



Doctor LANGDON's  
S E R M O N  
AT THE ANNUAL  
DUDLEIAN LECTURE,

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 1, 1775.



A  
S E R M O N

# LECTURE

H A R V A R D C O L L E G E

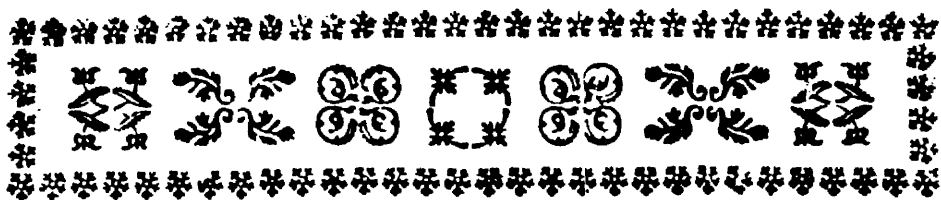
## LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Honorable PAUL DUDLEY, Esq;

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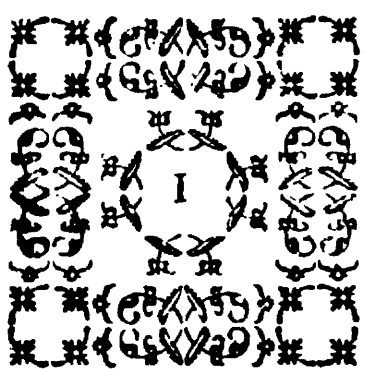
*God*, in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness. ACTS xiv. 16, 17.

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## M I C A H iv. 5.

*For all People will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.*



It is my part in this Lecture, according to the course appointed by the Honorable Founder, “to prove, explain, or shew the proper use and improvement of the principles of *natural Religion*, as it is commonly called by Divines and “*Learned Men.*”

This subject has been again and again managed with great accuracy, by a number of learned and judicious Ministers of Christ, who have gone before me in these anniversary labors. But if I can add nothing to what they have already delivered, it will not be wholly inconsistent with the design of the institution, to bring again into view the main principles on which natural religion is built, and shew how far all mankind are bound by them, what co-incidence they have with revealed religion, and in what respects they tend to confirm Christianity, and perfect that practical obedience which the Gospel requires.

The text now read mentions it as a well known fact, confirmed by a general view of the world, that *all people*, all nations and persons, have some God or Gods in whom they place their confidence, and to whom

whom they pay religious honors: This universal practice is supposed to have it's foundation in the very nature of man as a rational creature, who, by the least reflexion on the universe around him, will be led to entertain general apprehensions of some superior Power or Powers, presiding over the whole and every part. And from this observation is deduced a strong argument in favor of that religion which has the one living and true God for it's Object: for the worshippers of Jehovah have reason to glory in their resolute adherence to him, and regulate their whole conduct in life by the deepest reverence of his name, and a conscientious desire to honor and obey him, since *nature* itself dictates the worship of a God, and all mankind feel the obligation, however erroneous and gross their notions of a Deity may be. The Prophet introduces God's faithful people, who in the latter days should enjoy the privileges and blessings of the Gospel, as rising superior to all the reproaches cast upon them for their unremitting zeal in the worship of their God and Savior; and expressing, in one short sentence, their determination to persevere in the religion they had embraced, and the full conviction of their minds that this determination was justifiable by the principles of reason, and the universal zeal of mankind in the service of those Deities which they had set up according to their own imaginations, through ignorance of the true God,—  
 “For all people will walk every one in the name of  
 “his God, and we will walk in the name of the  
 “Lord our God for ever and ever.”

Let us then begin with some inquiry into the Religion of nature, and consider what it is; what are the main principles on which it is built; to what perfection it may be, or has been in fact carried; and how far all mankind are held under the obligations of it.

