us believe and receive it as the true history of our nation, as it would be to pull the stars from the firmament of heaven. Yet it would be as easy to impose it on us, as it would have been in the first age of Christianity to forge, and impose on the world, the historical parts of the New Testament. The reason is evident. In both these cases, appeals are made for the truth of what is related, to the knowledge and experience of public bodies.

Hence it is evident, that no man, in the first age of Christianity, could have induced the Christian Church or the world to believe that the historical parts of the New Testament were true, if Jesus Christ and his Apostles had never wrought any miracles, nor delivered any prophecies. The same may be said of any other parts of the Sacred Writings.

Therefore the Holy Scriptures were not forged, and imposed on the world, in the ages in which the facts recorded in them are said to have taken place.

ESSAY XXIX.

It is impossible that the Holy Scriptures should have been forged, and imposed on mankind, in any ages succeeding those in which the facts recorded in them are said to have taken place.

IN the last Essay we established the impossibility of forgery and imposition, respecting the Holy Scriptures, in the ages in which the facts recorded in them are said to have taken place. We come now to prove a like impossibility in any succeeding ages.

In the Sacred Records, the narration of miracles and prophecies, are intimately interwoven, and in some cases inseparably connected, with the docu-

trines of Religion, the institutions of the Jewish nation, and those of the Christian Church.

Let us consider, the Records contained in the New Testament. It is impossible that these Records should have been forged, and imposed on the Christian Church, or on the world, in any age succeeding that in which it is said Christianity was planted in the world. We have mentioned the Church and the world, because we mean to prove that on neither of them such imposition could have been practised. In the first case, it must be supposed, that some time after the Christian Church began to exist in the world, these Records were forged, and imposed on Christians as the true historical accounts of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. In the second case, it must be supposed, that some considerable time after the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor, but before there were any Christians in the world, these Records were forged, and imposed on mankind. But imposition, in both these cases, was impossible.

And first, it is impossible that the Records contained in the New Testament, should have been forged, and imposed on the Christian Church in any age after that in which it began to exist. The truth of this will appear evident from the following arguments.

1. The authors of these Records, intimately connecting the facts they relate with the doctrines

of Christianity, write as eye-witnesses of these facts, or as having them from eye-witnesses. We do not mean to repeat the argument which we urged in the last Essay, that the supposition of forgery and imposition respecting the Sacred writings, taxes the authors of them with such unnatural extravagance, as is impossible ; although this argument here is not without great weight. But we mean to consider this matter, not as it respects the supposed forgery, but as it regards the supposed imposition of these Records on the Christian Church..

If we make the supposition under consideration, that some considerable time, perhaps several hundred years, after the Christian Church was planted in the world, the Records contained in the New Testament were forged, and imposed on Christians, we must admit a proposition grossly absurd : we must admit that the Christian Church received the New Testament as a book of truth, when they had palpable and indubitable evidence of its falsehood. The Writers of the New Testament declare, that they were eye-witnesses of the facts they relate. Could the Christian Church receive this as being true, when they knew these writers had been born long since the time, in which the facts they record must have taken place ? Could the ancient Christians believe that a man might be an eye-witness of facts, which passed in the world some hundreds of

years, perhaps, before he was born? Undoubtedly they could not.

2. According to the Gospel, the doctrines of Christianity rest on the facts related in the New Testament. These facts are there made the ground of the Christian faith. If we suppose, that the Sacred Records were forged, and imposed on the Christian Church some considerable time after it was founded, we must also suppose that the members of this Church received these Records, as containing the true ground of their faith, when they knew that their faith had never rested on any such ground. We must admit, on the ground of this supposition, that they received the New Testament as a Record of truth, containing the miraculous facts by which all the doctrines they held, had been demonstrated; when they had never received these doctrines as having been demonstrated by any such facts. But as it is impossible for us, as reasonable men, to admit these suppositions as truth, we cannot admit the forgery and imposition of the Sacred Records, without renouncing all claim to reason.

3. The Writings of the New Testament announce to the world, that when they were written, the power of working miracles was in operation in the Church. Therefore, if these Writings were forged, and imposed on the Christian Church some considerable time after it was founded, they must

have been received by the followers of Christ as being true, in declaring that the power of working miracles was then among them; when they had undeniable evidence, the evidence of their own senses, that no such power was in the Church. But this is impossible, altogether impossible. Therefore the Sacred Records were not forged, and imposed on the Church of Christ, in any age succeeding that in which it was planted in the world.

We could multiply arguments which would evince, the impossibility of the forgery and imposition under consideration. But this matter is sufficiently evident.

The next thing to be considered, is the impossibility of forging and imposing the Writings of the New Testament on mankind. In this case it must be supposed, that some considerable time after the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor, but before there were any Christians in the world, these Records were forged, and imposed on mankind.

The impossibility of such forgery and imposition is no less, than that we have just had under consideration. This will appear from the considerations which follow.

1. The supposition that these Records were forged, and imposed on mankind, before the Christian Church existed, lies exposed to the force of all the arguments, we have urged against the possibility of forgery and imposition respecting these Records

in the cases before considered. The nature of these Records, as announcing that they are productions of eye-witnesses, that the facts related in them constitute the ground on which the Christian faith rests, and that the power of working miracles was then in operation, level such force of argument against this supposition, and the forgery and imposition which it embraces, as is utterly irresistible in the minds of reasonable men.

