

A  
COMPARATIVE VIEW  
OF THE  
SEVERAL METHODS  
OF  
PROMOTING RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION,  
FROM THE  
EARLIEST DOWN TO THE PRESENT TIME;  
FROM WHICH  
THE SUPERIOR EXCELLENCE  
OF  
THAT RECOMMENDED IN THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTES,  
PARTICULARLY FROM THE ILLUSTRATION OF  
SCRIPTURE HISTORY AND CHARACTERS,  
IS  
EVINCED AND DEMONSTRATED.

BY DUNCAN SHAW, D. D. ✓  
MINISTER AT RAFFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τῷ Θεῷ, ἐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος, διὰ τῆς σοφίας  
τὸν Θεόν, ἐυδόκησεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ τῆς μορίας τοῦ κηρύγματος, σώσαι  
τοὺς ἁγιότατους. 1 COR. i. 21.

Respicere exemplar vitæ, morumque jubebo  
Doctum imitatorum, & veras hinc ducere voces.

HOR. de Art. Poet.

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MDCCLXXVI.



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I N T R O.



# INTRODUCTION.

**M**ANKIND may be considered as Citizens of this World, or Expectants of another. In either, in both of these characters, happiness will naturally be the object of their warmest wishes and of their highest ambition.

But, as nothing can be more various than the sentiments which they have entertained concerning the nature of true happiness, and the course that leads to the enjoyment of it, every attempt to set mankind right as to either of these, must be acknowledged to be laudable, an instance of true philanthropy, and as such deserving of a favourable reception from the public.

In this noble design, many, in the different ages of the world, have engaged: But, however united they have been in the design itself, they have differed widely in the manner of execution. This has been diversified, according to the several views in which they have been led to consider the subject, the genius of those to whom they would recommend the consideration of it, or the various success, with which the attempts of those who had gone before them in the same design, had been attended.

Were applause or gain what a man aimed at, in any performance he offered to the public, he would greatly mistake in the choice of his subject, who, important as it is, should pitch upon one so grave and serious as that of this Essay. The prevailing taste of the present age is for a very different species of writing. In Novel or Romance, with any tolerable degree of merit, he would succeed much better. However, the author, induced by the importance of the subject, to bestow no small attention upon it; con-

scious

scious to himself of the rectitude of his own intentions, and fully persuaded that the cause of virtue, if it receive no benefit, will receive no hurt from this attempt, has ventured to lay before the Public, those reflections which have occurred to him, and appeared important and deserving of attention: But, how far they are so, the Public has a right to judge.

To recommend a certain Plan of Religious Instruction, of which the sacred History affords both the hint, and some excellent models, though neither has perhaps been much attended to, was all the Author had principally in his view, when he first sat down to write upon this subject. But he soon found it necessary to enlarge his Plan, into that form in which it now appears, and, upon a candid attention to it, the several parts of it, he hopes, will be found to have a not distant relation to each other.

Before he would venture to propose an improvement in the manner of promoting

religious instruction which now obtains (if he may venture to call that an improvement which he recommends) he was of opinion it might be, if not necessary, at least highly useful, to consider the several methods which have been followed for this purpose, and to point out their respective defects.

This design gave rise to the first and second Parts of this Essay, and both of them, pave the way for the third.

This enquiry, it is hoped, will produce some good effects. From a comparative view of the most remarkable schemes which have been adopted, in the different ages of the world, for promoting the knowledge, and enforcing the practice of virtue, several important advantages may be derived. The proof and illustration of these are reserved for the conclusion, and will make the subject of the several addresses which it contains.

From

From the above hints, the Reader will easily perceive the design which the Author has in view, and the manner in which he means to prosecute it. Unwilling, therefore, to detain him longer in the entrance, he begs leave to carry him along with him, to the execution of his Plan,

## P A R T I.

*Of the several methods which have been employed, in the different periods of the world, for promoting the knowledge and practice of virtue.*

**N**OTHING can more clearly evince the importance of Religion, and the sentiments of mankind in general, with respect to the excellence of it's nature, the force of it's obligations, and it's subserviency to their happiness, than the attention which hath been paid to it, in all countries and under all those forms of government, of which any account has come down to us.

In it's cause, *Lawgivers, Poets, Philosophers, Historians, Divines*, and others who do not fall under any of these denominations, have all engaged; proud, each, of becoming advocates for it. Left to plead it's cause in that manner which to them seemed best, it needs not surprize us that *this* should be serious. It has been so: each, no doubt, thinking their own an improvement upon the former, and all fondly flattering themselves, that the course which was most acceptable to themselves, would be equally so to the rest of Mankind.

To trace, through a course of ages, the progress of improvement in religious knowledge, the various manner of conveying it, and *fully* to unfold both, might be no unpleasant or unprofitable employment. It would, however, be a work of no small labour and difficulty, and require a very able hand to execute it properly. All the Author of this Essay purposes, is, only for the sake of those who have perhaps never  
turned

turned their thoughts this way, to lay before them, from the subject of his own reading, a few hints, from which, if they have not the leisure, opportunity, or inclination of extending their enquiries upon this point, they may be enabled to form, if not a very comprehensive view, yet a just judgment of the merit of the several methods which have been followed for promoting religious knowledge. And, for the sake of order, which it will be necessary to observe amidst such a variety of subjects, and to conduct his Readers through it, with the less trouble and embarrassment, the Author will digest what is necessary upon the subject of this first part, under the following Sections.

## SECTION



## S E C T I O N I.

*Of the State of Religion, while under the  
Direction of the Civil Magistrate.*

**I**N the more early ages, and before mankind began to form themselves into societies, every thing that related to Religion, must have been under the direction of the Masters of families: and, as each family had probably it's domestic altar, they would naturally preside in the offices of Religion performed at them. Mankind, however, could not long remain in this state. The increase of their numbers, joined with the feelings of nature and a sense of their mutual wants, would soon prompt them to form themselves into societies, incorporated under such forms of Government, as should be concerted by the several members, and did appear most conducive to the good of the whole.

Upon

Upon this principle, it is, I think, highly probable, that the Supreme Power would, at first, be lodged in the hands of one of their number, who, they had reason to think, would be least disposed to abuse it, and the most proper to manage it for the public weal.

In such a state, the supreme Ruler would, no doubt, find an attention to Religion necessary, for the purposes of sound policy and wise government, and accordingly we may observe some species of religion, wrought into all those models of government, of which any account has been transmitted to us.

It is not improbable, that the people, having vested the Supreme Magistrate (call him what you will) with the direction of all matters relating to the State, would, from their confidence in him, intrust him also with the direction of what concerned the public Religion of it. And, had they shewn any backwardness to this, which it  
does

does not appear they did; it is not to be doubted, but, both for the honour which attended the direction of the Sacra, and the subserviency of this to the purposes of State Policy, he would endeavour, by every expedient in his power, to work himself into the management of it.

Nor is this mere conjecture. For, from the most antient accounts that are conveyed down to us, we find, that the Supreme Magistrate both instituted and performed those sacred Rites, which accompanied the public offices of the national Religion.

Thus we find, from the sacred History, that Melchisedeck was, at once, King of Salem and Priest of the most High God. From Homer we learn, that *Peleus* officiated as Priest in his own kingdom, when Nestor and *Ulysses* went to pay a visit to him; and that *Agamemnon*, at the head of the Grecian army, presided in the oblation of the public sacrifices. Xenophon informs us, that among the Lacedemonians, the

the King was to have the supreme command of the army, and direction of the officers of Religion. And it is well known that *Romulus* and *Numa*, not only instituted the Colleges of the Priests, but also reserved, each to himself, the office of Pontifex Maximus.

Let us look into the codes of ancient Legislators, so far as they have come down to us, and we shall find Religion early employed, as an engine to promote the several movements of Government, and farther than this, the views of the most renowned of them seem not to have extended.

A system of Religion formed with such a design, modelled according to the caprice of the Prince, or the prejudices of the people, how absurd and ridiculous must it have been? A strange medley of whim and superstition! Well, what shall we conclude from thence? Is it that Religion is a mere state-engine, a piece of political craft, practised upon the credulity of the people,  
and

and intended to over-awe and bend them to the purposes of ambition, a handle by which they might be most easily and successfully managed? This is indeed the shameless pretence of some, who are equally strangers to themselves, and to the history of Mankind. None other could entertain such a thought; for, if Religion were not already deeply laid in the human frame, every appeal to it would have been vain, and every mean of restraint, drawn from this consideration, ineffectual. There can be no just inference, therefore, drawn against Religion, from it's being wrought into the systems of human policy: On the contrary, this shews the native authority of it over the mind, however it may be abused to the purposes of worldly interest and ambition.

I know it has been alledged, that a proper system of laws, and a due enforcement of them, by a regular distribution of rewards and punishments, are all that is necessary, to make the subjects of any Government,

vernment, good and virtuous. But this assertion must not be admitted without a proof. Let us examine it, and then judge what regard is to be paid to it.

It is true, the professed design of government, under all the different and possible modifications of it, is to promote the welfare and happiness of its subjects, by enforcing the practice of those duties they owe to the public, and to one another. These, it is acknowledged, make a *part* of Religion, but they are no more: they are far from being the whole of it. Besides, it deserves to be remembered that all the laws of Government with respect to the conduct of its subjects, consider them only as citizens of this world, and so are far from being sufficient to influence it properly, in a moral and religious view.

The rigor and authority of laws may procure obedience to them, or at least, secure against an open violation of them, but human authority is too feeble to reach  
the

the heart, or to promote a principle of real virtue; that principle, which is necessary to render our conduct liberal and ingenuous, and to give uniformity and stability to it.

Public order and utility are the grand objects of all civil Institutions: Moral and religious conduct, as such, fall not under their cognizance, nor lie before their tribunal. The reason is, at first sight, obvious. The most sagacious lawgiver cannot dive into the hearts of his subjects, nor discern the springs of their conduct, upon which the morality of it chiefly depends.

Besides, as government is ambulatory and various in its nature, and, in fact, wears such different forms, and adopts such different modes in different countries, that the very ideas of right and wrong, appear not only different, but, in some cases, contradictory to one another, it seems to admit of no doubt, that the cause of virtue is too important and sacred, to be rested upon so weak and precarious a bottom. It certainly



tainly requires a more solid and durable foundation.

## S E C T I O N II.

*Of the State of Religion, and the manner of conveying the Knowledge of it, under a Pagan Priesthood.*

**H**OW long the direction of Civil and Religious concerns continued to be lodged in the same hands, is, from the imperfection of Historical records, a fact difficult to be ascertained. We may, however, venture to affirm it could not be long. For, as the extent of kingdoms, the number of inhabitants, their commerce with neighbouring nations, and their interfering interests became enlarged, so must the cares and concern of the Sovereign, till, at last, the load of business would become too heavy for him to bear alone. Matters of State and Government



would be sufficient to ingross his whole attention. This would make it necessary to delegate the care of public Religion to a certain order of Men he might nominate for this purpose. And hence the institution of Priests, as a Body separate and distinct from the Laity, might take its rise. §

*Now*, it may be thought, we should begin to find something like a just regard paid to Religion. When the concerns of it were lodged in the hands of an order of men consecrated to the services of it, and exempted from all other concerns that they might be at liberty to mind these the better, we might naturally expect they would be ambitious to bring every thing that related to it, under proper regulations.

To discover how far they have done so, is the design of this part of our enquiry: And, as it leads us back to the most re-

§ See Appendix, No. 1, p. 480.

more and distant ages of the world, the Reader must not think it strange, that we find it difficult, if at all possible, to trace the several steps of that corruption, which, from this time, prevailed in Religion.