When we speak of *religion*, we ought to include  
 more

more in the idea than merely a *system of morality*, adapted to the situation of mankind in the present world, separate from the consideration of divine Government, and proper rewards and punishments. If men had no knowledge at all of the Deity, or no manner of regard to him ; if they had neither hopes nor fears beyond the enjoyments of the present life in the natural course of things, and consulted only temporal security and comfort, they would find it necessary to observe those natural laws which regulate the conduct of rational creatures for their good, both in social connexions, and as individuals ; but there would be impropriety in calling such morality by the name of religion, unless in a much laxer sense than is now commonly affixed to the word : for by religion is meant, not only an obligation on conscience by a conviction of the reasonableness and beneficial tendency of morality in the present state, but that more powerful obligation which binds us, by the love and fear of God, to conform to his will, and labor to be accepted in his sight in all our actions, from a persuasion that our highest felicity is derived from his favor.

- Religion begins in the acknowledgement of a Deity, and those acts of devotion which immediately appear necessary as soon as God is known. Devotion is maintained by a constant persuasion of our dependence on the Deity for all things. And as he is Lord of all, and mankind are under his moral government, we become conscious of guilt before him when we act contrary to the dictates of reason and conscience, and enjoy the higher satisfaction in right conduct as we hope to be approved and rewarded by him. Thus every branch of morality is connected with religion, and becomes an important part of it ; because in regulating our behaviour, we feel the bond of duty to God on our conscience, without which morality might be considered as a good social system, but intirely distinct from religion.      However ;

However ; since the apprehensions of a Deity, and the obligations of conscience thence arising, are as universal among mankind as the knowledge of those natural laws, which are essential to good order and comfort in the present world ; we may consider the *religion* and the *law of nature* as the same thing. For it is as plainly a law of nature, that we should honor and obey God, and behave in all respects as creatures dependent on him, and accountable to him, as that we should be just, merciful and kind to our fellow men, and govern ourselves by rules of common wisdom and prudence.

*The religion of nature*, considered in the most perfect view, is that which we suppose investigable by the natural powers of the human mind, without the assistance of any revelation from heaven. If therefore the question is stated in this view, and the inquiry is,—What System of religion *Reason* alone would trace out when exercised on this grand subject,—we must proceed on the supposition that the rational powers are exercised in full strength, without the least prepossession, or wrong bias, to blind the mind, or pervert the judgment. By such a perfect exercise of the rational faculties, the most essential characters of God might perhaps be learned, from the signatures of them marked on all parts of the creation. By just observations on the grandeur, order, and beauty of the universe ; the natures, purposes, and powers of the various ranks of Beings, animate and inanimate ; together with the many indications of the constant agency of some supreme Intelligence, in continuing the established order of things, providing for all possible changes of circumstances, and exercising a more immediate government over mankind, agreeable to their rational faculties and moral state ; we may suppose the mind would naturally be led to such reflexions as these——

“ Surely this stupendous universe is the work of  
“ some

“ some invisible Agent, beyond all comparison and  
 “ conception superior to man : for such a grand  
 “ complete System, so infinitely complicate, and yet  
 “ so exactly adjusted in all it’s parts, the most mi-  
 “ nute as well as the grandest, that all kinds of sym-  
 “ metry and perfection concur to complete the whole,  
 “ could never be the effect of chance, or the product  
 “ of endless essays and mutations of matter. This  
 “ Agent must have an unlimited mind, to compre-  
 “ hend these vast innumerable works in one perfect  
 “ Idea, before they were made. His *power*, also,  
 “ must be equal to his unlimited understanding. And  
 “ He is evidently as *good* as he is wise and powerful ;  
 “ otherwise malignity against his creatures would  
 “ appear in universal discords through nature, per-  
 “ petually generating all manner of evils.

“ Whatever *moral characters* are necessary to ren-  
 “ der man honorable and amiable, the same ought  
 “ to be attributed to the glorious unknown Author  
 “ of all things in unbounded perfection ; especially  
 “ as the government of all worlds, and every crea-  
 “ ture that exists must be in his hands. To imagine  
 “ him capable of committing any error, or having  
 “ any moral evil imputed to him, would be to de-  
 “ grade him at once, in theory, from all his honor  
 “ as God, and judge him disqualified either to be  
 “ the maker or governor of the universe. If he is  
 “ acknowledged as *King and Judge* of all the earth, he  
 “ must be worthy the highest confidence of man-  
 “ kind,—as impartially *just* ; determined to punish  
 “ all wickedness, according to the demerit of every  
 “ crime committed by rational creatures against the  
 “ law they are under, whatever honorable distinc-  
 “ tions they may claim in other respects, and to shew  
 “ special favor only to the righteous ;—and as per-  
 “ fectly *benevolent* ; making it the grand design of  
 “ his universal dominion, to secure to every living  
 “ creature all the happiness suitable to it’s nature,