2. The Sacred Records contained in the New Testament, announce to the world, that when they were written, the Christian Church existed ; that its founder, Jesus Christ, had instituted a standing order of men denominated ministers of the Gospel, the ordinance of baptism, and that of the Lord's supper, and that this order of men, and these ordinances, were then in the Church of Christ. Now, if these Records were forged, and imposed on mankind before the Christian Church existed, the world must have received them as true historical accounts ; when they knew that there was not a word of truth in them. They must have received them as giving true relations of the Gospel ministry, and of the observance of the Lord's supper and baptism ; when they had undoubted knowledge, that there were neither such ministers nor ordinances in the world. They must have received them as historical narrations free from error and falsehood, respecting these ordinances and this

order of ministers; when they had the most certain knowledge, that there was no such thing in the world as the Christian Church, in which these ministers might have an official existence, or in which these ordinances might be observed. What a multitude of absurdities result from the supposition under consideration! We are astonished that such a supposition should ever have entered the mind of any man as a truth.

If there is any thing calculated to excite uncommon astonishment, in the minds of serious and thinking men, it is that confidence with which infidelity embraces, and offers to the world, the supposition of the forgery and imposition of the Holy Scriptures: a supposition which necessarily drags after it such a multitude of extravagant consequences! But this astonishment is somewhat abated by considering, that it is passion, blind as midnight rolled in thickest clouds, and furious as the impetuous torrent rushing down the precipice, that rules in the kingdom of unbelief. Hence it is, that men, who have long wandered in this dreary kingdom, having accustomed their minds to error, and enlisted their passions on the side of infidelity, seem hardly, capable of knowing truth. The plainest consequences resulting from propositions which they have adopted, are scarcely perceived by them. The expression of astonishment which we have just dropped, may, therefore, excite a murmur! perhaps, a sigh:

a murmur from those who are still determined to worship their dreadful idol ; and a sigh from those who desire to find the truth, but feel their minds filled with doubts. Can we place this subject in any point of view, which will suppress this murmur, and relieve this sigh ? Let us attempt it.

We will then suppose, that a book is put into our hands, by a grave and elderly man, with this observation. " This is the history of Pennsylvania—an excellent work, written by a man now living in the city of Philadelphia, of the first character for truth and literary abilities. There ' pointing to a particular page ' you will find the principal matter contained in it, summed up in a few words." Let us suppose, that we find it there written as follows. " Before I enter on the body of this work, I shall here state the chief matters recorded in it. The great William Penn was a Chinese philosopher, born in the city of Peking—From thence God took him, and brought him on a pillar of smoke mingled with fire, to the land of Pennsylvania, in order that he might establish a nation of warriors—In the course of a few years, with ten thousand chosen men, he destroyed and took prisoners more than two millions of the natives of this country. He made the prisoners slaves—He built the city of Philadelphia where it now stands, because on this very ground he overthrew an immense army of savages—In this city he erected a superb temple to

the god of war, adorned with gold and precious stones, and well supplied with the ministers of Mars—He gave the Pennsylvanians a body of excellent laws, after the manner of those of Lycurgus—This book of the laws of Penn, is in the temple under the golden altar; and among the rest of its excellent institutions, it ordains, that every free man shall learn only the art of war; that all the male children of free men shall be brought to the altar, that the ministers thereof may imprint upon their foreheads, in colours of flame, the word *Mars*. I shall write on these subjects, unto you, ye sons of the noble Penn, with a strict regard to truth. I have been an eye-witness of the facts which I shall record in this volume. But I need not make this declaration—for ye know that the words in which I have just related the substance of this history, are the words of sober truth; because ye have been diligent observers of these laws and institutions of the mighty Penn.”

Now suppose that this grave and elderly man, and ninety nine others like himself, should spend all their days in endeavoring to impose this supposed book, filled with such infamous falsehood, on the Pennsylvanians and the world; would they succeed? No; they would as soon stop the river St. Lawrence were it rushes down the falls of Niagara, with a feather! or dry up the fountains of the great deep, with a blowpipe! However the im-

possibility of forging, and imposing the Holy Scriptures on mankind, is not less than the impossibility of imposing such a book upon us. "Ah! but," says one, "the cases are not entirely parallel." We grant it. But the supposed history of Pennsylvania would have the advantage, with respect to imposition, on its side. For it would not interfere, as the Scriptures do, with the interests and passions of mankind. It would not demand the sacrifices, which the Gospel requires of us. Therefore, it seems that the impossibility of imposing such a book on us, is not so great, as the impossibility of forging and imposing on mankind, that Holy Book which requires us to crucify every corrupt passion of our hearts.

Thus we may see, that the Holy Scriptures are the Records of truth; and that the external evidences of the Christian Religion, have been handed down to us in such a manner, as is not susceptible of deception. Hence it is evident, that Christianity is a Revelation from God.

ESSAY XXX.