It is, I think, highly probable that the first Priests, after the public institution of their Order, would be obliged to receive their directions from the Prince, and to model Religion according to the system of Faith or Policy which he had adopted. However, under a succession of Princes, plunged in pleasure, or embarrassed with business, and so, from either of these causes, incapable of attending to the concerns of Religion, it is easy to see how an ambitious Priesthood might soon become venerable. Profiting themselves of the credulity of the people, they, in their turn, began to corrupt Religion, by blending with it those inventions, which their pride, superstition, avarice or policy would dictate. One ceremony prepared the way for the introduction of another. A recent

innovation would be grafted into one more antient; and, at last, by various and gradual steps, and different efforts of ingenuity, Rulers and People become the dupes of the public superstition.

The circumstances of these early times, and the more liberal Education of the Priests, it must be confessed, gave them great advantages, and put much in their power. The great body of the people was altogether ignorant. Any degree of knowledge and learning that then prevailed, was only to be found in the sacred College of Priests; and they had art enough to improve, to their own interest, the advantage which their superior accomplishments gave them over the people, and so to raise their reputation among them, that they became easily disposed to receive whatever they were pleased to teach them.

How soon idolatry began to prevail, must be very difficult, if at all possible, to  
ascertain.

ascertain. Learned men are of very different opinions upon this point. But I humbly think, that, at whatever time it had it's rise, it did not prevail much till about the time of Abraham. Before this period, the different nations of the world seemed to have worshipped God, according to the dictates of Nature, and those few hints of Revelation, with which they might have been favoured by the means of Noah, &c.

As far back as this period, Idolatry can be traced. Higher than this, it would be needless, even if we could, to rise in our enquiries into the origin, nature and progress of it.

In order to judge of the state of Religion, and the manner of communicating the knowledge of it, in these early ages, it may not be improper to single out some Nation, whose history can throw the earliest light upon this part of our subject.

In this view, our attention is immediately called to the history of Egypt, not only because it was one of the most antient seats of Learning, but because it is generally acknowledged, that from thence, Greece received its Gods and systems of Religion, and that from them, the Romans received theirs. Being among the first places, if not the very first, where Religion had any thing like a public establishment, and where Learning began to flourish, Strangers, enticed by the fame it had acquired for it's improvements in science and Religion, resorted to it from almost all countries, and never failed to carry home to their own, the knowledge of both, as the most valuable present they could import.

Astronomy was, from a variety of causes which might be mentioned, among the first Sciences, to the study of which Mankind seem to have applied themselves. The Chaldeans very early turned their thoughts this way, and from them the  
 Egyp-

Egyptians seem to have received the first hints of it. And it was not long, till, by a most unhappy perversion, it became the source of the grossest species of Idolatry, with which Religion was afterwards disfigured. For, elated with any little discoveries they had made in this Science, they began to think of carrying their speculations next into Religion.

At what time the Egyptians began to give into Idolatry, it is not easy precisely to determine. It is certain they did so very early. Thus we are told, that *Syphis*,\* one of the Kings of Memphis, who began to reign about A. M. 2164, indulging himself in some of the most fanciful speculations concerning the nature of the universe in general, and of this world in particular, and the influence which the Sun and Moon had upon it, came, at last, to be persuaded (or pretended to be so)

\* See Shuckford's Con. of Sacred and Proph. Hist.  
V. 1. B. 5.

that the Sun and Moon were so many Deities. He wrote a Book upon this subject, appointed them to be worshipped, and, by the pretence he made of having seen and conversed with the Supreme Deity, found it no difficult matter to obtrude his own whims upon an ignorant and credulous people. The grandeur of the appearance of those heavenly bodies, and an observation of their various phenomena, motions, courses and influence, could not fail to inspire them with the highest sentiments of their glory and excellence. From an admiration of them, thus bred in their minds, the transition to Idolatry, or an adoration of them was very easy.\* And

\* Diodorus Siculus, speaking of the Egyptians, tells us, that the first men, looking up to the world above them, and terrified and struck with admiration at the nature of the universe, supposed the Sun and Moon to be the principal and eternal Gods. This quotation from Diod. Sicul. I give upon the credit of Dr. Warburton, Div. Legat. &c. v. 1. p. 437, who, very probably, had access to the original, which I have not at present.

if



if we consider the ignorance of these early times, that the human mind had yet received but little culture from science, and that their situation did not allow mankind to bestow much time upon it; nay, if we consider how difficult it is to look up to an invisible God, and to perform a purely spiritual worship to him, and the strong propensity which, from thence, mankind have always discovered to worship God under some visible *Schechinah*, or symbol of his presence, we shall find reason to make allowances for this instance of religious error.

Idolatry did not, at once, assume that monstrous form, in which it afterwards appeared. The progress to it was gradual. One corruption paved the way for another.

Happy, no doubt, as they imagined, in those inventions or discoveries they had already made, mankind, led away by a pride of understanding, and an humour of specu-



speculation, assumed, in process of time, into their apotheosis, or the number of their Gods, some of the most illustrious of their ancestors, who had, by their heroic behaviour and good services, deserved well of their country, and now began to be thought upon with a kind of enthusiastic gratitude. To a deification of such they might be strongly prompted, from a conceit they entertained (and very probably it might be infused into their minds by some hero who was himself a candidate for those honours) that, immediately after their death, their souls removed to some of those luminous bodies they saw moving, in such awful majesty, over their heads,\* and that, as the ministers of the Supreme Deity, or mediators betwixt him and them, they might be highly serviceable to them.

They did not long rest here. Mankind, once become vain, knew not where to

\* Plut. de Iside & Osiride.

stop,

stop, but indulged themselves in all manner of fooleries. Having once deviated from the truth, nothing is more difficult than to return to it. Involved, as it were, in a labyrinth, the more they endeavour to extricate, they but the more bewilder themselves in it. So it happened in the case before us.

Having once taken it into their heads, to deify some of the heavenly luminaries, and of their departed heroes, they soon came to introduce into their worship certain symbolical representations of them, by consecrating to them creatures, in whom they discerned a fanciful likeness or resemblance of some of their perfections. And before these animals, or the images of them, they performed their worship, when the original was removed from their sight: This must have been the case, as to the Sun in the night, and the Moon and Stars in the day time. Hence that tribe of sacred animals, viz. the Serpent, the Beetle,  
the

the Wolf, the Crocodile, &c. § for which the Egyptians had such an high veneration.

Not only did they make use of such representations, or images, as helps to their devotion, by making them so many remembrancers of their respective divinities, they had also a conceit, that, by certain incantations or forms of consecration, the influences of the several intelligences were charmed down to their images, that they were no longer to be considered as uninformed idols, and therefore, that having the virtues of those intelligences or inferior deities infused into them, any worship performed before them, would be equally acceptable, as if performed before the planets themselves, which were their immediate Sacella or Temples. §§

§ Dr. Shaw's Travels, fol. edit. p. 392.

§§ See Shuckford's and Prideaux's Connect. pass.

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This account of the rise and progress of Idolatry, appears not only natural, but is also favoured by the writings of antiquity, so far as they can be traced. Amidst the obscurity which envelops those early ages, error or mistake are not to be avoided. It is hoped, however, that in the above account, there is none which is material. From the hints upon this subject, conveyed to us from early writers, there is scope afforded for abundance of conjecture. Nor has this been wanting. The design of this essay does not require, yea, it would be a digression from it so much as to attempt, a minute discussion of each of these, or even the most remarkable of them. But there have, of late, been some reflections thrown out upon this subject, by an author of distinguished character in the republic of letters, too remarkable in themselves, and too important in their consequences, not to be taken notice of. The particular consideration of them, would make this digression too  
long,

long, or swell a note too much, and therefore I have thrown it into the Appendix.\*

To return : So far as we have traced the corruption of Religion in those early periods, it might have been owing to the speculation of the learned or the policy of the ambitious. It was afterwards greatly promoted by the Poets, who, upon the groundwork with which they were furnished by those who went before them, did not fail, by the help of their inventive Imagination, to rear the fabrick of Pagan superstition to that enormous size which has made it to be gazed upon with wonder by all succeeding ages. But what was their particular connexion with Religion? Whence their influence so great in every thing related to it? Why they were the Divines || of those early ages, and as such employed to sing the praises of  
their

\* See Appendix, No. 2. p. 502.

|| Silvestres homines sacer interpretsque deorum  
 Cædibus & victu scædo, deterruit *Orpheus*.

————— fuit hæc sapientia quondam

their Gods, and instruct the people in Religion. In the praises of their Gods, ample scope was afforded to their poetic fancies. Under pretence that the subject was too sublime to be treated in a plain and common style, their compositions (which were generally in verse) were enriched with all the ornaments and imagery that could serve to exalt their Ideas of the Gods, or give beauty and grandeur to the descriptions of their characters: And thus, in process of time, their Divinity became converted into a perfect Mythology, and the history they meant to convey down to after ages, is lost in Fable.

The Religion of those early times, as described by their antient Bards, who themselves left no writings behind them, may be best learned from the Greek and Roman

Concubitu prohibere vago; dare jura maritis;  
Oppida moliri; leges incidere ligno.  
Sic honor & nomen divinis vatibus atque  
Carminibus venit.—————

HOR. de Art. Poet.

Poets,

Poets, some of whom, as particularly *Orpheus*, travelled into Egypt, for instruction in the more sublime parts of Learning, and was the first who introduced those religious rites into Greece, which afterwards obtained in it.

However much the first Poets might, from the licence of their descriptions, have contributed to the corruption of Religion, yet, when afterwards the character of the Priest and Poet became separated, no such freedoms were taken with it by the latter.

When Religion had once gained a public establishment, those who wrote on this subject, must have taken care to do it justice in the accounts or representations they gave of it. To have done otherwise, would have been not only disrespectful to Religion and the State, but also highly dangerous to themselves. Hence therefore we may depend upon the writings of the Greek and Roman Poets for the most authentic account of the popular Religion of antient times. They  
were



were not the inventors of that Mythology which they convey down to us. It was far more antient than they, the production of former ages. They took and transmitted it as they found it, and this it was which made them such favourites with the people, while others, who dared to speak too freely of the received Theology, fell sacrifices to their resentment.

Would we, then, form a judgment of the Religion of those early times, let us consult such of their writings as have come down to us, and what a shocking picture do they exhibit of it?

The Reader cannot expect that I should present him with a large and minute detail of the several particulars relating to Religion, from which he is to form his opinion of it. Of these there is so great a variety, that even the most cursory account I could give of them, would swell this Essay to an immoderate size. I must therefore satisfy myself, with little more than the



have mention of the topicks upon which the Reader might desire information, and refer him to the writings themselves for receiving it.

Let him then consider how great was the number of their Gods ; that celestial, terrestrial, sylvan, marine, &c. There were even as early as Hesiod's days, no less than thirty thousand. Let him consider, that they canonized, and built temples and shrines for some of the meanest animals, and even descended so low as to consecrate and pay a religious regard to some of the productions of the vegetable kingdom, for which the Poet justly burlesques them, with all the poignancy of satire, in these well known lines :

Quis nescit, Volusi Bithynice, qualia demens  
 Egyptus portenta colat ? Crocodilon adorat  
 Pars hæc ; illa pavit saturam serpentibus ibim.  
 Illic cæruleos, hic piscem fluminis, illic  
 Oppida tota canem venerantur, nemo Dianam.  
 Porrum & cæpe nefas violare & pangere morfu,  
 O sanctas gentes quibus hæc nascuntur in hortis  
 Numina !

JUVEN. Sat. 15.