“ and consistent with the general order of the world,  
 “ and the moral government of rational beings, and  
 “ manifesting his tender mercies towards all in cir-  
 “ cumstances of misery. All the good mankind in-  
 “ joy must come from his hands ;—all the evils they  
 “ fear must be under his direction ;—and according  
 “ to their knowledge of his glorious perfections, they  
 “ must be bound to pay him homage, make their  
 “ prayer to him, give thanks for his goodness, love,  
 “ fear, trust in him, and obey his Will.

“ If God is a Being of perfect moral rectitude  
 “ (certainly he must be such) and if he takes any  
 “ notice at all of mankind, every immorality practised  
 “ among men must be highly offensive to his nature.  
 “ *Reason is his Law* given to man, indelibly imprint-  
 “ ed on his mind : but to prevent the labor and error  
 “ of long abstract reasonings in order to ascertain the  
 “ necessary duties of life in their various branches and  
 “ changeable circumstances, He has furnished man  
 “ with a kind of instinctive knowledge, by which he  
 “ is capable of distinguishing betwixt right and  
 “ wrong action, almost as immediately and necessa-  
 “ rily as the inferior creatures know their proper  
 “ food, or shun their enemies. *Reason and Conscience*  
 “ therefore co-inside in the government of human  
 “ actions, and to disregard them must be a crime in  
 “ the view of that Deity who gave mankind their  
 “ rational powers : and He that made us under this  
 “ law of nature doubtless will enforce the observance  
 “ of it by the proper exercise of his authority, in  
 “ bestowing suitable rewards on the obedient, and  
 “ punishing such as disregard it. Therefore the prac-  
 “ tice of every thing good and virtuous is to be con-  
 “ sidered as *duty to God*, as well as necessary for the  
 “ preservation of Society, and the welfare of indivi-  
 “ duals ; it must render men amiable to that perfect  
 “ Being who is above all, to act in the most perfect  
 “ manner of which their nature is capable ; and on  
 “ the



“ the contrary, they must appear odious, and be exposed to his just displeasure, when every maxim of wisdom and justice is counteracted ; and from the favor of the great God, the greatest good which can be desired may be expected ; but misery and death must be the effect of his displeasure.”

In some such manner as this *Reason* in it's perfect state might be supposed capable of arriving at the knowledge of the *One true God*, and deducing from thence a compleat system of natural religion. Yet it can hardly be conceived, according to our experience of the labor of searching out truth, that the human mind, in its utmost strength, could by one glance of thought discover all the essential characters of the Deity, or the proper acts of worship and obedience which he requires. We might as well affirm, that unimpaired reason must naturally, at the first view of the heavenly bodies, have a clear knowledge of their magnitudes, distances, and revolutions : or by looking round on the earth, immediately be acquainted with the innumerable gradations of animal life, and vegetable productions and Fossils of all forms and uses. In such limited Beings as man, there cannot be an instantaneous knowledge of things, especially such as are sublime and remote from sense ; the discovery of one truth leads on to another, and by constant progress we perfect every theory.

Therefore it may justly be questioned whether, if man at his first creation, furnished with the strongest mental powers, and continuing innocent and free from every bias against the knowledge of God, had been left to himself intirely, to form his notions of a Deity, merely by his own reflections, without any supernatural revelation, it would not have cost the labor of Ages to demonstrate a true System of religion, as it has really taken near six thousand years to search out the laws of the material system, and bring natural philosophy to it's present perfection.

Indeed

Indeed it may be doubted whether religion could ever have been delineated, with such precision, and assurance of truth, as now it has been, without the assistance of immediate revelation.