*Predictions now fulfilling demonstrate the Truth
of the Sacred Records.*

THE unbelief of the human heart, respecting things of a divine nature, is greater than most men conceive. There is an evil heart of unbelief in man, which is ever ready to incline him to depart from the living God, and too often to deny his Holy Religion, by calling in question the Truth and authenticity of those Records, which hand down to us its external evidences. How many men, though boasting of the dignity of their nature, and the acuteness of their reason, deny the Truth of the Holy Bible, although this denial is pregnant with obscurities too glaring for them not to perceive in other cases !

God pities our weakness, and our natural inclination to unbelief; and not content to resist this evil inclination, by guarding the Truth of the Sacred Records, in constituting them so as to render it impossible, that they should have been forged, and imposed on the world; he condescends to set the broad seal of his own truth unto these Records. —He constantly gives ocular demonstration of

their truth, by the accomplishment of those predictions contained in them, which are daily fulfilling before our eyes.

Did miracles establish the Truth of Christianity in the Apostolic age? Did the fulfillment of prophecies then assure the world, that the Religion of Christ was a Revelation from heaven? So does the completion of predictions in our day, assure us that the Records which contain the external evidences of the Christian Religion, are Records of truth. So wonderfully is our Holy Religion constituted! So wonderfully has God guarded its Truth! Let the heart of every Christian, swell with gratitude to God, for his great goodness in affording such abundant motives to faith—in that Religion which is infinitely important to mankind!

When we compare the present state of the Church with the Gospel, we see, that it falls infinitely below that excellence, which Christ requires of his people. The Church is greatly degenerated from that state of purity, in which she shone with so much lustre in the Apostolical age.—She is dreadfully corrupted in faith and practice. Volumes might be filled with the false doctrines, which are advanced as the doctrines of Christ—doctrines abominable in their nature, and dangerous in their tendency. Nor is the Church less corrupted in practice than in faith. It is a lamentable truth, that all kinds of vices and abominations, are

committed by those who call themselves the followers of the Holy Jesus.

This dreadful corruption, and the consequences which unbelievers draw from it, can never be sufficiently lamented by real Christians.

However, we have one thing to comfort us—This very corruption, which is frequently made a pretext to deny the Sacred Records, is an unanswerable argument in favor of their Truth; for many of the predictions contained in them are accomplished in it.

The apostacy of the Church of Rome was accurately foretold by the Apostles, and recorded in the New Testament. How particularly does the Apostle describe her corruption, her usurpation of civil authority, her claim to universal dominion, and her blasphemous assumption of the honors which belong to God only. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to the seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy: having their consciences seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.”* “For that day” of judgment “shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth, and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is wor-

* 1. *Tim.* 4. 1. 2. 3.

shipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God :” “ Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.”*

Is this prophetic description of the church of Rome, given by St. Paul more than seventeen hundred years ago, inferior in propriety to any which a historian might have given? Had Rome set for her likeness, could a better one have been drawn? It is well known that she has arrogated to herself “all power” human and divine; and that to establish this power she has exercised delusive “signs and lying wonders, with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness.” The popes have exalted themselves above all that is called God, claiming universal dominion. According to the most eminent “popish writers, they have announced unto the world, that the pope only ought to use the ensigns of royalty; that all princes ought to kiss his foot; and that he has power to depose emperors. “He sits in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God,” claiming the prerogatives which belong only to God himself. The popes have declared, in the face of the world, that the name of the pope is the only name under heaven; and that his name alone should be recited in the churches

* 2. *Thess.* 3. 4. 9. 10.

The church of Rome has "forbidden" her priests, her monks and her nuns "to marry;" and commanded all men to "abstain from meat," at such and such times. She is full of the spirit of seduction, and eminent for "the doctrines of devils." The proof of this we shall more than see, we shall indignantly feel it, if we consult the tax book of the Roman chancery. This book is a scandal to human nature. In it the price of every crime is rated—so much for murder—so much for assassination—so much for incest! Indeed she has so corrupted herself, that she is no longer the Church of Christ, but she is the synagogue of Satan—the whore of Babylon.

But it is not in the church of Rome only, that we see depravity and degeneracy from the purity of the Gospel—we see them also in the Protestant churches. In the lands of Protestantism, where the Word of God is not only acknowledged, but is open to the inspection of all classes of men, how greatly do ignorance, vice and impiety abound! Here the completion of the following prediction is daily before our eyes; giving us a sad lesson on the depravity of human nature, and a demonstrative proof of the Truth of the Holy Scriptures. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false ac-

cusers, incontinent, fierce despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God ; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof"* O Lord ! how dreadfully do we fulfil this prophecy ?

In the consequences of this general degeneracy from primitive Christianity, we see the accomplishment of another prediction : "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution"† We have great reason to be thankful unto God, that in our happy Country, the cruel and bloody hand of persecution is restrained. We are not tried with cruel scourgings, bonds, and imprisonment—we are not stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword, led to the burning stake ! Yet this prediction so dreadfully fulfilled in some ages and countries, is not without its accomplishment among even us. If we are free from the force of the hand of persecution, we are not free from the shafts of her tongue. These, dipped in the poison of asps, too often fly thick around us, and spread death among our comforts !