Let

Let him consider the account given by Homer and other Poets (and for which some of the most famed sages of antiquity, particularly Plato, Cicero and Plutarch blame them §) of the wars, battles, wounds, murders, thefts, adulteries, incests, &c. of their Gods : Let him consider the sacrifices of different kinds, some even human, offered to render their Gods propitious ; the various, absurd rites that attended the oblation of them, and the several orders of Priests who presided in those Services : Let him consider their oracles, the forms of consulting them, and the parade, artifice and ambiguity with which the responses were given ; their Auguries, and the endless superstition with which they were taken ; their shews of Gladiators and scenical Entertainments, which were, at first, introduced under the notion of Religion and in honour of their Gods. || Let him, I say, consider these, and all the other, trumpe-

§ Plato, De Repub. lib. iii. Cicero, lib. i. Tusc. Quest. Plut. de Iside & Osiride.

|| Valer. Maxim. lib. ii. cap. iv.

ries of their Religion, and what a strange medley must it appear of ignorance, whim, craft, superstition and enthusiasm? What a melancholy, but just, proof does it afford, that mankind, indulging their pride of heart in the cultivation of a vain and false philosophy, and thus imagining themselves to “ be wise, have become fools, and “ changed the glory of the incorruptible “ God, into an image like to corruptible “ man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts “ and creeping things? || Surely vain are “ all men by nature, who ignorant of “ God, and could not, out of the good “ things that are seen, know him that is : “ Neither, by considering the works, did “ they acknowledge the workmaster, but “ deemed either fire or wind, or the swift “ air, or circle of the stars, or the violent “ water, or the lights of Heaven, to be “ the Gods which govern the world; with “ whose beauty, if they, being delighted, “ took them to be Gods, let them know “ how much better the Lord of them is,

|| Rom. i. 23.

“ for

“ for the first author of beauty hath created  
 “ them.” §

In the Theology of this period, especially in the earlier ages of it, it must be owned there was something so involved, intricate and perplexed, that it must ever be difficult, if at all possible, to ascertain the true meaning of it. Few authentic records of these first ages have come down to us, and those which have, cast very little light upon the matter. This obscurity is, no doubt, very much owing to the liberties which the Poets, the first Divines, took upon all the subjects of Religion which fell under their consideration. These they never failed to dress up in a style highly figurative, pompous and ornamented, to please their own fancies and entertain their admirers; and thus enveloped in mystery, they have left no key by which we may be enabled to come at the true meaning of them.

§ Wisdom xiii. 1, 2, 3.

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It

It would be doing injustice to the more knowing and intelligent among them, to imagine they believed all the gross stories that are recorded of their Gods. Some of them, no doubt, are to be considered as moral fables, others, as metaphorical descriptions of events removed far back into antiquity: But I am far from being satisfied that some parts of them, even those which to us appear very gross, were not understood in their literal sense, or that their sentiments concerning the Deity were at least during the first ages of this period, so just and rational as some of their admirers are apt, in compliment to them, to allege.

The period under consideration, that in which Religion remained under the direction of the Pagan Priesthood, was very long and included many ages. The extremes were very distant, and, of consequence, the state of Religion in them, could not but be very different.

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In the progress of Science and Philosophy, it is probable, their notions of Religion would greatly improve, and the men of learning and education among them come to settle in the belief of one supreme Numen or Deity. Nay, it is certain they did so pretty early. It is true, some of their Literati, as well as others, were wont, according to the mode of the times in which they lived, to speak of the supreme Deity under a variety of titles. This, either by not rightly understanding or not attending to the dialect then in use, has led some of their readers to conclude that they still believed in a plurality of independent Deities; whereas all they intended was no more, than by these different names, to express the several Characters under which they considered the chief Deity. || What other Gods they acknowledged, they always looked on as subordinate to this, as his Ministers to whom he committed the Government

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and

|| See *SENECA de Benefic. Lib. iv. cap. vii. and viii.* Seneca seems to have been of these sentiments, when he  
says,

and Tutelage of certain Kingdoms, Cities, &c. under his own administration as supreme.

Such as above represented, seems to have been the creed of the most learned men of the heathen world, upon this fun-

says, “ Quoties velis, tibi licet aliter hunc auctorem rerum nostrarum compellare. Et Jovem illum optimum & maximum rite dices, & tonantem, & statorem; qui non (ut Hist. æci tradiderunt) ex eo, quod post votum susceptum, acies Romanorum fugientium stetit, sed quod stant beneficio ejus omnia, stator, stabilitorque est: Hunc eundem & fatum si dixeris, non mentieris, nam cum fatum nihil aliud est, quam series implexa causarum, ille est prima omnium causa, ex qua ceteræ pendent. Quæcunque voles illi nomina proprie aptabis, vim aliquam, affectumque celestium rerum continentia. Tot appellationes ejus possunt esse, quot munera. Hunc & *Liberum Patrem*, & *Herculem*, & *Mercurium* nostri putant. *Liberum patrem*, quia omnium parens est. *Herculem*, quia vis ejus invicta sit. *Mercurium*, quia ratio penes illum est, numerusque & ordo, & scientia. Quocunque te flexeris, ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi. Nihil ab illo vacat: Opus suum ipse implet.

See also to the same purpose, Plut. de Iside & Osiride.

damental



damental article of Religion. But considering how many ages had elapsed, before the persons wrote, to whom we are obliged for this information, the religious sentiments of those more early times must still remain doubtful, from any thing that can be inferred from them. From the sentiments of more improved and polished ages, we can draw no certain conclusion with respect to those of others, rude and uncultivated, and which were removed at a great distance from them.

I know that Plutarch, who was himself a Priest of the Delian Apollo, and might therefore be supposed to be no bad interpreter of what was obscure in the theology of those antient times, is at no small pains to persuade us into a more favourable opinion of the sacred rites, usages, and doctrines of this early period, by telling us, that if any thing appears absurd in them, it proceeds from ignorance of the true meaning of them; and that, rightly understood, they will be found to contain, in  
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some cases, a most sublime morality under the veil of allegory, and in others, an allusion to the history and natural philosophy of remote ages. § Longinus also offers an apology for the antient theology. He observes that Homer, in the account he gives of the Trojan war, exalts his heroes, if it is to be understood literally, into Gods, and degrades his Gods into men. But, to save Homer from the imputation of so gross an impropriety, he, at the same time, observes, that such bold representations, if not allegorically understood, would be downright blasphemy and extravagantly shocking. † But what do all these apologies amount to? To no more than this, that they who made them, had a high veneration for antiquity and it's sages, and that, rather than their character should lie under the slur, which some, of later ages, had thrown upon them, they were

§ Plut. de Iside & Osiride.      † Longin. § 9.

glad to put the best face upon the matter possible, and say all they could for them.

But should we make as great allowances for the Literati of those early ages, as their most zealous partisans could desire (and perhaps these are more than needed to be made, when we reflect, that some of them seem to have been great admirers and very keen supporters of the doctrine of Polytheism taught among them, and of the train of superstitions, § which, probably,

§ It will not, perhaps, be unacceptable to the Reader, to mention some of the most striking instances of the superstition of ancient times. I beg leave, therefore, to lay before him a few collected to our hand by David Hume, Esq; V. II. p 469. and I hope they will appear directly to the purpose for which they are quoted. Mr. Hume informs us, that Xenophon, that great Captain and Philosopher, and that Disciple of *Socrates*, did, by the advice of *Socrates*, consult the oracle of *Delphi*, before he would engage in the expedition of *Cyrus*; that he and the whole army regarded sneezing as a very lucky omen; that the *Greeks* suffering from a cold North wind, sacrificed to it, and that (according to *Xenophon*) it immediately abated; that he consulted

bly, took their rise from them) what shall we say of the religious creed of the multitude?

sulted the sacrifices in secret, before he would form any resolution with himself about settling a colony; that he was himself a very skilful Augur; that he was determined by the victims, to refuse the sole command of the army which was offered him; that he mentions the place of Hercules's descent into Hell as believing it, and says the marks of it are still remaining; that he had almost starved the army, rather than lead it to the field against the auspices. That all this devotion was not a farce, in order to serve a political purpose (Mr. Hume observes) appears both from the facts themselves, and from the genius of that age, when little or nothing could be gained by hypocrisy; besides, that Xenophon was a kind of heretic in these times, which no political devotee ever is.

To the above instances of superstition, let me add a few more. Those already mentioned are, it must be owned, pretty remarkable, but lest it should be alleged that they prove no more than that Xenophon was highly superstitious, I might mention many which can leave no doubt with respect to the superstitious sentiments of the public. Thus, we are told, the Lacedemonians, in time of war, were wont to pray to the Gods as early as possible in the morning, from this conceit, that if they addressed them before their enemies were able to do so, they pre-engaged them in their favour. That the Romans and others endeavoured to

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multitude? At first, the corruption in their faith, as well as in their manners, being gradual, they might, perhaps, consider the descriptions given of their Gods as merely picturesque, or, as so many finely wrought up poetical allegories, or, in the same light, and with the same allowances, we do an epic poem: But there are many things which force us to conclude that, what at first they looked upon as *fable*, they at last believed to be

keep the names of their tutelary deities a profound secret, lest their enemies, becoming acquainted with them, should, by certain religious ceremonies, and particularly, by what they called, *Evocatory Sacrifices*, draw them over to espouse their interest and cause. And, upon this principle, very probably it was that the Tyrians acted, when, during the siege of their city by Alexander the Great, they ordered the statue of Hercules to be secured by a chain, that their enemies might gain no advantage over them, by charming away their tutelar God from them.

See many more remarkable instances of superstition, relating to omens, dreams, prodigies, miracles, &c. Valer. Max. Lib. 1. cap. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

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*real*, and that the fabulous genealogy of the Gods, their amours, their ridiculous feats, and even their vices, constituted a part of the public creed.

Of this it is easy to bring more than an abundant proof. Had not this been the case, why should Anaxagoras have been treated in the manner he was? He taught that the Sun was no more than a burning mass of matter, that the Moon was of itself an opaque body, and that the stars were of a matter similar to our earth. And he was pronounced impious, fined, banished. For what? Where was the crime in all this? Why thus severely treated? It was because his sentiments upon those subjects, stood in opposition to such as were generally received, and seemed to degrade into the rank of creatures, Beings which were esteemed and worshipped as Gods. Had it been the vulgar only who condemned him for these tenets, it should not surprize us; but who does  
not

not regret to find even Plato himself gravely censuring them? \* When their zeal for Religion flamed, in this violent manner against Anaxagoras, it may perhaps to some appear surprizing, how Aristophanes came to escape the rage of it, for an incomparably more disrespectful representation of the Gods. But their wonder will immediately cease when they are informed, that, ludicrous as the light was, in which the comic poet represented their Gods, when he represented them upon the public theatre, it was the light in which the people were wont to consider them, and therefore he was never so much as suspected of any profane design of exposing them. What we have inferred from the opposite treatment of Anaxagoras and Aristophanes, *Lucian* has put beyond all doubt, by expressly assuring us, that whoever ventured but to express so much as a doubt with respect to any of the fables of

\* Plato de Repub. Lib. 10.

the Pagan theology, however absurd and ridiculous in themselves, did it at the hazard of being considered and treated by the people, as impious, and an enemy to Religion and the Gods.

But our opinion does not rest solely upon the conclusions or testimony immediately referred to. It is also supported by the fairest deductions from several parts of their religious practice. This, so far as we are acquainted with it, exactly corresponds to the religious belief we have ascribed to them, and was such as might be naturally expected from it.

It is next to a maxim in Religion, that the worship, homage and service paid to the Deity, will always be of a piece with the notions which are entertained of him, and therefore if we find the people, in these early ages now under consideration, engaged, not only in some of the departments of civil life, but also in some of the most solemn parts of their worship, in  
scenes



scenes of the most infamous and abandoned debauchery, even such as were a reproach to human nature, and to any other but the Gods they worshipped, what are we forced to conclude from thence? Is it not, that the accounts which they had early received and believed of their Gods, had reconciled them to such practices; and that reason, if not corrupted in this manner, would not have failed to revolt against them?