No sufficient experiment ever has been made to determine this question ; there never was a time when mankind were absolutely left without revelation, though some nations have approached very near to such a state, and have, for wise ends of providence, to shew the great imbecility of human reason, been suffered (as the Apostle strongly expresses it) *to seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.* Notwithstanding any hypothesis confidently advanced to the contrary, Adam, who came into existence in perfect stature of body immediately, and not by slow advances, was at once as perfect in his mind, capable of exercising all the faculties with which his Creator endowed him in the best manner ; but it does not appear that he was left to find out, merely by the force of reason, who was the author of his Being. His Maker immediately discovered himself by an open correspondence, and settled the terms of perpetual communion and friendship ; otherwise the first man, starting suddenly into Being, and filled with amazement at the infinite variety of Objects presented before him in the new world, might long have wondered what power created him, and wearied himself in his inquiries concerning the Author of nature, before he could have gained full satisfaction.

A revelation once made may have in some degree a perpetual effect. A point of knowledge of the first importance, given from above in a supernatural way, would be handed down to posterity with peculiar care. But when revelations are from time to time renewed, and at such seasons, and in such methods as are most likely to spread the report of them through the world, and continue their remembrance, the knowledge communicated

communicated imperceptibly mixes with the natural notions of mankind, so that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other.

For this reason it is not easy to determine where any system of mere natural religion is to be found ; much less what nations have practised on such a system. As to the moral philosophy of the moderns, it is far from being the production of simple nature. It has borrowed great light from the last and clearest revelation of the grace of God to men, though pride forbids the several Authors to give credit for what they have received, and they bend all their force to destroy the reputation of those sacred Oracles of wisdom, to which they owe every improvement they have made beyond the heathen Sages. Nor can we allow that *Plato*, *Socrates*, or *Cicero*, collected their theology intirely from nature. The fame of *Jebo-vah*, the God of the Jews, had long been spread abroad in the world by the miracles wrought for his people, the great judgments manifested in the sight of all nations on their account, and the many wonderful deliverances granted them. By all these the divine perfections were clearly demonstrated ; nor were the sacred Oracles wholly unknown to the kingdoms bordering on Canaan, or the countries where the Jews were dispersed by wars or for the sake of commerce. Especially after the jewish scriptures were translated into the greek language, great numbers in all parts became acquainted with them, many were profelyted to the true God, and doubtless Philosophers had the curiosity to read them, and did not neglect to make some advantage of the knowlege they gained for the farther improvement of their own schemes, however they might despise the peculiarities of the jewish religion.

The agreement of all nations in acknowleging some heavenly Powers, shows that reason naturally admits the notion of a God, as far as he is discover'd  
to

to minds now greatly darkned. Their erroneous conceptions of him originate from the evil dispositions of nature corrupted : for the love of sinful gratifications directly militates against the love of truth, and that knowlege of God which binds men to a wise, virtuous and pious conduct.

When the world was peopled after the *Flood*, all mankind were acquainted with the one true God, and that rational and spiritual worship which he requires ; but as vice increased, they grew more averse to the purity of religion, though natural reason would not suffer them absolutely to renounce the form ; and so they gradually lost what they knew of God, changed his worship into gross superstitions, and step by step introduced the most abominable idolatries. In Abraham's day Idolatry began generally to obtain ; and that heaven might bear public testimony against it, and prevent it's becoming absolutely universal, that Patriarch was called out of his own Country, and his seed separated from the rest of the nations and settled in Canaan, which became a chosen Theatre for new displays of the divine glory in the view of the whole world. Notwithstanding which, Idolatry prevailed ; and instead of being checked and eradicated by the refinements of science, and politeness of manners among the Greeks and Romans, the infatuation of their minds was continually increasing, and superstition appeared dressed up in a multitude of additional ornaments ; for the *world* by all its *wisdom knew not God*. This well agrees with what St. Paul says of the state of the Gentiles in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans—“ *They are without excuse ; because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkned. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools &c.*—And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate

*reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient ; being filled with all unrighteousness &c."*

Did *Reason* naturally lead mankind into all these shameful superstitions and vices ?—This would be the most reproachful reflexion on Reason, and give us the most contemptible idea of natural religion.—No surely ; but by all this we have full evidence of the weakness and great corruption of human nature, that reason no longer maintains its proper empire in the soul, but *Ast* and *sense* have usurped an uncontrouled authority.