The present condition of the Jews, is a very remarkable accomplishment of prophecy. They are scattered among all nations of the earth, a bye word, and a reproach, oppressed and afflicted ! yet they remain a distinct people. "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, said Jesus Christ, and shall

* 2. Tim. 3. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

2. † Tim. 3. 12.

be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”* And more than three thousand years ago, Moses foretold their present national distress. “And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other.” “And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest.” “And thou shalt be an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all the nations whither the Lord shall lead thee.”† The completion of these predictions is before our eyes: and we must be in more than Egyptian darkness, if we do not perceive in them the Truth of those Records by which they are transmitted to us.

Even infidels afford awful evidence of the Truth of the Holy Bible. For while they deny the Truth of the Holy Scripture, and make a scoff of the exceeding great and precious promises made therein to the people of God, they give completion to some of the prophecies contained in it. They do not seem to think, that in them we have ocular demonstration of the divinity of the Holy Scripture; while we see in them the fulfilment of the prediction of St. Peter. “There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and

* *Luke.* 21. 24.

† *Deut.* 28. 37.

saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”*

In these predictions, and many others fulfilling in our day, we have evidence directly from God himself, of the Truth of the Sacred Records. The external evidences of the Christian Religion, in miracles and predictions already fulfilled, are confirmed unto us, by the operations of Providence in bringing forward events, long since foretold by the prophets of God. Therefore these evidences, are so conveyed down to us in the Sacred Writings, as not to admit a possibility of deception. The Sacred Records are so constructed, having the historical parts thereof so intimately interwoven with the doctrines and institutions of the Christian Religion, that in the very nature of things, it is impossible they should have been forged, and imposed on the world. And to give us more direct assurance of their Truth, God has added his own testimony—he has given us ocular demonstration, that these Records are divine, by fulfilling before our eyes a number of predictions contained in them.

Christianity, therefore, bears the test of all those Rules, which ought to be applied to any Religion, claiming the character of Divine Revelation. It bears the application of those Rules with increas-

* 2. *Pet.* 3. 3, 4.

ing lustre. Its excellence is not diminished in our eyes, by the severest examination ; but its glory increases upon us, as we approach nearer unto it. We love it the more, as we understand it the better ; because it is from the world of light—it is the Religion of God.

The attacks of infidelity against Christianity are all in vain. They can make no impression on it ; for it is founded on the rock of eternal Truth.—There is not the least danger, that it will ever be overthrown. But there is great danger, that vast multitudes of men will be forever lost, by rejecting the Gospel. Those who can renounce the Christian Religion, revile its doctrines, despise the excellence of its moral obligations, and spurn the richness of its grace, in the face of evidence so conclusive, have reason to fear. God may deliver them up to judicial blindness, darkness, and misery forever—for rejecting that Religion, the evidence of which can be resisted by nothing but obstinacy of will.

ESSAY XXXI.

The Efficacy of Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY came down from the world of light, from the God of truth and grace, to bless

the sons of men with "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." We have seen the Truth of this established, by the arguments which have been already offered for this purpose.

But if Christianity came from God, have we not a right to expect, that consequences of the highest importance to mankind, will result from it? Undoubtedly we have. We have a right to expect from the Religion of Jesus Christ, in its application to human society, to the hearts and lives of mankind, the happiest effects. It is not possible, that a Religion of so much excellence; so harmonious in its doctrines, so pure in its law, so awful in its threatenings, so rich in its promises, so forcible in its Truth, should not be attended with an efficacy truly great and glorious.

But has Christianity, in this respect, justified our reasonable expectations? Is it as beautiful, as lovely, when reduced to practice, as when seen in theory? Has it added to the other evidences of its Truth, that of a glorious efficacy? Has it restrained the fury of vice, and the madness of impiety? Has it arrested the sons of folly, in their dreadful career to destruction, and turned their feet into the paths of sober wisdom? Has it smoothed the rugged nature of man, and fitted him for his place in society? Have the nations felt its happy power, and rejoiced beneath its benign influence? Has

it irradiated the mind of man with the beams of truth, and ennobled his heart with the grace of God? Has it alleviated the miseries of human life, and opened to the humble and good, the fountains of divine consolation? The Christian Religion has done all this—and infinitely more! It has rolled away the reproach of man by delivering the sons of faith from the fear of death—by inspiring them with more than mortal courage to meet death in all his most terrific forms! It has shed on the valley of the shadow of death, the light of endless life; and opened to the sons of God by faith in Christ, the gates of everlasting glory.—Countless multitudes have already entered; and a goodly number are now on their way.

When the doctrines of Christ came pure from the first ministers of the Gospel, and were enforced with visible marks of divine authenticity, they descended on the world like the showers of the south, in the heat of summer, on a thirsty land! They produced glorious and happy effects. That dearth of truth and righteousness, which had long prevailed in the world, and which threatened the extermination of moral life from the society of men, gave place to a plentiful and vigorous growth of virtue and piety, with all the fruits of divine peace and consolation.

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter arose, and in the demonstrations of the spirit of God,

delivered the great truths of his exalted and Holy Master—His tongue glowed with the fire of inspiration, and his doctrines fell on his hearers, as the Holy Ghost had just fallen on him, like the rushing of a mighty wind! Multitudes, of different nations, felt the force of divine eloquence and truth, and three thousand were added to the Church of Christ.