That this may not be considered as merely a vague declamation; a heavy charge, without any evidence to support it, it will be necessary to enter a little into a detail of facts.

How shocking were the religious rites, which accompanied the worship of *Baal*? Were they not the plain indications of madness and phrenzy, or at least of the most absurd superstition, in those who



joined in them? § Still more shocking were the oblations made to Moloch, the very thought of which is enough to make human nature shudder. † Who does not blush to hear of the shameful prostitutions practised in honour of certain deities? \* What scandalous, obscene practices were carried on at some of the public games? Such as, impudent as the people were become, they blushed at, and would not venture to perform in the presence of a Porcius Cato. § What scenes of the most abominable vice, did their Eleusinian, Bacchanalian, and other mysteries, *at last*, become? I say, at last, for it is but fair to acknowledge, that at first, the institu-

§ 1 Kings 18. 26. 28.

† Ps. 106. 37, 38. Jerem. 7. 31 and 39. 5. Ezek. 23. 37.

\* Valer. Maxim. Lib. 2, cap. 10. § 8. in Lud. Floral

§ Valer. Maxim. Lib. 2. cap. 10. § 8. in Lud. Floral.

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tion of them seems to have been intended for promoting the purposes of Religion, and particularly, sentiments of the Deity and of a future state, unadulterated with the corrupt mixtures and fables, with which the popular theology of those times abounded.† But though this much must be owned in honour of the first institution of the Mysteries, yet certain it is, that according to the plan laid down, and rigidly adhered to, they could be of no extensive usefulness, as the directors of them admitted but comparatively few into them, and none, till after a long and troublesome noviciate, under the most sacred ties of secrecy, and the penalty of Death, if they dared to violate them. And in process of time, the original design of their institution being forgotten, they were prostituted to the vilest purposes, and became the most infamous means of corrupting the manners of the people.‡ Nay to

† Warburton's Div. Legat. &c. V. I. book 2.

‡ Liv. Hist. Lib. 39. cap. 8. 17.

such an extravagant height was debauchery carried at the Bacchanalia, that the senate of Rome found themselves obliged to forbid the celebration of them, by a public decree. §

From these imperfect hints we may judge, in some measure, of that kind of Divinity (if it deserves the name) which obtained in those early ages of the heathen world; a Divinity, not peculiar to any one country, but, with perhaps some little variations, almost universal.

We are apt to think the religious tenets, here ascribed to the populace, in pagan times, too absurd and monstrous to gain credit with any who make the least pretensions to reason, and on that account, to entertain a doubt of their having been ever believed by them. But let it be observed, that, if we are not upon our guard, we shall probably form a wrong judgment upon

§ Valer. Max. lib. i. cap. iii.

this

this point. Surrounded with so much light ourselves, we are ready, at first, to be greatly surprized at their ignorance, and the ridiculous system of religious opinions which we suppose them to have adopted. But we do not consider, that what makes this appear so extraordinary to us, is our disposition to make the advantages which we ourselves enjoy, not what they had, the measure or standard of our judgment upon this subject. Whereas, to form a just decision, we should suppose ourselves in their situation, and without any advantage but what they possessed; and in that case their religious Faith or creed will not so much surprize us. How wonderful, even in this enlightened age, are the effects of the prejudices of Education! Does not every one know many instances, in which they reconcile some, and these too none of the most weak and ignorant in other respects, to the belief of doctrines as extraordinary, as any that ever gained credit under a pagan hierarchy? and when this is considered, should it not lessen, if not entirely remove, our surprize at the

ignorance and superstition of those early times, and dispose us to make all reasonable allowances for them, as we are sure the gracious Judge of all will?

Such as we have now seen, was the religious creed in the period under consideration. But had it been incomparably better and more agreeable to truth, the disadvantages under which the manner of communicating instruction at that time laboured, must have necessarily prevented its extensive usefulness.

Before the invention of writing, or any species of the graphic art, it is generally agreed that religious, as well as all other knowledge, could be conveyed down from one generation to another, only by tradition.

The uncertainty, and many other inconveniencies to which this method was subjected, would necessarily oblige mankind to devise some other, better adapted to the ends  
of

of communicating and preserving their knowledge.

*Writing*, or the art of communicating one's sentiments by the means of certain marks, afterwards called *Letters*, must have undergone several improvements, before it could arrive at any tolerable degree of perfection. And therefore it is highly probable, that the first method which would occur of communicating one's thoughts, except by sounds or words, would be by *pictures*, or symbolical representations of the different objects which engaged attention; and that, not only because the simplest, but also a kind of visible representation of them; and hence, very probably, it is, that this species of writing being first employed upon the subject of Religion, Porphyry calls it, "ἱερογραφικὰ καὶ εὐλογήματα κατὰ μίμησιν"

In this manner, we are pretty certain, the Egyptians preserved their religious knowledge; for a very learned and judicious author

observes from Kircher (who bestowed more than ordinary pains upon this subject) that,  
 “ to symbolical or hieroglyphic writing,  
 “ they committed such things as regarded  
 “ the being and attributes of their Gods,  
 “ the sacrifices and adorations that were  
 “ to be offered to them, the concatenation  
 “ of the different classes of beings, the  
 “ doctrine of the elements, and of the good  
 “ and bad demons that were imagined to  
 “ influence and direct them. These again  
 “ were represented by such particular ani-  
 “ mals, plants, instruments, &c. as they  
 “ supposed, or had actually found by a long  
 “ course of observations, to be emblematical  
 “ of, or to bear some typical or physical  
 “ relation to them. Every portion, there-  
 “ fore, of this sacred writing, may be pre-  
 “ sumed to carry along with it, some  
 “ points of doctrine, relating to the Theo-  
 “ logy or Physics of the Egyptians.” §

Agreeably to this, we are informed, that  
 their Pillars or Obelisks, which may be

§ Dr. SHAW'S Travels, &c. folio edit. p. 391.

con-



considered as the first repositories of their sacred writing, were inscribed with a multitude of animals of different kinds, birds, fishes, &c. than which nothing could be more natural, in those early and rude times, after these things became adopted into their Religion, as symbolical expressions of certain Theological Doctrines. Of this kind were probably the famous Pillars of the first *Hermes*. Upon these he is said to have inscribed his Learning in Hieroglyphic Characters; and the second *Hermes*, commonly called *Trismegistus*, is said to have translated it, if I may in the present case, use the Phrase, into the vulgar Character. These columns were extant in the times of Pythagoras and Plato, and from them they are supposed to have borrowed a good deal of that learning for which they were afterwards so justly celebrated.

I know that Hieroglyphicks were, according to Kircher and some others, a kind of sacred Character, originally intended to conceal, rather than communicate their  
religious



religious tenets, and thus preserve them a profound and impenetrable secret from all to whom they did not chuse to reveal them. But it is far from being certain that this was the primary design of them ; it is more probable, that this opinion did only obtain, when, after this species of writing had fallen into disuse, it became difficult, for want of a proper key, to decypher it. Then perhaps some conceited scholiast, to divert that reproach from falling upon him which his ignorance deserved, devised this apology for it, that such kind of writing was originally intended, by the college of Priests, as a mystical veil to religious truths, and therefore that none but such as they chose, were let into the true meaning of it. §.

If there was a Character, Hieroglyphic, Symbolical or other, invented to transmit

§ The Reader, who would incline to see more upon the Subject of Hieroglyphic Writing, the different kinds of it, and the purposes to which they were applied, may have his curiosity gratified by consulting Dr. Warburton's *Div. Legat. of Moses*. Vol. II. B. iv. §. iv.

the

the knowledge of religious mysteries to those who were initiated into them, and yet conceal it from the vulgar eye, it must have been the invention of some after or later period, when the refinements, or rather corruptions in religion, became too many to be laid open to all, and such as could with safety be communicated to none, but those who, by a proper discipline and long noviciate, were initiated into it's mysteries, and even to those under the bond of inviolable secrecy. On all these accounts it is humbly imagined, that the original design of Hieroglyphic, Picture, or Symbolical Writing, must have been the communication of religious knowledge, and the very name (which signifies sacred sculptures or engravings) makes this fully as probable as the contrary.

But however natural this method of conveying knowledge might have been, and however preferable to tradition, yet still it must be owned to have been but a very imperfect one, by all who have read

or heard any thing of the Hieroglyphic descriptions of the Antients. Let me adduce a few instances, and then the Reader may judge for himself. We are told, that the head of a woman, joined to the body of a lion, which was called a *Sphinx*, was the emblem of strength and prudence united; that, when such figures were placed near the *Nile*, they signified that the inundation would take place while the sun passed through the signs of *Leo* and *Virgo*, but, when they ornamented the gates of their temples, then they were intended to intimate, that the Theolgy taught and represented within, was involved in types and mysteries: § That by the figures of an Infant, an old Man, a Hawk, a Fish and after these, of an Hippopotamus or Sea-Horse, is conveyed to us this moral sentence: “ O ! ye that are born and that die, God hateth impudence : ” || That a statue, without hands and with close eyes was the

§ Dr. Shaw's Travels, p. 399.

|| Plut. de Iside & Osiride.

proper emblem of a Judge, who ought ever to be on his guard against being corrupted either by bribery or the arts of address: That a *Serpent* placed by the Image of Minerva, and a *Snail* by that of *Venus* at Elis, were intended to signify that Maids needed a guard, and that silence and keeping at home became married Women.

Who can consider these instances as a specimen of the Hieroglyphic manner of writing, and not own that any interpretation that can be given of it now, must be entirely conjectural; nay and that even while this manner was in use, any explication offered must have been very uncertain, there being so much scope for imagination and fancy? But we need not rest our opinion of the imperfection of symbolical representation, considered as a mean of communicating religious knowledge, upon conjecture alone: We have a clear proof of it, in the different sentiments, which not only the moderns, but the antient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans themselves, entertained

tertained concerning the genuine sense and true interpretation of it; while yet none of them have offered any thing, which, to an unprejudiced enquirer, can appear decisive.

Religion being thus, in some of the most early periods, corrupted by the policy of the state, the superstition of the Priesthood, and by the fables and allegories of the Poets, no wonder that the improvements in science, which were made in after ages, should beget a disgust of the ridiculous fooleries which had been introduced into Religion, and set some upon attempting a reformation in the systems of their religious faith, by offering others, in place of them, more rational and consistent.

This was the professed design of those Philosophers, who sprung up in a long succession, and employed their pens upon moral subjects. And to discover how far they have succeeded in this, will be the object of our enquiry in the following Section.

## SECTION

## S E C T I O N III.

*Of the aid derived to Religion from the dogmata of Philosophers, and their manner of inculcating them.*

THERE is scarce any subject upon which the moderns have differed more in their sentiments, than with respect to the merit of the *Philosophic* writing of the ancients.

Some, fired with an enthusiastic zeal think they can never enough extol them; while others, prejudiced against them, spare no pains to run them down. But in this, as in most other cases, we may expect to find the truth in the mean betwixt those extremes.

When Learning began to revive, after having long lain buried in ignorance and barbarism,

barism, a taste for the writings of the ancients revived with it. And no wonder: Because, had they been possessed of much less merit than must be allowed them, they were then almost the only writings, from which one who had a passion for letters, could find either entertainment or improvement.

When the profession of infidelity became fashionable among those, who assumed to themselves the title of Free-thinkers, by way of honourable distinction, we find appeals frequently made to those writings, as a specimen what Reason, under proper culture, could do in the science of morals; and as a boasted proof of the little need we have of an external Revelation. And thus, laying aside Revelation, the patrons of Infidelity exalted *Reason* into a perfect guide to virtue and happiness.