The utmost we can know of natural religion by any experiments among those that have, in a great measure, lost that knowledge which was originally communicated to mankind by revelation, is by the writings of their most eminent *Philosophers*. But in the very best of them we find great errors and deficiencies, both in theology and morals. Some of them, indeed, have done wonders, considering the vulgar prejudices they had to combat, in asserting the unity of the Deity and tracing out his perfections, as well as drawing a system of morals : but it was not in their power to avoid some capital errors in both, while reason was making efforts against the universal corruption ; so that we cannot from them gain an idea of the religion of nature altogether just.

We are not to expect to find the *religion of nature* exemplified in any systems of theology or forms of devotion, *generally receiv'd* and observed among nations unenlightened by revelation, though we abate much from the perfection even of that to which their *Philosophers* attained, on account of the unavoidable weakness of human nature as it now appears. The philosophic religion of the antient Sages came nearest to the dictates of mere reason, however chargeable with many deviations and deficiencies ; but it never generally obtained.

But

But now, after so many discouragements in our endeavours to find the theory of natural religion verified in the practice of mankind, shall we wholly give up the point, and say such religion is intirely imaginary?—By no means :—Let us look more intimately into human nature, and see whether it is not so constituted, that every man finds himself ready to admit the most essential principles of religion, as soon as they are offered to the mind, whether suggested by his own reflexions, or otherwise communicated. Though we should allow almost insuperable difficulty in arriving at the certain knowlege of one supreme Being, the Creator and Lord of all ; yet when by any means this primary truth is in general declared, it strikes the mind with great power, every thing around us serves to confirm it ; *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowlege.* And when the unity and spirituality of the Deity are clearly settled in the mind, his essential attributes may be discovered without any long laborious deductions. His *wisdom* and *power* in all his works strike us with irresistible conviction ; his *goodness* every where appears ; and as *King* of the universe we are led to acknowledge him possessed of all the glorious qualifications for such boundless dominion. If we should meet with any great impediment in reasoning more abstractly, in order to investigate any of the divine attributes, an attentive view of the creation will lead us at once to discover what perfections, both natural and moral, necessarily belong to his nature : “ *for the visible things of God are clearly seen, being known by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* But if, in any respect, we should be liable to fail and err from the truth, when left merely to our own reasonings, if some friendly instructor gives better information, reason instantly feels the force of truth, without

out the necessity of a miraculous confirmation, unless some vicious bias intercepts the light.

And upon such a discovery of the divine perfections, the most important duties, which men owe their Creator and King, immediately appear self evident; such as adoration, prayer, thanksgiving, love, fear, confidence in his goodness, mercy and justice, earnest endeavors to please him, and joy in the hope of his favor. And though we first may be informed of these duties by revelation, yet reason unites with it in bearing testimony, that these duties plainly result from the knowledge of God.

As to the morality of our conduct, with respect to ourselves and one another, it is so evidently the *Law of nature* that we regulate our actions by reason and conscience, that it will not admit any controversy: and as far as this makes a part of religion, the religion of nature appears to be universal. For they who are most remote from all the advantages of an express Law given from heaven in writing, are nevertheless conscious of a law written on their hearts, and “*do by nature the things contained in the law.*” This is the basis of all the penal laws of civil society. This is the foundation of all the charges which men bring, one against another, for any injuries receiv’d, the reproaches cast on men of bad morals, and the high commendations of men of exemplary virtue. In this part of religion men are most universally agreed in judgment, however vicious their practice may be: for all condemn murder, injustice, theft, adultery, lying, perjury, dissimulation, covetousness, and every thing manifestly foolish, irregular, and dissolute in any man’s personal behavior; and on the contrary, praise men for wisdom, integrity, patriotism, liberality, moderation, temperance, and the like. Without any revelation, nature itself will teach these and all the larger branches of virtue and vice which cannot easily be concealed: and when

*revelation* gives a more perfect discovery of these things in their most secret principles in the heart, *reason and conscience* at once join in testifying the truth and peculiar excellency of the morals it teaches.