While the Gospel was preached in purity, in truth and faith, it spread with amazing rapidity through the world; so that in the course of a few years, Europe, and a great part of Africa and Asia, were filled with its doctrines. And had the Church remained pure in faith and practice, the Gospel, in a short time, no doubt, would have filled the earth with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the face of the great deep. But the mystery of iniquity entered the Church, and direful have been the consequences! However, the man of sin shall be destroyed, and the Gospel will manifest its glorious efficacy, by bringing the whole world under its peaceful sway.

But as these general considerations may not make such lively impressions, as more particular views might do, we shall endeavor to draw nearer to this subject, and contemplate the efficacy of the Gospel in some particular cases. Behold that man. What was he a few years ago? It is scarcely in the power of language to give his true

character, to describe the baseness of his heart, and the crimes of his life. He had departed from truth and righteousness. He had drunken in iniquity with greediness, and become practically acquainted with almost every abomination committed under heaven. He was a pest to society, a source of vexation and grief to his friends, a monster of vice and impiety, a disgrace to human nature !

But what is he now ? The reverse of what he then was in all things. For he has heard the Gospel preached in purity and power, and experienced its efficacy in the transformation of his heart, and the reformation of his life. The doctrines of Religion, forcibly pressed upon his mind, by the demonstration of the Spirit, fastened on his conscience with all the power of eternal truth.

The doctrines of Justice contained in the Gospel, arrested the sinner. The light of the holy law flashed around his heart ; and its curses sounded in his ears more dreadfully than peals of thunder ! The clouds of divine vengeance, lowering over his head, seemed ready to break, and to discharge upon him the indignation of an angry God. Dismay took full possession of his soul ! His eyes rolled in wild confusion, and his heart seemed to die within him ! But the delay to execute the sentence of death, which was displayed before him in fiery pomp, gave occasion for a gleam of hope, which darting through his soul an invigorating

impulse, broke open the fountains of godly sorrow.* The tears fell fast from his eyes, and lamentation and prayer, mingled with deep groans, fell as fast from his lips. The anguish of his conscience was dreadful; but it was not of long duration. The sun of righteousness arose upon him with healing in his wings; his fears fled away, and the thick clouds of his guilt were dispersed. Then truth and righteousness, peace and joy, sprang up in his soul—for he felt that he was translated from the regions of darkness and sin, into the kingdom of God's dear Son—He felt that he was born of God, and made an heir of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Under the influence of the principles of Religion then planted in his heart, he has since lived in all holy conversation and godliness—an affectionate husband, a kind and prudent parent, and a faithful friend—an honor to the Church, and a blessing to the world. In the purity of his principles and life, contrasted with his former views and conduct, we see the most decisive evidence of the efficacy of the Christian Religion.

But he is not alone. There are others who have felt the happy effects of the Gospel. Multitudes now feel its efficacy, and rejoice in the richness of

** The terrors of the law alone, will never produce true repentance. There must be some view of Divine goodness, some hope of the mercy of God, to melt the heart into godly sorrow.*

its grace. Thousands and tens of thousands, under the influence of that Religion, whose efficacy is almighty to save, when it is properly applied, have been transformed by the renewing of their mind, turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

The efficacy of the Gospel, is greater than we generally apprehend. We shall see this in a strong light, if we consider how universal and lasting are the effects of the Christian Religion.—Where is the man in Christendom, who has never felt, in the least degree, the power of the Gospel? Where is the man, who has fully eradicated from his mind, the great truths of Christianity? It is readily granted, that the Gospel does not effect a saving change in the minds of most men; but will it therefore follow, that it has no effect on them? Certainly it will not. Besides a common influence, which restrains the fury of passion, socializes the affections and smooths the manners of mankind, the Gospel operates with peculiar force on the mind of man in certain periods of life. Even infidels, who have exerted their utmost ability to overthrow the authority of Christianity, and to destroy its influence on themselves, when pressed to serious reflection by their near approach to the eternal world, have generally confessed the Truth and power of our Holy Religion. We could give a long list of the names of men, who have been re-

markable for their violence against Christianity, and as remarkable for their deep anguish on account of that violence. Their unwearied labors, their indefatigable pains, were all in vain. The Truth of Christianity arose in mighty power, at the approach of death—and all their fortifications of unbelief were laid low in the dust !

How died Voltaire, the apostle of infidelity in France ? In the renunciation of his deistical principles, and in the acknowledgement of the Truth of the Gospel*—in the terrors of despair, tortured with the expectation of the fiery indignation of the Son of God, whom he had so horridly blasphemed. “Crush then, do crush the wretch,” had been his exhortation to his infidel brethren.†—

But now he felt, that the hand of him whom he had vowed to crush, was crushing him ! This hero of modern infidels, would fain have returned to the bosom of Christianity, for relief in the extremity of his distress—But it seems it was too late ! He died in horrors inexpressible ! The circumstances of his death were so terrible that his attendants and physicians fled from his presence.‡ So died, in all the anguish of despair,

* *Momet's minutes, a notary at Paris.*

† *Voltaire used to call our Blessed Saviour, the wretch, and he vowed he would crush him.*

‡ *M. Le Luc's letters.*

Diderot and D'Alembert, his friends and companions in infidelity.