The friends of Revelation run into the opposite extreme. Without making any allowance for the disadvantages which the  
authors



authors of those writings laboured under, they, with a pleasure not to be justified, exposed the errors and foibles they found in them, and run them down in the lump.

He who would form an impartial judgment of those writings, must look into them himself; and if he examines them with candor, he will probably find reason to conclude, they are neither deserving of the high degree of praise bestowed upon them by the one, nor of the censure, with which they are loaded by the other, and will entertain sentiments very different from both, concerning them, or at least, many things which they contain.

He must be little acquainted with those writings, or do them great injustice, who will not own, that the discoveries and improvements in science, with which they abound, are considerable. Nay, considering the small progress which learning had made, when some of their authors began to write, and the great expence

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both of labour and time, at which knowledge was then to be acquired, he must own they are indeed wonderful, and entitled to no small share of merit.

Upon subjects of the highest importance, many of these ancient writers think with great justness, write with much precision, argue with wonderful energy, and, upon the whole, discover a refined taste and true eloquence. In all these respects, it may be asserted, that not a few of them are proper models for the imitation of after times. But how far they are to be followed as guides, or only consulted as helps in Religion, is what we are now to enquire into. Let the candid Reader judge from what follows under this Section.

There are, it must be owned, certain principles which are essential to Religion, upon which the whole superstructure of it ought to be raised, and with which it must either stand or fall. Of this sort are those, which respect the Being, Character,  
Provi-

Providence and Worship of the Deity, the nature of that service we owe, and that account we must render to him. Take these away, and Religion remains a mere ideal thing: Or let the account given of these be unjust, and Religion degenerates into superstition or enthusiasm, and puts on a thousand wild fantastic forms.

To enable the Reader to judge of the merit of these writings, now under consideration, in point of religious direction, it will be necessary to lay before him, in a pretty full induction of particulars, what can be collected from them upon these several subjects.

The belief of the being of a God lies at the foundation of all Religion, and is a truth, in which, if in any, it might be thought Philosophers would have united as a common principle, and on which they would have built every other moral truth, as on an immoveable foundation. But has this been the case? Far otherwise.

Some there were who doubted of the existence of a Deity: § Some, who flatly denied it: † Not a few who affirmed the existence of two Independent Principles; the one, the cause of all good, the other, the cause of all evil in the world. || And if we may credit some of the writers of antiquity, the number of Gods, who were acknowledged and worshipped as early as Hesiod's time, amounted, at least, to thirty thousand. We must not however imagine, that they were all considered as on an equal footing. We have shewn already in the former Section, that the more knowing, even in the most early ages, believed but in one supreme Deity; at least, the most of them seem to have done so: The rest of the Gods were considered as subordinate,

§ Valer. Maxim. lib. 1. cap. 1. Cicer. de Nat. Deor. lib. 1. §. 1.

† Plut. de Placitis Philos. cap. 7. Cic. de Nat. Deo. lib. 1. §. 1.

|| Plut. de Iside & Osiride.

gene-

generated, or created.\* The more noble parts of the mundane system, such as the Sun, Moon, &c. were believed to be animated, and were adored as so many deities: They had also their Dæmons and Genii, beings of an order far superior to men, but inferior to the celestial Deities.† These subordinate Deities some believed to be immortal, but others maintained, that at certain periodical conflagrations (which they made to revolve in the space of about twenty-five thousand years, and which is by some called the Platonic year) these, as well as every other species of being, would be absorbed into the one self-existent Deity, and re-created out of his original substance. ||

When we come to consult the writings of the Philosophers with respect to the

\* Plut. de Repugnant. Stoicorum. Herodot. b. 2.

† Plut. de Placitis Philos. cap. 8.

|| Plut. de Repugnant, Stoicorum. Arrian. in Epic-  
tct. lib. 3. cap. 13.

character of the Deity, we find the greatest diversity and inconsistency imaginable, in their sentiments concerning it.

Anaxagoras, and a few who followed him, considered the Deity as a pure mind, and acknowledged him both as the Creator and Governor of the world.

Some represented the Deity under the notion of the  $\tau\acute{o} \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu$ , or, *the Universe*. § And yet what can be conceived more absurd than such a conceit, and if traced through all its consequences, what can be more

§ Epictetus calls the soul,  $\Delta\iota\theta\acute{\iota} \mu\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma$ . M. Antoninus calls it, B. 12, §. 26, an efflux from God; B. 5. §. 27. “The divinity within, which Jupiter had taken from himself.” And to the same purpose, *passim*.

Seneca, Epist. 92, writes to this purpose: “Quid est autem, cur non existimes in eo divini aliquid existere qui Dei pars est? Totum hoc, quo continemur, et unum est, et Deus: Et socii ejus sumus & membra.

Horace calls the soul, *Divinæ particulam auræ*.

hurtful

hurtful to the interests of Religion? Nay, is it not absolutely subversive of them? §

Something akin to this, is the dogma concerning the *Anima Mundi*. According to this, God is represented as a vital principle, by which this corporeal system, considered as an organized body, is animated and actuated.

§ Nothing can be more severe, and at the same time more just, than the manner in which Cicero exposes the absurdity of this notion. “ Terra (says he) quoniam  
 “ pars mundi est, pars est etiam Dei. Atqui terræ  
 “ maximas regiones inhabitabiles & incultas videmus,  
 “ quód pars earum appulsu solis exarserit, pars obri-  
 “ guerit nive pruinaque, longinquo solis abscessu.  
 “ Quæ, si *Mundus* est Deus, quoniam partes mundi sunt,  
 “ Dei membra partim ardentia, partim refrigerata di-  
 “ cendæ sunt.”

“ Pythagoras, qui censuit, animum esse per natu-  
 “ ram rerum omnium intentum & commeantem, ex  
 “ quo nostri animi carperentur, non vidit distractione  
 “ humanorum animorum discerpi & lacerari Deum:  
 “ Et cum miseri animi essent, quod plerisque conti-  
 “ gerit, tum Dei partem esse miseram; quod fieri non  
 “ potest.”

Cicero de Nat. Deor. Lib. 1. §. 10.

Who was the author of this opinion it is difficult, if at all possible, at this distance of time, to determine. It seems to have obtained very early. Cicero, if he does not in the above-mentioned passage assert Pythagoras to have been the author, makes him, at least, an abettor of it. Plato is also, by some, thought to have entertained the same notion, and by not attending that there is the clearest evidence of it's having been maintained before his day, has been represented as the first who broached it.

I know some have endeavoured to explain away the absurdity of this doctrine, by making those who first taught it, to intend no more by it, than to represent the Deity as that great spirit, who supported and presided over the world, and might therefore be called, by a very allowable freedom of speech, the soul of it. We should very readily admit this comment, were not the places, even in the writings of the antients themselves, too many and express, to bear  
so



so much softening. § We are apt to stand amazed at such opinions, and are at a loss to conjecture whence they could take their rise. But our business is not to pursue such enquiries, but to mention the facts relating to this subject as we find them. In short, the more we search into the sentiments of antiquity concerning the nature and character of the Deity, we shall find ourselves the more involved in a labyrinth

§ Esse apibus partem divinæ mentis, & haustus  
 Æthereos dixere : Deum namque ire per omnes  
 Terrasque, tractusque maris, cœlumque profundum.  
 Hinc pecudes, armenta, viros, genus omne ferarum  
 Quemque sibi tenues nascentem arcessere vitas.  
 Scilicet huc reddi deinde, ac resoluta referri  
 Omnia ; nec morti esse locum ; sed viva volare  
 Sideris in numerum, atque alto succedere cœlo.

VIRG. Georg. Lib. iv. l. 220.

Principio cœlum, ac terras, composque liquentes  
 Lucentemque globum lunæ, Titaniaque astra  
 Spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus  
 Mens agitat molem, & magno se corpore miscet.

Æneid. Lib. vi. l. 724.

M. Anton. Lib. ii. §. xii. Lib. ix. §. xxviii. &  
 passim.

from



from which it will be difficult to get out, and must acknowledge that it was not without just reason that Cicero said, “*Qui Deos esse dixerunt, tanta sunt in varietate ac dissensione, ut eorum molestum fit dinumerare sententias. Nam et de figuris Deorum, & de locis atque sedibus & actione vitæ multa dicuntur, deque his summa philosophorum dissensione certatur.*” \*

The sentiments of antiquity did not differ more concerning the nature and character of the Deity, than they did concerning the origin of the World. Each of those who wrote upon this subject, had the vanity to differ from them who had gone before him, and to become the author of some new hypothesis, by which he flattered himself he would be able to explain the phænomena of nature better, than by any other which had been formerly adopted.

\* Cic. de Nat. Deor. Lib. i.

Thus

Thus some, to get free of the difficulties which they saw any scheme they could devise would be incumbered with, roundly asserted the eternity of the World as it now is. Those who by the system of their Theology, were taught to consider it as a part of the supreme Numen, were necessarily obliged to be of this opinion. Others there were too who admitted the eternity of the world, and were duped into this opinion by the subtilty of their own reasoning upon this subject. Thus some, considering goodness as an attribute essential to the divine nature, could not imagine how it could exist without some proper object upon which to exercise itself; and therefore, to remove this difficulty, they made the world coeval with the Deity; not attending, that the difficulties with which this scheme is embarrassed, are incomparably greater than what they meant to avoid by adopting it. Others, at a loss to comprehend the manner in which this world could be produced from nothing, hastily concluded that it was eternal, or at least, that the materials out of which it

was

was afterwards formed into a system, were so. But what if this opinion should be admitted? According to it all must have been at first, a rude, indigested heap, mere chaos and confusion. Whence that beauty, order and harmony we now find prevailing in this mundane system? To account for this, our antient sages are again greatly puzzled, and they appear to be so, notwithstanding all the pains they take to conceal it.

Some, unwilling to acknowledge a beauty, symmetry and proportion (because they easily foresaw the conclusion to which this would lead) pretended to find a multitude of faults in the construction of the world, and the disposition of it's parts, and from thence, without offering a proof in support of their charge, pertly inferred

*Nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam*

*Naturam mundi, que tanta est prædita culpa.*

LUCRET. Lib. ii.

that is, they would not allow this world to be the work of God, because, as they alledged,

alleged, it was so full of blunders. Nothing is more common than for one mistake to arise out of another. It happened so here: To account for imaginary blunders they fell into some which were real. One sect ascribed the production of the world, such as we now see it, to a fortuitous concurrence of atoms: Another, sensible of the imperfection of this scheme, called in to their assistance the operation of certain mechanical laws, by which matter being once in motion, they alledge the homogeneous and heterogeneous particles of it, which were originally blended together, became separated, and a world, such as we now behold, sprung out of chaos and disorder.

These were not the only schemes which have been devised to account for the origin of this world. It would be tedious to mention them all. To what I have already mentioned, permit me however to add, that some considering this world as an animal, others as a vegetable, supposed it  
endued

endued with a plastic nature or principle, by the operation of which they endeavoured to account for the formation of every thing in it; though when they come to explain themselves with respect to the nature of this principle, they are greatly divided, and run into the most opposite sentiments, some asserting that it was *Air*, some that it was *Water*, and others that it was *Fire*, &c.

It were easy to collect from the writings of antiquity a great deal more upon this subject. § But what has been observed above, may serve as a specimen of the absurdity and inconsistency with which they abound upon this subject, and while it exposes the pride and ignorance of their most celebrated sages who have written upon it, must confirm us in the belief of the justness of that account which Moses has

§ See this subject treated at great length in Stillingfleet's *Origin. Sacr. B. iii. chap. 2.* See also Cudworth's *Intellect. Syst. &c. passim.*

given

given us of Cosmogony, or the Origin of the World.