Upon the whole then, we properly call that the *Religion of nature*, which may either be discovered by the proper exercise of our rational faculties in the present imperfect state of human nature, or which the reason of mankind cannot but approve as soon as it is made known, without the necessity of supernatural evidence : and what has been said may afford sufficient evidence, that a general sense of religion is inseparable from human nature ; that though, in theory, we may imagine religion capable of being carried to great perfection by reason alone, yet in fact it needs the assistance of divine revelation to revive it's original strength, and regain it's influence.

One thing more remains to be considered under this first head, viz —How far all mankind are held under the obligations of natural religion.

Now the obligations of natural religion are of two kinds, viz. those which are inseparable from the power of reason and conscience over men, even though they have no dread of a Supreme Being ; and those which arise from the consideration of the nature and universal government of the Deity. These obligations are of a moral nature, not implying irresistible compulsion, but the criminality of disobedience, and the danger of suffering some punishment for it, according to the very constitution of things, or by the just resentments of the Sovereign of the universe.

*Reason and Conscience*, by the power they naturally have over men, oblige them to observe the laws of nature, even though they have no dread of the Supreme Being. For who dares to be guilty of so great an absurdity, as to attempt to prove by reason, that he is no ways obliged to govern himself by the dic-  
tates



tates of natural reason ? How is it possible for a man to justify to himself his own conduct, when he plainly sees he is not justifiable, but is acting contrary to truth and right, to wisdom and prudence, and even the genuine principle of self-love ? Can he blame, and feel resentiment against others, for doing wrong, and having no regard to their own or their neighbors welfare, and yet look on himself free from all restraint, and feel no uneasiness in his own mind, when he does the same things ? To think ourselves at liberty to act irrationally, is to renounce all the dignity of rational creatures, and sink human nature even below the brutes, who uniformly act according to their several capacities and instincts. *Conscience*, making an instantaneous judgment of what is our duty, as a kind of instinct implanted in human nature to serve the most sudden occasions, cannot but have tender feelings, and give uneasiness whenever we neglect what we know ought to be done, or do what we cannot but condemn. The mind can have no settled peace, when our conduct is manifestly contrary to the principles we acknowledge ; when we are quite regardless of the consequences of our behavior, and are governed by no rules. If we live without any care of our morals, we must be exposed to endless vexatious reflexions on our selves, as often as we feel the innumerable ill effects of our irregularities.

But when men likewise are persuaded there is a God who governs the world, so far as they acknowledge the perfections of his nature, and his regard to the conduct of mankind as their Lawgiver and Judge, they confess their obligations to honor him, and obey that law which is inseparable from their rational nature. The dread of his power and anger, the desire of his favor, oblige us to comply with his will ; and we are so conscious of this obligation, that we can by no means enjoy peace and satisfaction of mind, when we are guilty of those things which are  
offensive

offensive to him? Every truth concerning the Deity which men discover, immediately produces a proportionate conviction of the importance of those duties which result from this knowledge; and the clearest knowledge brings us under the strongest bonds: so that no man, unless he is totally ignorant of God, can be insensible of the obligations of religion. And surely the advantage of a full revelation of God and his Will, must be so far from relaxing the bonds we are naturally under, that it rather becomes most inexcusably criminal not to obey the truth so perfectly made known; for revelation confirms every thing which the law of nature teaches, and requires the most complete observance of the duties of it, in order to our highest advances in religion.

This reminds us of another general Head which may require some attention before we finish the Subject.—It is comprehended in the following question, viz.

II. How far do the Principles of *natural religion* coincide with *Revelation*; and in what respects do they tend to confirm Christianity, and perfect that obedience which the Gospel requires?

Now if Christianity did not coincide with natural religion, all the supernatural evidences which ever were or might be adduced to prove the truth of it, would be utterly insufficient to establish it's credit; for no evidence can possibly prevail against the constant testimony of Reason and Conscience, or the primary principles of truth implanted in human nature. For instance;—If Christianity required us to believe the Supreme Being to be defective in Wisdom, of limited power, capable of falsifying his word, unrighteous and cruel in his government, or so weakly mild and merciful as never to execute his threatenings against transgressors of his laws, and the like, mankind could not be bound to receive such a religion: for by contradicting all the natural documents