Behold the proud boaster of reason, the impious Paine ! What a sad and impressive lesson, does he afford, of the miserable darkness of human reason ! This vain idolizer of reason, and bold blasphemer of the Holy Jesus, has given decisive evidence of the imbecility and perversion of his mind. His principles of infidelity, which he would have us to believe are those of philosophy, matured in this ostentatious age of imaginary reason, are marked with all the characteristics of folly, in the actions of his life, and the circumstances of his death. Paine, in his last moments, could not bear solitude : to be left alone, was to him insufferable.— In the greatest agonies of mind, and with a voice that alarmed all around him, he incessantly cried for hours together : “ O Lord help me, God help me, Jesus Christ help me.”* But when he was asked, Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ? he answered, “ I have no wish to believe on that subject.”†

How inexpressibly miserable was Paine, in his last moments ! So deeply impressed with the Truth of Christianity, that he could not refrain from calling on the Lord Jesus Christ for help—yet so greatly corrupted in heart, that he had no

* *Dr. Manley's letter, published in Cheetham's life of Paine. Page 305.* † *ibid Page 307.*

wish to believe on him ; or if he had such a wish, he was so full of "excessive pride of opinion, consummate vanity, and inordinate self-love," that he would not acknowledge the existence of such a wish. And how many of the companions of Paine, have died in a similar manner ?

How invincible is Truth ! How lasting the impressions, which are made on the mind of man, by the Christian Religion ! Voltaire and his companions, Paine and his associates, applied themselves with great assiduity to the work of destruction—they endeavored to erase every trait of religious truth from their minds, and all sense of obligation arising from the Gospel, from their consciences. But they labored in vain. The Truth of Jesus Christ was too mighty for them. While health gave them an opportunity of dissipating thought in the bustle of life, or of drowning reflection in riot and debauchery, the Truth seemed to sleep. But when the voice of death was heard, the Truth arose with increased vigor, and, rushing upon them like a man of war, took from them all their armour wherein they trusted. The schemes of infidelity, with which they had pleased themselves, and on which they had grounded their miserable hope, vanished away like the baseless fabric of a dream ; while the truths of the Gospel stood awfully manifested before them. Men may despise the Truth, when presented by the hand of Mercy

—but they cannot despise it, when Justice presents it. The Gospel will take effect ; it will be a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death.

Behold on the bed of languishment the gasping mortal, in the agonies of death. A deadly paleness in his countenance, and a cold sweat on his face, indicate the near approach of dissolution. Death has gained his vital parts ; pulsation has ceased in the extremities ; and the powers of nature sink apace. A few moments, and the vital flame will be extinguished. He is just now going to bid adieu to all things below the sun, to close his eyes in the darkness of death, and to take his flight to an eternal world ! But how does he meet death ? Does a dark cloud hang over, time and a darker over eternity ? Does “remorse for the past throw his thought on the future, and worst dread of the future drive it back on the past ?” Is he racked with the anguish of uncertainty, or the tortures of despair ? Have the terrors of death taken hold on him ? O ! no—Death has no terror for him. There is no darkness to him in this land of shades. The prospect before him is divinely pleasing and ineffably glorious ! For he is a Christian indeed. The light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, now shines on his path. He now drinks, even in the midst of death, of the waters of life, flowing through the Gospel from the fountain of e-

ternal Truth, and rejoices in the life of God—Heaven bursts upon his sight! He shouts! he shouts in the full triumph of faith! "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!" There breathed the spirit of a true Christian, and of a true hero—How he smiles in death! He is gone—gone to the bosom of God!

How divine is the efficacy of christianity! and to what greatness and glory does it elevate the real Christian! May we all feel the happy efficacy of the Gospel in the hour of death! God grant us this favor through Jesus Christ!

ESSAY XXXII.

The real Christian enjoys a divine Sense of the Truth of Christianity.

AS God is immutable in his nature, he could have had no view to self-interest, in the creation of the world. And, therefore, as he is full of all goodness, it is reasonable to conclude, that overflowing benevolence, boundless desire to communicate happiness, gave birth to nature.

This thought, while it places the character of Deity in the most glorious and lovely light, suggests another, which, if not so luminous, is at least as delightful. The thought is this: When man heartily embraces the Revelation of the will of God, on the ground of the evidences with which it is attended, he has a right to expect, that these evidences will be corroborated with a divine sense of the Truth of that Religion, which they go to establish. That boundless benevolence which gave rise to creation, and bestowed the Gospel on man, will ever prompt the Author of nature and grace, to inspire the bosom of the true believer with such a sense of divine Truth. For of all the sensations of which human nature is capable, there is not one more pleasurable, or more necessary to the safety of the real Christian, than a lively sense of the Truth of Christianity.

We are also lead to believe, that such a sense exists in the minds of true believers, from a consideration of the nature of Religion descending from God. The efficacy which came under consideration in the last Essay, arising from the excellent nature, and impressive weight, of the Gospel, must produce a divine sense of the Truth of Christianity, in the mind of the genuine Christian.