If from the accounts which antient Philosophers give us of the Origin of the World, we turn our attention to the manner in which they say it is supported and governed, that is, to what we call a Providence, we shall find as great a diversity, but as little satisfaction, in what they have advanced on this subject, as upon any of the former.

Some, without ceremony, denied a Providence altogether §, and even in this pretended to consult the honour of their

§ Enim per se divûm natura necesse est  
 Immortali ævo, summa cum pace, fruatur,  
 Semota a rebus nostris, sejunctaque longe,  
 Nam privata dolore omni, privata periculis,  
 Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri  
 Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.

LUCRET. Lib. i.

See also Arrian. in Epictet. Lib. i. cap. xii. Plut. de Placit. Philos. cap. iii.

Gods,

Gods, alledging that this world was an object too little to engage their attention ; and besides, that a concern about it would be incompatible with true and compleat happiness, of which they must be supposed to be possessed. Some maintained a general Providence, but would not admit that there was any which descended to individuals, † perhaps from an opinion, like the former, that an office, such as this, would be too mean, or too operose for the Deity.

Some confined the regards of a Providence entirely to the upper regions of the universe, † while others, unwilling to exclude the Deity from all concern with this lower world, suppose him to carry on his designs in it, by the subordinate govern-

† Plut. de Placit. Philos. cap. 7. Arrian. lib. i. cap 12.

† Arrian in Epictet. lib. i. cap. 12. Simplic. in Epictet. cap. 38. Plut. de Placit. Philosoph. cap. 3.



ment of inferior and local Gods, to whose tutelage or guardianship they believed certain countries, cities, &c. were committed.\* And there were not wanting many

\* Thus Seneca in Lactant. (Divin. Institut. lib. 1. cap. 5.) speaking concerning God “Hic, cum prima fundamenta molis pulcherrimæ jaceret, & hoc ordiretur, quo neque majus quicquam novit natura nec melius, ut omnia sub ducibus irent, quamvis ipse per totum se corpus intenderat, tamen ministros regni sui deos genuit.”

Expressly in point upon this subject, is what Julian the Roman emperor writes in his book against the Christians. ‘Οι γαρ ἡμετεροι φασιν, τον δημιουργον ἀπαντων μεν εἶναι κοινον πατερα και βασιλεα, νεμεσηθαι δε ταλοιπα των ἰθιων ὑπὸ αὐτου, ἰδιαρχεις και πολιτευχεις θεοις, ὡν ἕκαστος ἐπιτροπειει την ἑαυτου λεξιαν οἰκειως αὐτω· ἐπειδὴ γαρ ἐν μεν τω πατρι παντα τέλεια, και ἐν παντα, ἐν δὲ τοις μεριστοις ἄλλη παρ’ ἄλλω κρατεῖ δυναμις. *i. e.* Our Theologers affirm the Maker of all things to be a common Father and King, but that the nations, as to particular things, are distributed by him to other inferior Gods, who are appointed to be Governors over countries and cities, every one of which administers in his own province agreeably to himself. For whereas in the common Father, all things are perfect, and one is all, in the particular Deities, one excels in one power and another in another. Cud. Intell. Syst. &c. B. 8. ch. 4.



many who seemed to have maintained, that all things were ruled by *Fate*. This some understood in a restricted, others, in a more extensive sense, as if the very Gods themselves were brought under the power of it. It must be owned there are many things in the writings of antiquity, which have such an aspect, † but rightly understood,

The author has quoted what is contained in this note, from the learned Cudworth's Intellectual System of the Universe, as he has not an opportunity of consulting the originals.

† Si nihil fit extra fatum, nihil levare re divina potest. Hoc sentit Homerus, cum querentem Jovem inducit, quod Sarpedonem filium à morte contra fatum eripere non posset. Hoc idem significat Græcus ille in eam sententiam versus.

Quod fore paratum est, id summum exsuperat Jovem.  
Cicer. de Divinatione, lib. 2. cap. 10.

Quicquid est quod nos sic vivere jussit, sic mori eadem necessitate et Deos alligat. Irrevocabilis humana pariter ac divina cursus vehit. Ille ipse omnium conditor ac rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur. Semper paret, semel jussit.

Seneca de Providentia, cap. 5.

stood, so far as it respects the Gods, it means no more than that plan of government, all wise and perfect, founded originally in the divine mind, and therefore when it is said that Jupiter himself is subject to immutable Fate, it can only be understood that he is ever subject to the wisdom of his own councils, and can never act in opposition to it.

But whatever might be the opinion of antiquity concerning Fate, considered as a rule of action to the Deity, yet certain it is, that its influence upon human actions, was represented as universal and irresistible: § And, what is still more extraordinary,

To the above quotations many more might be added which have the same appearance.

§ *Nec servio Deo, sed assentio, eo quidem magis, quod scio omnia certa & in æternum dicta lege decurrere. Fata nos ducunt, & quantum cuique restet, prima nascentium hora disposuit. Causa pendet ex causa, privata ac publica longus ordo rerum trahit. Ideo fortiter*

ordinary, acknowledged by many as such, †  
contrary even to the very feelings of moral  
liberty,

*omne ferendum est; quia non, ut putamus, incidunt  
cuncta, sed veniunt.*

Seneca de Providentia, cap. 5.

† A striking instance and proof of this observation, we have furnished us by the Roman historian Livy: He informs us that some of the Roman legions having, upon a certain occasion, revolted to the enemy, and thereby forfeited their honour, were, from a consciousness of their crime, so abashed and dejected, that they retired to their tents to conceal themselves; and that every effort used to recover their spirits proved ineffectual, till Cerealis told them their misfortunes were owing to Fate.

LIV. Hist. lib. 4.

Plutarch (in Vit. Alexandri) informs us, that Alexander having in a fit of passion killed Clitus, wept bitterly, and notwithstanding all his friends could say to quiet his mind, remained inconsolable, till Aristander observed to him that nothing had happened in this world, but what had been predetermined by Fate, and that then he seemed to be satisfied.

From the above passages, is it not evident that the doctrine of a Fate seems to have gained general credit? The first shews its influence upon the rude and illiterate vulgar; the last, upon those distinguished by their high rank in life. And had not this been an article of their  
Creed,

liberty, than which, it must be owned, there can be none more strong in the human breast. It is indeed worthy of observation, that in most cases, where any regard is shewn to this opinion, it seems to proceed not so much from a conviction of the justness of it, as from a desire to apologize for some misconduct. But this, at the same time, shews the dangerous tendency of such doctrine, by shewing how strong the propensity of mankind is to grasp at any opinion, however absurd, by which they can flatter themselves into a favourite course of conduct, or soothe their own minds, when they would either remonstrate against, or reproach them for it.

But to proceed in our examination of the sentiments of antiquity, upon subjects connected with Religion.

Creed, such an address as either of these, would in the circumstances referred to, have been considered by the persons to whom it was made, as an insult, and in place of the effect had, warmly resented.

The obligations upon all to the worship of a Deity, are next to self-evident. They have been acknowledged by the universal practice of mankind, and their anxious enquiries after the proper manner of performing it. But if we have recourse to the writings of the Philosophers for direction in this, we shall not only find ourselves disappointed in the hopes we entertained from them, but also bewildered in a maze, from which it will be very difficult to extricate ourselves.

Pythagoras is said to have recommended to his disciples to worship the Gods, i. e. the Sun, Moon, and Stars; and the Heroes, though not with equal honour.

Cicero † and Epictetus\* recommended, as the safest course we can follow, a com-

† A Patribus acceptos Deos placet coli; et illud ex institutis Pontificum & Aruspicum non mutandum est, quibus hostiis immolandum cuique Deo.

Cic. de Legib. lib. 2,

\* Epictet. Enchirid. cap. 38.

pliance with the custom of the country in which we live, in the worship of the Gods. And Xenophon, in his memoirs of Socrates, whose disciple he was, informs us that he taught the same thing:‡ And what else was this but to encourage the grossest superstition, when once custom had given it's sanction to it?

‡ Όρας γαρ ότι ο έν Δελφοις Θεος, όταν τις αυτόν έπερωτα, πως έν τοις Θεοις χαρίζοιτο, αποκρίνεται, Νέμω πολεως. Νομος δε υπηρ πανταχου έστι, κατα δυναμιν ιεροις Θεοις άρροσκεθαι. Πως έν άν τις καλλιον και ευσεβεστερον τιμωη Θεου, ή ως αυτοι κελευσιν, εύτω ποιδν.  
i. e. You see that, when the Oracle, or God at Delphi, was consulted as to the most acceptable manner of worshipping the Gods, he replied, that it ought to be performed according to the legal rites of each city or state. It is an universal rule, that all should endeavour to appease the Gods, by sacrifices, as their circumstances will allow. For how can any honour the Gods in a way more truly religious, than by acting as they enjoin?

Xenoph. Memorab. Socrat. lib. 4. cap. 3. §. 16.

See also to the same purpose, Liv. Hist. b. 39. chap. 16. where a compliance with the established custom of a country in the worship of the Gods, is represented as agreeable to the opinion of their earliest and most respectable ancestors.

All the modes of Religion which have been offered to the world, have proceeded upon an acknowledged sense of guilt in man, and displeasure in the Deity on account of it, but which of them (the Jewish and Christian excepted) have suggested a scheme for obtaining the pardon of the one, or averting the other, that Reason, cool and unbiassed, could approve of, or that could give ease to the anxious and troubled mind? They prescribed lustrations, sacrifices, and a thousand superstitious rites. But alas! what more do these than shew the sense which mankind had of their unhappy situation, their anxious desire of a deliverance from it, and the weakness of Reason to discover the proper method by which it might be effected? Sacrifices very properly made a part of the Mosaic institution of Religion. In those early ages of the world, to which the origin of sacrifices must be referred, it does not appear that there was any other way of conveying religious, or other knowledge, but by hieroglyphic or emblematical



cal representations, and therefore God might have pitched upon this method of communicating his gracious intentions to mankind, which, by having a certain meaning affixed to it, would render it as intelligible as any other possibly could. And once instituted, there were besides those already taken notice of, many additional reasons for adopting them into the ritual of the Jewish worship. The people of Israel had, by their long stay in Egypt, contracted an attachment to and passion for the shew and parade of its Religion, and were in danger, after their settlement in Canaan, of having their taste for external splendor increased by their communication, little as it should be, with the Heathen nations around them. Therefore God, to prevent, as much as possible, their being corrupted from either of these causes, was pleased to indulge them with the institution of several splendid rites and sacrifices amongst the rest, in that scheme of Religion which he published to them by the ministry of Moses. Rites, all of them  
such



such as were admirably calculated, if duly attended to, for conveying the most useful instruction along with the use of them. The design of this emblematical or sacrificial service, never was to expiate sin or appease an offended Deity. It never could be instituted from a regard to any intrinsic worth in it, or any efficacy it could have for the attainment of these ends. The institution of sacrifice, according to the original design of it, was intended in dumb, but significant show, to represent the death which the offerer deserved as the punishment of sin, and at the same time, to encourage his hopes of the pardon of it; and by these means to work his soul into a habit of devotion, and the firmest resolutions of future reformation. Considered in these points of view, the institution and use of sacrifice, must stand justified to every unprejudiced person. But unluckily the practice seems to have crept into the heathen world, without a full knowledge of the original reasons of the institution, or at least, was continued after these seem

to

to have been forgotten; and therefore, considered as a part of their Religion, it could not but be absurd. And indeed, viewed in it's connexion with the ends to which it was intended to be subservient, no practice could be more so: For what connexion was there betwixt the effusion of the blood of Bulls and of Goats, and the expiation of sin? What value could there be in hecatombs of the most costly sacrifices, considered as a reparation to the affronted Majesty or injured Honour of God? None surely. Nay, as practised among the Heathen, the usage was worse than absurd: The tendency of it was bad; no less than to corrupt the very source of Religion, by diffusing the most unworthy sentiments of the Deity among his votaries. The influence of this upon the other services of Religion could not but be very strong. How far it extended, let the accounts we have of them witness.