ments of Reason, it would intirely destroy it's own authority. So if a supposed revelation should teach us, that men may live as they please, bite and devour, murder and destroy, rob and plunder, without crime or danger ; and that God will shew as much love and kindness to such persons, and make them as happy, as if they should give the most solemn attention to his voice, and discover the utmost concern to comply with the laws of nature and the express commands of heaven ; if it should pretend to assure men, that there is no manner of difference between pursuing a course of abandoned wickedness, or hearkning to the dictates of conscience, and improving every advantage of gaining wisdom, and finding the way to eternal happiness ; but they are more likely to be inlightened, and obtain all the blessings of the divine favor in the former way than in the latter: such doctrines would be so shocking to common sense, so destructive of all religion and morality, that reason and conscience would *justify* us in rejecting—yes, they would *constrain* us to reject such a revelation, with the greatest abhorrence.

But Christianity is far from contradicting the principles of natural religion in the least degree. It reveals, indeed, surprizing things which the light of nature never could have discover'd,—the *Mercy* of God perfectly reconcilable with the *severest Justice* and resentment against sin ; *Mercy and Truth meeting together, Righteousness and Peace kissing each other* !—the Law executed and fulfilled in every part, and the divine government honor'd, though the greatest criminals may escape punishment and obtain heavenly glory !—the reconciliation of a rebellious condemned world to God, by the obedience and sufferings of the Mediator ! The Gospel assures us of a *new ground* of the justification and salvation of sinners, not by their own works of righteousness, but on account of that perfect righteousness of *Jesus the Son of God*, which

which is well pleasing to the Father ; and a new way of our admittance to the enjoyment of the blessings of God's love, viz. by our *believing* the testimony of the Gospel concerning the glorious characters and work of Christ ;—*believing effectually* so as to trust in him with all the heart to render us accepted in the sight of his Father, and to discipline us for heavenly happiness, and love and serve him with fidelity. Where the light of nature fails the Gospel offers itself as an intallible guide, discovering the things of God which could not be discerned by the naked eye or the human intellect, and correcting the errors of misguided reason ; but it does not contradict any first principles of reason, or any clear discoveries it has ever made : No, they happily co-incide, and it confirms them all. Revelation teaches the same things with natural religion, but it teaches more ; and reason and conscience, if they judge impartially, must allow the excellency of it's doctrines, and the superior advantages received from the light it communicates. The attributes of the great Author of all things are placed in the most glorious astonishing point of view, and not only so, but the most refined branches of morality are laid open, the grandest arguments for a sober, righteous, and godly life are presented, and instead of rectifying some particular irregularities of behavior, it aims at nothing less than such an intire change of the man, in his inmost principles, temper and affections, as well as outward conduct, that he may well be denominated a new man, as if he were created over again, and had gained a new kind of life. Revelation aims to restore the soul to liberty from a state of base servitude to the flesh, to spiritualize or bring it to live agreeable to its own spiritual nature, under the government of the Spirit of God,—to bring it to live as a citizen of heaven, by the clearest discovery of spiritual and heavenly things, in hopes of being shortly united with the society of  
angels,

angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and dwelling in the presence of God forever.

Tho' Faith and Love are the capital graces of Christianity, and the sum of all it's precepts, and we are taught not to claim the special favor of God and eternal life on account of any virtues to which we have, or imagine we have, attained, or any labors we have performed ; yet the Gospel assures us, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and requires believers to be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect : it does not allow them to stop short in their holy course, but urges their incessant progress from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue ; and accordingly it delivers a great variety of particular precepts for a godly and virtuous life.

But precepts can never be framed to suit every action and every circumstance in the practice of morality ; therefore besides more particular rules of life, not to be equalled by the most celebrated precepts of boasting philosophy, our Divine Lord and Master has added new force to that capital Law of Nature, " Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same unto them," by commanding his disciples to observe it as the comprehensive rule of Christian morals. So St. Paul gives this summary direction—*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest (i. e. honorable), whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things :* and in the apostolic epistles Christians are excited both by exhortations and example to make it their constant care, and look upon it as a general rule of holy living, to keep a good conscience in all things, so that even their greatest enemies might not be able to find any just grounds of accusation against them. Now what can all this amount to, but a full confirmation of the Law of nature,