But does the Gospel agree with these rational conclusions? Does it teach us to believe, that its efficacy is attended with a sense of its Truth, in.

the mind of the true Christian ? It does. " He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself."* But what is this witness ? " The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."† But how does the Spirit bear witness, that we are the children of God ? " The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given unto us."‡ According to the Gospel, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, is the witness of the Spirit. This divine nature, diffused through all the powers of our souls, and attended with an inexpressible sense of heavenly joy, establishes, beyond all doubt, our sonship by faith in Jesus Christ ; and consequently confirms the Truth of the Christian Religion, under the influence of which we have received adoption into the family of God.

But does this agree with the experience of the genuine Christian ? It does. He enjoys a sensible internal evidence of the Truth of the Gospel. This is a natural consequence of the efficacy of Christianity. Can a man be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, without the knowledge of this great change, or without a sense, that the principles which have effected it,

* *John*, 5. 10.

† *Rom.* 8. 16.

‡ *Rom.* 5. 5.

of a divine nature? Can a man, under the influence of the Gospel, receive the love of God shed abroad in his heart—diffused through all the powers of his soul as the principle of a new nature, and as an inexhaustible source of consolation, and know nothing of it, or be destitute of a lively sensation, that the Gospel is of God?

The undue impressions which we suffer external objects to make on our passions, and the improper inferences which we draw from the feelings of our hearts, are, indeed, sources of errors great and dangerous. But will it, therefore, follow, that the sensations of our hearts, which arise from the impressions of truth itself, and promote its practical dictates, are unreasonable, or that the inferences drawn from them must be fallacious? When principles, the truth of which the mind clearly perceives from demonstrative evidence, are applied to the heart, and the application is attended with the happiest consequences; when the whole heart is transformed, corruption giving place to purity, the tyranny of passion, to the mild government of enlightened reason, strife and misery to the peace and pleasures of God; is it possible in such a case, that there should be no inward sense of the divine nature of the principles, under which such glorious effects have taken place? And can we believe that such a sense, so agreeable to the best dictates of reason, so favorable to virtue, and so productive of

happiness, is groundless and fallacious, and that it ought to have no weight with reasonable men? Impossible.

But why do we argue? We will appeal unto those who have truly and heartily embraced the Christian Religion. Thousands and tens of thousands, who have gone to mingle with that happy multitude which no man can number, have left behind them a testimony, that they enjoyed the sense of divine Truth, which we have now under consideration. Thousands of rational men and women, now living in the world, can bear testimony to the same truth.

It is the genuine experimental Christian, on whom this evidence operates so forcibly. The nominal Christian, and the unbeliever, have no part in it. They may, however, find an argument in favor of Christianity, in the testimony of those who enjoy this sense of divine Truth. For it affords evidence of no inconsiderable weight. Multitudes of honest men, whose word bears the highest degree of credit in temporal affairs, declare unto us that they enjoy an internal sense of the Truth of the Gospel. Many of these are men of the first abilities both natural and acquired.

There is, indeed, in the mind of the real Christian, a lively sense of divine Truth, arising from the happy experience of the efficacy of the Gospel. This is superior to all those evidences which we

have hitherto considered. It is the best of all arguments in favor of the Gospel, because it arises from the enjoyment of its spiritual blessings. It is an argument addressed to the understanding by the sensibility of the heart. No evidence is more direct; for it resembles that which a man has of his own existence. I know that I am, because I feel that I am. I know that Christianity is true, because I feel its Truth within me.

We do not mean, that this evidence is superior to all others, because it is more demonstrative—but because, while it carries the fullest conviction with it, it is attended with more satisfaction and advantage. What eternal advantage can any man derive from the fullest persuasion of the Truth of Christianity in his mind, if his heart take no part in this persuasion? Not any. But when this persuasion descends from the mind to the heart, and meets with cordial reception there, it produces a lively sense of the Truth of the Gospel, attended with inexpressible satisfaction. This sense naturally returns to the understanding, and increases the conviction from which it arose; and this increased conviction, again descending to the heart, operates with increased power. A communication founded on the natural constitution of the soul, is kept open between the heart and the mind, in which the sensibility of the former, and the conviction of the latter, operate reciprocally on each other, and

produce the happiest effects. Thus the Christian is more and more confirmed in the faith, and more strongly stimulated to be active and assiduous in the pursuit of Christian virtues. He daily advances in the love of God, and in the love of man.—

Through the operation of that faith which is of God, and which has equally to do with his understanding, and his heart, he gradually advances in moral excellence, until he becomes truly fit for the enjoyment of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This inward evidence gives its possessor a vigor more than mortal; and affords him support of a divine nature in the severest trials of virtue, by giving him the enjoyment of unspeakable delight, an undoubted persuasion of the approbation and protection of God, and the full assurance of everlasting glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. Besides, it has, among other excellences, this in particular, that he who truly possesses it, cannot doubt the Truth of Christianity—because not only his understanding perceives, but his heart also feels, that the Gospel is divine. He knows that it came from God—because it discovers God unto him, and unites him to his maker in the bonds of holy love.