There can be nothing more natural than those anticipations of futurity which spring  
up

up in the mind of man, when serious and sedate. Convinced by the accounts he has had of the past, and his own observations on the present, that, in a short time, he will have no more concern in the busy scenes of this life, he can scarce avoid thinking what shall become of him, when he has bid adieu to them. He must be anxious to know: No pains can divert the thought. It will sometimes force itself upon the mind, whether he would or not: The importance of the enquiry, and the concern which all have in the issue of it, have turned the attention of all to it: Many have written upon it: And yet, how must it surprize the Reader to be informed, that scarce is there any subject, upon which less can be collected with certainty, from the many volumes of antiquity,

The vulgar, in almost all ages and countries of the world, attending to the simple dictates of Nature, and the actings of their own mind, seem not to have entertained

so much as a doubt concerning the immortality of the soul and a future state. But the Literati of the several schools, indulging their speculative humour upon these subjects, have run into the most opposite and contradictory sentiments. And no wonder: As in these they seem to have been, in a great measure, determined by the systems of philosophy they had adopted, or the ends they had to serve by what they advanced.

None of these seem to have had the least notion of a resurrection of the body: This never so much as once entered into their minds. What is an abundant proof of this, were there no other, is the reception which this doctrine met with, when preached by the Apostle Paul at Athens, † one of the most celebrated seats of learning then in the world.

† Acts xvii. 18. 32.

The immortality of the soul, some of them flatly denied; § And others doubted of it.\* It must however, in

§ See Plut. de Placit. Philosoph. cap. 7. de Animæ Immortalitate.

Salust. de Bell. Catilin. De pœna, possum (says Cæsar before the Roman Senate) equidem dicere id quod res habet. In luctu atque miseriis, mortem ærumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse: eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere; ultra neque curæ, neque gaudio locum esse.

Aristotle (Eth. ad Nicom. Lib. 3. cap. 6.) expresses himself in the most positive terms. Φόβηρωτατον δ' ὁ θάνατος: πικρας γαρ και ἔδειν ἐτι τω τεθνηοτι δεκαῖ οὔτε αγαθον οὔτε κακον εἶναι. *i. e.* Of all things Death is the most terrible. It is the period of existence. To the dead, there is nothing deserves to be called good or evil.

\* Marc. Anton. (Lib. 7. §. ) speaks of death in a manner, which shews he was uncertain whether it was an extinction of being, or a translation to another state.

Seneca (Epist 24.) Mors nos aut consumit, aut emittit: Emissis meliora restant onere detracto. Consumptis nihil restat. Bona pariter malaque submota sunt.

justice

justice to antiquity, be owned, that some of it's most celebrated sages seem to have believed it. § Those who adopted the pantheistic

See Plat. Apolog. Socrat. See also Phæd. pass. It is true there are some passages in both, which would seem to indicate doubt or uncertainty, but if we consider the whole of what Socrates has said upon this subject, and the part he acted in some of the most trying scenes of life, and particularly in the last, we must in justice acknowledge, that if there remained any doubt with him concerning the Soul's existence, it was but very little.

Nothing can be more spirited, as well as express upon this point, than the dying address of Cyrus to his children. To save the trouble of transcribing the original, I beg leave to lay before the Reader, a translation of a part of it. “ Do not imagine (says he) O my  
 “ sons, that Death, which puts an end to this mortal  
 “ life, puts an end to my existence, or that when it  
 “ takes place, I am nothing. I never could allow my-  
 “ self to think that the soul could live, while confined  
 “ to this mortal body, and die when set at liberty  
 “ from it. In place of communicating life to the  
 “ soul, it derives life from it. Nay, I could never be  
 “ persuaded that the soul should be deprived of intelli-  
 “ gence and wisdom by it's separation from an unthink-  
 “ ing body. It is much more agreeable to reason to  
 “ conclude,

theistic scheme, or considered the Deity under the notion of the  $\tau\acute{o}$   $\pi\alpha\delta\iota$ , or, the  $\tau\acute{o}$   $\epsilon\upsilon$ , were necessarily bound to maintain the immortality of the soul. Believing it to be a part excerpted from the Deity at it's first entrance into the body, they supposed it to be resolvable into the same universal principle, though as to the time when it became reunited to it, they were far from being agreed, as we shall have occasion to shew afterwards. But we must not imagine that all who maintained the immortality of the soul, believed a future state of rewards and punishments, corresponding to our moral conduct here. Some indeed seem to have had a firm belief of two opposite states, to the one or other of which mankind should, after death, be consigned in consequence of an enquiry into their conduct

“ conclude, that, disengaged from it, and becoming a  
 “ pure mind, it's improvement in wisdom should be ad-  
 “ vanced.” See Xenophon *Κυβερητικα*. Lib. 8. §. 47.

here,



here, \* though, when we consider the wild and extravagant notions with which their accounts of them are blended, we cannot but stand amazed.

The pantheistic doctrine which required the belief of the soul's immortality, by a consequence equally plain and just, would not admit the belief of a state of proper retribution, because incompatible with the above notion of Deity, and accordingly

\* His & talibus rationibus adductus Socrates — cum pæne in manu jam mortiferum illud teneret poculum, locutus ita est, ut non ad mortem trudi, verum in cœlum videretur ascendere. Ita enim censebat, itaque disseruit, duas esse vias, duplicesque cursus animorum è corpore excedentium. Nam qui se humanis vitiis contaminavissent, & se totos libidinibus dedissent, quibus cæcati, velut domesticis vitiis atque flagitiis se inquinavissent, vel republicâ violandâ fraudes inexpiabiles concepissent, iis devium quoddam iter esse, seclusum à concilio Deorum. Qui autem se integros castosque servavissent, quibusque fuisset minima cum corporibus contagio, seique ab his semper sevocassent, essentque in corporibus humanis vitam imitati deorum : his ad illos, a quibus essent profecti, reditum facilem patere. Cic. Tuscul. Disput. lib. i. §. xxix. xxx.



the votaries of the pantheistic scheme seem to have held that the re-union of the soul to it's parent substance, took place immediately after it's separation from the body, and represent the stories of a Tartarus, Cocytus, &c. as no more than so many bugbears to fright the weak and ignorant §, and as carryng so much the air of fiction,

§ Ut ad solatia veniam. Quid te, Marcia, movet? Cogita, nullis defunctum malis affici. Illa quæ nobis inferos faciunt terribiles, fabulam esse. Nullas immingere mortuis tenebras, nec carcerem, nec flumina flagrantia igne, nec oblivionis amnem, nec tribunalia & reos & in illa libertate tam laxa ullos iterum tyrannos. Luserunt ista Poetæ, & vanis nos agitavere terroribus. Mors omnium dolorum & solutio est & finis, ultra quam mala nostra non exeunt, quæ nos in illam tranquillitatem, in qua antequam nasceremur, jacuimus, reponit. Mors nec bonum nec malum est. Id enim potest aut bonum aut malum esse, quod aliquid est: quod vero ipsum nihil est, & omnia in nihilum redigit, nulli nos fortunæ tradit. Seneca de Consolat. ad Marciam. cap. 19.

To the same purpose see Cicer. Tuscul. Disput. l. i. §. xvi. And Arrian in Epictet. lib. iii. cap. xiii. §. i.

that

that they became, and deservedly too, the very sport of children || .

It is well enough known that some represented the plan of Providence or God's moral Government, as carried on in a succession of different states. They supposed man to have existed in a state prior to the present, and sent into this to correct the misconduct he had been guilty of in that; and the transmigration to be continued in several successive states, if necessary, his condition in each being determined by the part he acted in the preceding. This is in substance, the import of the antient doctrine of the Metempsychosis. It is true, according to the manner in which it was taught among the Egyptians, the transitions from one state to another are represented as physical and necessary, and

|| *Esse aliquos manes, & subterranea regna.*

*Et Contum et Stygio Ranas in gurgite nigras*

*Atque una transire vadum tot millia cymba*

*Nec pueri credunt, nisi qui nondum ære lavantur.*

*Juv. Sat. 2. lin. 149.*

seem no way connected with any moral intendment or design § . In this light it is probable it was also considered by Pythagoras, who, because of the most illustrious character among the first teachers of it, has been generally believed to be the author of it, though it is certain that it was much more antient than his time, and seems to have been borrowed by him from Egypt, into which he travelled for his improvement in science.

Plato, his admirer, improved on this doctrine; and taught that those who are distinguished for the eminence of their virtue in this world, would, upon their departure from it, be immediately admitted to the abodes of the blessed; whereas those

§ Herodotus, lib. ii. Euterp. informs us, that the Egyptians affirmed, that the soul of man, after leaving his body, always enters into some other animal; and passing, by a continued rotation, thro' the different kinds of aërial, terrestrial and marine beings, returns again into a human body, after the revolution of three thousand years.

who,

who, by indulging in low and animal pleasures, had contracted any high degree of moral taint, must pass through different states of purgation before they could be freed from it §.

Considered in this last point of light, the doctrine seems to have been calculated to represent the several supposed transmigrations, which man was to undergo as a kind of moral discipline for promoting the improvement of his nature, till at last, it becomes fitted for a re-union with the Deity, or the enjoyment of the most pure and refined happiness.

The Doctrine of the Metempsychosis might perhaps have gained footing among the Egyptians, from a belief of the unperishable nature of the soul, and the difficulty of conceiving the manner of its existence in a state separate from the body. But whencesoever it took its rise, certain it is, that

§ Plat. Phæd. pass.

among many of the antients, it was believed in it's literal sense, though I think it is highly probable, that the great teachers of it, after Pythagoras's time, if not Pythagoras himself, intended no more by it, than, in the way of allegory, to represent the several gradations in improvement, which our nature must pass through to fit it for that happiness for which it was originally designed. But let this suffice on the subject of their systems of religious faith, though on this part of our enquiry, it were easy to enlarge.

Let us from these turn our attention to their systems of morals. Here we shall find many things indeed excellently said, and such as do great honour to the authors. But we shall at the same time, find almost as many things, which we cannot, dare not approve of; because reason, not to say Revelation, condemns them when they come to be impartially considered.

Let

Let us look into the moral writings of the Stoicks (a sect, who of all others, came in most things, nearest to the Christian system, and that very probably, because in the later period of their philosophy, they were greatly indebted to it) and we shall find them abounding with paradoxical aphorisms, such as these : That a wise man is void of all passion ; that he is happy in the midst of the greatest affliction ; that he is always the same ; that none else is free, or rich, or great ; nay, from that pride which seems to be the consequence of their Theology, and one of the distinguishing characteristics of their sect, do they not, in a manner, exalt their wise man to a kind of equality with their Deity, and in some cases, give him the precedence § ?

I know that most of these favourite sayings of this sect, may by a little soft-

§ Est aliquod, quo sapiens antecedit Deum. Ille naturæ beneficio, non suo, sapiens est.

SENEC. Epist. 53.

ening, be defended ; nay, that they are, by the admirers of this philosophy, so explained, as to give very noble ideas of of human Nature and Virtue. But after all, it must be owned, they carry too much the air of ostentation and parade, and so have deservedly drawn censure upon them from many, who but for this would have delighted to bestow praise. In this as in every other similar case, the affectation of it never fails to be justly punished with a disappointment. But were these the worst things that are to be met with in the ancient systems of morals, exceptionable as they are, they might be put up with. But it is suspected that upon enquiry, this will not be found to be the case ; for with respect to some, even Cardinal Virtues, it might be made appear, that they seem not only to have thought meanly of them, but also to have praised, if not recommended, a practice opposite to them.