nature, and an implicit adoption of it into the system of Christianity, so far as it teaches perfect morals ? For, as to the practice of every thing which could not be enumerated in particular precepts, we are plainly referred to our own natural judgment and observation, to determine what is just and right, lovely and honorable : this is to be our guide in all circumstances not easily reducible to any special rules, and we are required to conform ourselves to what common reason and natural conscience will readily point out as our duty. And unless we thus attend to the law of nature for our direction in a multitude of cases, we shall be insensible of many defects in our temper and conduct, and cannot carry the practice of Christian morality to the utmost perfection designed.

I need not say any thing more to show how far natural religion and Christianity co-incide, and how far they mutually assist and corroborate each other.

I shall now conclude with a very few words of application.

Let us take heed of setting up natural religion too high, so as to vie with the honor of divine revelation : for none can tell whether the reason of man, absolutely left to it's own natural strength, in the most perfect state, would ever have arrived at such a certainty in the knowledge of the invisible things of God, as is necessary in order to pure worship and unreserved obedience. While we pay due respect to the wisdom of the heathen sages, let us remember, that the simplicity of the Gospel incomparably surpasses all their labored philosophy. May the Ministers of Christ never exchange the glorious doctrines of the New-Testament for the deficient schemes which men have invented, or magnify reason in any respect above the revelation of God by his Son Christ Jesus our Lord ! But let us humbly and thankfully submit to the authority of the divine word, and make it our care to teach

teach the way of God in truth, and manifest the favour of Christ's name in every place.

May all that are educated in this Seminary of Learning, consider the excellency of the holy Scriptures above all the Wisdom of this world ; and as they desire the true knowledge of God, and to find the way to peace and satisfaction in this life, and happiness in the world to come, may they never treat the sacred Oracles with bold contempt, or careless neglect ! My dear Pupils, let me intreat you to read the Scriptures with the most serious and earnest attention ; make them your delightful study ; remember they teach divine *science* communicated from heaven to mankind,—*science* which tends to elevate the soul, inlarge its views, fortify it against all fears in this world, and direct it in the way to heavenly glory. Prefer the word of God to the best productions of human genius, that you may grow in wisdom every day, and not only be acquainted with the duties which nature teaches, and that Literature which may conduce to your credit and usefulness in this world, but also may know Jesus Christ the divine Savior of miserable men, rejoice in his instruction and government, yield to the power of religion, live a life of true godliness and virtue, and having done eminent service in your generation, may in the world to come obtain that glorious immortality which is the great promise of the Gospel.

Finally ; let all Christians glorify God, according to the peculiar advantages of knowing him with which they are favored. Let none of us be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, or of those religious affections and exercises which are necessary for the honor of our God and Savior, and our advancement in a life of true holiness. Reason, conscience, and revelation, join in obliging us to pay our constant devotions to our Maker and Redeemer ; and if we neglect to worship and glorify the Eternal Father thro' his

Son Jesus, agreeable to the revelation of his nature and Will, even the superstitious heathen will rise up in judgment against us. But while we attend to all the devotional duties of religion, let us not forget the great importance of morality, as it makes an essential part of that holiness which the Gospel requires. If we desire to press forward towards the perfection of the Christian character, we must not content ourselves with an apparent obedience to some of the primary precepts of the Gospel, but continually judge within our own selves what is right,—make the most critical observations on ourselves and others, that we may see what reason and conscience approve or condemn,—and never allow ourselves in any temper or practice which may not be justified both by the law of nature and the revealed rules of righteousness. We are required to be *holy* as *God is holy*,—to be followers of him as dear children—and to be blameless and harmless, as the Sons of God, without rebuke, shining as lights in the world by the wisdom and rectitude of every part of our conduct. Labour therefore, my Christian brethren, to keep a good conscience in all things ; think and judge well what is right in the sight of God and man in all circumstances ; adorn your Christian profession by adding to your faith all the virtues required both by natural and revealed religion—And may the God of all grace, who hath called us into his kingdom and glory, make you perfect in every good work, and work in every one of us that which is well pleasing in his sight, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, in whose name we will walk, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

A M E N.

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