This strongly marks Christianity, as a work of the God of nature. It is addressed to the whole

man—The heart, as well as the mind, is required to know the Truth, the excellence, and the saving power of the Gospel of Christ.

ESSAY XXXIII.

The subject briefly reviewed and concluded.

LET us now very briefly review the evidences of Christianity, which have come under our consideration in these Essays ; and we are persuaded that we shall see, that we do not depart from that modesty which becomes human nature, in affirming that there is nothing within the bounds of the knowledge of man more certainly true, than the Christian Religion.

In the consideration of this subject, we have seen—that all objections against Revelation in general, are entirely groundless—that a Revelation from heaven is possible, with respect both to God and man—that Revelation is highly necessary for the salvation of mankind ; because of the inability of reason to form a perfect system of Religion, and to enforce known obligations ; and because, in par-

ticular, natural law, were it fully known, is not suited to the condition of fallen man—that Revelation cannot derogate from the glory of the Divine perfections, from the wisdom, holiness, and majesty of God—and that from the necessity of man, the tendency of Revelation to promote order among moral beings and to increase their welfare, and from the moral character of God, from his infinite benevolence which prompts him to make his subjects happy, it is highly probable, that God would give a Revelation of his will to man. What objection against Revelation in general, can, therefore, be offered with the least shadow of reason ?

We have also seen—that it is equally impossible to raise any reasonable objection against Revelation in that particular form, in which it is found in the Christian Religion ; because it contains nothing contrary to the nature of God—that the historical parts of Christianity are consistent, and its doctrines reasonable—that the doctrines of the Gospel, respecting moral evil, the incarnation of Christ, the atonement, and the Trinity, have nothing in them repugnant to the nature of God.

We have likewise seen—that Christianity is attended with evidence of its Divine authority, in its internal constitution ; its doctrines and laws being impressed with the character of God—that it resembles God in its perspicuity and sublimity, in its

consistency and perfection as a body of divinity, in its holiness, proportion and energy, in the propriety of its conditions, the promise of divine aid, and the doctrine of Providence.

Moreover we have seen—that the Christian Religion is supported by external incontrovertible evidence, addressed to the senses of mankind—that the testimony of Jesus Christ and his apostles, is worthy of the highest degree of credibility—that a vast number of genuine miracles demonstrate the Truth of the Gospel—and that this Truth is equally demonstrated by a great number of predictions accurately accomplished long subsequent to their publication in the world.

We have also seen—that these external evidences have been so handed down to us, as to exclude all deception and error, respecting their Truth—that it was impossible to forge, and impose on mankind the Sacred writings which convey these evidences to us—and that the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, is confirmed to us by the completion of predictions in our day.

We have likewise seen—that this grand assemblage of arguments and demonstrations, is corroborated by a glorious efficacy attending the preaching of the Gospel, and a divine sense of its truth in the minds of true believers.

On this broad and firm basis the Christian Religion

stands ; and here it will forever stand—the admiration of the wise—and the hope of the good.

Let us now divest ourselves of the influence of passion and prejudice, and remove every thing which would obstruct the operation, or restrain the rational liberty, of our intellectual powers, in our decisions on this important subject. And let us ask ourselves, can we reject the Christian Religion without renouncing natural Religion also ? And after such rejection, can we claim the prerogatives of reasonable beings ? can we rank ourselves among men who have the use of their rational and moral powers ? And can we require evidence, in any case whatever, as the ground of faith, or as a motive to action ?

We must confess, that it is difficult for us to conceive how any man can candidly consider these evidences, and not be convinced, that the Gospel is divine. It appears to us impossible—For these evidences are so numerous, so full, so strong, so perfectly conclusive, that their weight, though their nature is different, is equal to mathematical demonstration.

We must acknowledge, that the mind of man long accustomed to error, often becomes incapable of perceiving the force of truth ; because it loses its capacity of candid examination. To such a mind, Christianity, though surrounded with all the splendor of divine evidences, may still be an object of

doubt. However, a wish may remain to return to Christ, if the Truth of his Religion could be ascertained. There is a direct way, for persons in such a state, to obtain the Truth. “My doctrine, said Jesus Christ, is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, *he shall know* the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” Let them take this direction. Let them sincerely do what they know to be the will of God, and humbly ask him for the knowledge of truth. They who do so, will assuredly find the Truth of our Holy Religion: they will be enabled both to perceive and feel that the Gospel is of God.

The Gospel is, indeed, of God; and it will remain forever. It is founded on a rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The oppositions of ungodly men, and the exertions of satanical powers against the Gospel, may effect the eternal destruction of thousands of men, but they cannot effect the destruction of the Christian Religion.

The world shall fail and waste away; the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; nature shall grow old with age, and the sun shall decay and die—but the Religion of the Son of God shall abide forever. All the parts thereof, which relate to this world, shall have their full accomplishment in the economy of time; and its great principles of truth and love, shall extend through the economy of eternity, and operate on the society of the blessed to increase their happiness and glory forever.

God grant that we may know the Truth of this Holy Religion—May we feel its power, obey its obligations, and receive the full accomplishment of its promises, in the profession of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE END.

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