Thus for instance, we find a spirit of forgiveness represented by some of them

as



as pusillanimous, while that of revenge is dignified with such epithets as could best remove every thing disagreeable from the idea of it, and make it appear the evidence of a true magnanimity of soul. In those early days, when arms were the delight of heroes, and military achievements the way to glory and renown, while the tempers of mankind had yet received little softening, and their manners as little polish, from philosophy or religion, they seem to have despised the noble triumphs of a humane and forgiving spirit, and to have valued none but those which were acquired by the feats of fierce and cruel combat; so far did a principle of false honour operate, in almost all cases of quarrel and dispute.

I might take notice of several other instances of the grossest corruption of manners, countenanced by the writings of some of the most renowned Philosophers. But to save myself this disagreeable task, and my readers time, I shall mention only one or  
two



two more. Do we not find Seneca, little less than recommending the exposing of children, if from their weak and sickly constitution, the inhuman parents apprehended they might become burdensome to them §? Nay, do we not meet with many things in the most esteemed writings of antiquity, which give encouragement to suicide itself, the most unnatural of all crimes || ?

The frequency of this crime was the consequence of certain dogmata which were

§ Tollantur è cætu mortalium, facturi peiora quæ contingunt, & quo uno modo possunt, desinant mali esse: sed hoc sine odio. Quid enim est cur oderim eum, cui tum maxime prosum, cum illum sibi eripio? Nam quis sua membra odit, tunc eum abscidit? Non est illa ira sed misera curatio. Rabidos effligimus canes, trucem atque immansuetum bovem cædimus, & morbidis pecoribus, ne gregem polluant, ferrum demittimus, portentosos fœtus extinguimus, liberos quoque, si debiles monstrisque editi sunt, mergimus. Non ira, sed ratio est, a sanis inutilia secernere. Senec. de Ira lib. i. § xv.

|| Marc. Anton. lib. v. §. xxix. Arrian Epictet. lib. iii. cap. xiii. §. i. Senec. de Ira, lib. iii. cap. xv.

taught

taught by many of the Philosophers, and for very obvious reasons, eagerly received by many of the people. Persuaded that the soul, immediatly upon it's separation from the body, was re-united to the Deity, or translated to a state, free from the miseries and calamities to which this is subjected, this practice, repugnant as it is to one of the strongest principles of our nature, became very frequent : nay so frequent in Egypt, that I remember somewhere to have read, that Ptolemy Philadelphus was forced to forbid the teaching of these doctrines; alledging that, in proportion as they gained credit, his country was in danger of being dispeopled. The unhappy effect or influence of these principles is not only evident from the edict of Ptolemy Philadelphus, just now referred to, but also from an observation of the manners of those other countries, where they, or similar ones, obtained. To support this remark, I need only mention one made by the justly celebrated Baron De Montesquieu, when, to shew that it is not so much the truth or falsity of a doctrine

which

which renders it useful or pernicious to men in civil Government, as the use or abuse which is made of it : he observes, “ The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, falsely understood, has almost throughout the whole world, and in every age, engaged women, slaves, subjects, friends, to murder themselves, that they might go and serve in the other world the object of their respect or love in this ||.”

It must be acknowledged, in justice to antiquity, that some of it's best writers have dissuaded from this shocking practice, and have told us, that like centinels who have a post assigned them, we ought not to remove from this world, till called from it by Him who sent us into it. But at the same time, it deserves to be observed, that if we have a call from the Deity to this purpose, they acquit us of all blame. Upon this principle Cicero attempts to justify Cato in that violence he offered to

|| The Spirit of Laws, V. II. B. xxiv. Chap. xix.

himself.

himself §. But who that reads what he has said with respect to him, can miss observing, that by omitting to ascertain what constitutes such a call, or how it may be known, he leaves every one at liberty to act as he pleases ; and if unhappily so disposed, to construe the inclination to this horrid deed, as a license for the commission of it thus ; with their own hands, to rid themselves of life, when pride, for instance, would tell them, that they could not maintain it with dignity ; or that it would be mean to survive a certain disappointment or disgrace, or to submit to the government and yoke of a hated Rival ?

§ Cato sic abiit è vita, ut causam moriendi nactam se esse gauderet. Vetat enim dominans ille in nobis Deus, injussu hinc nos suo demigrare. Cum vero causam justam Deus ipse dederit, ut tunc Socrati, nunc Catoni, sæpe multis, næ ille, medius fidius, vir sapiens, lætus ex his tenebris in lucem illam excefferit, nec tamen illa vincla carceris ruperit, leges enim vetant. Sed tanquam a magistratu, aut ab aliqua potestate legitima, sic a Deo evocatus atque emissus, exierit. Cic. Tuscul. Disput. lib. i. §. xxx.

But,

But not to spin out this part of our enquiry longer, let what has been observed upon the above points be duly considered, and any one may be able to judge how far the ancient Philosophers were fitted to be the instructors of mankind in the great concerns of Religion and Virtue; nay must be forced to conclude that many of their disquisitions, however curious and subtle, and excellent specimens of philosophic acumen, were upon the whole, the speculations of Fancy, rather than just conclusions deduced from an accurate view of the nature of God and Man.

But for argument's sake, let it be supposed, that they were much better fitted for guiding mankind in matters of Religion, than from their writings they appear to have been, there was a disadvantage attending the manner of communicating their instructions, which must have rendered them of little avail, for either enlightening the minds, or reforming the lives of those amongst whom they lived.

They

They had their *Esoteric* and *Exoteric* discourses. The first were delivered only to those who had entered their schools, and were willing to attend them, in order to their being instructed in the more profound and subtile parts of their Philosophy. The other, were public lectures, which all who pleased were welcome to attend.

Whether they taught a double doctrine upon some important points of Religion, or in other words, whether what they taught their scholars upon these subjects, was different from what they taught the promiscuous croud, I shall not take upon me to determine.

Writers of a very respectable character in the republic of letters, are to be found on both sides of this question§. But one thing may be affirmed, however hard it

§ Dr. Warburton's Div. Legat. &c. V. I. b. 3. §. 2.

See also Dr. Sykes's Examinat. of Dr. Warburton's account of the double doctrine of the old Philosophers.

may bear upon the character of those ancient Philosophers, that in their exoteric discourses or lectures, which were calculated for public hearing, they fell in with, and so, encouraged the superstition, and strengthened the prejudices of the people.

Thus, to humour the populace, who were superstitious to a degree of madness, in their Theology, such as it was, do we not find them speaking of a *Hercules*, an *Apollo*, an *Æsculapius*, an *Æacus*, a *Rhadamanthus*, a *Styx*, an *Acheron*; as if they believed they had a real existence, while they knew they were but the creatures of a political craft, or poetic fancy? In all this however their conduct might be justified, upon the maxims of government or state policy, upon those of Religion it surely cannot. Where Religion was concerned, every thing that had the appearance of deceit, or studied obscurity, should have been carefully avoided, and the greatest honesty and perspicuity imaginable followed.

Neither



Neither will it apologize for them to say, that they meant in this manner, as under a sacred veil, to convey some of the most profound and important truths of Religion. Why not plainly speak out? Why not honestly tell the people what they themselves meant, by the several modes of expression which they used? Was not this the more necessary, when they found that the people, already too strongly prejudiced in favour of their mythological whims, were in matters of the greatest importance, in danger of being misled by them?

It is readily acknowledged that their doctrine concerning an *Acheron*, a *Styx*, &c. would at first, be considered in no other light, but as so many fables of the Poets, who through a licence of fancy, took the liberty in this manner, to represent some of the most important truths of Religion, that by exhibiting them in this agreeable dress, they might the better recommend them to their attention. While they were considered in this light by the

VOL. I.    I    people,



people, there was no danger from the manner in which they were taught. But when the original doctrines, veiled under these poetical descriptions, were like to be lost in the fable, then it became the duty of those who undertook the instruction or reformation of mankind, to do all they could to undeceive them.

This task, it is true, required prudence and caution. The fate of Anaxagoras, Socrates, and others, from the honest freedom with which they ventured to speak of Religion; the opposition they might lay their accounts with from the ignorance of the *Sophists*, who were the tutors of the great; and the superstition of the *Poets*, who were the instructors of the vulgar, all might concur to render them timid. But however great the opposition and danger from these quarters might have been, public instructors were called on, rather to incur the hazard of offending, than to allow the people quietly to remain under a cloud of ignorance. Without this honesty  
and

and boldness of spirit, a reformation could never take place. And yet so few and feeble were the attempts, made by the ancient Philosophers in this way, as must ever leave us of opinion, that they were far from being proper guides in Religion.

To this allow me to add, that their doctrines of *local Deities*, and an *intercommunity of worship*, were also attended with the most baneful influence upon Religion. By the reciprocal concessions hereby made, a tacit approbation of the Gods and worship of each country was given, than which nothing could more tend to confirm them in their respective superstitions. The effects of this principle shewed themselves, as in many other cases, so in a particular manner in the detestation in which the Jews, and afterwards the Christians were held, and the persecutions they met with from all their neighbours.

The Religion of neither did, like that of others, countenance the notion of local

Deities, nor admit of religious worship to any but *their* God, who they contended was the alone true God, and ought to be acknowledged in the character of *the Lord of all*; and therefore both these Religions and their votaries, became the objects of general hatred, and were run down with uncommon keenness and violence. Thus we have considered the light received from the famed luminaries of the Heathen world in very different points of view, and now it is submitted to the impartial Reader, if it be not like the twinkling of a star in the midst of darkness, which serves only to render the darkness visible.

But may it be said, “Let this be granted  
 “with respect to any one of them, or all  
 “of them taken separately, yet still might  
 “there not be extracted from them what  
 “would make a compleat system of Reli-  
 “gious instruction and morals?”

That something like this was practicable, seems to have been the opinion of a sect  
 who

who sprung up in the second century, who under the auspices of *Potamon*, their founder, opened a school at Alexandria, and took to themselves the name of *Eclectics*.

These entertained the romantic hopes of making out one regular, uniform whole, from the systems of the several Philosophers, in which they flattered themselves all the contending parties would agree. With this professed design they set to work. But the code or digest they formed, after all their careful selection of materials, was far from giving satisfaction to any. And indeed it was no wonder that it did not: A composition of such jarring materials, what an absurd medley of Religion and Philosophy must it have made! An appearance as truly ridiculous, as the picture of that monster drawn by a poetic fancy, in the beginning of Horace's Art of Poetry. Such was the success of the first *Eclectic* reformers; and should others, in hopes of doing better, renew

the attempt; should they ransack all the writings that have come down to us of the Italic and Ionic schools, and of all different sects, which like so many branches, have sprung from these venerable stems; it would require no prophetic spirit to tell what would be the success. What difficulties, almost insuperable, lie in the way of the execution of such a scheme? Who are they whom mankind would agree on to be the compilers of this new, philosophic system of Religion? Where could we find persons of various learning, solid judgment, uncorrupted honesty, universal philanthropy and unwearied application, sufficient for carrying on and completing this arduous undertaking? But could such be found, and mankind unite in the choice of them, what reason have we to think they would unite in adopting this laboured performance, as the rule of their faith and manners? Should they differ upon this point, would the compilers of this new system have authority enough to determine the controversy? Nay after all their learned pains, must  
not

not mankind be left at liberty to judge for themselves, and for any authority which this system would carry along with it, to receive or reject it, as it might best suit their interest, passions, principles or humours?

“What,” it may be said, “are we to reject all the philosophy of the ancients in the lump?” I am far from thinking so, and would be sorry if any thing which has been offered on this part of the subject, should be looked upon as a general censure of their moral and philosophic writings. Nothing could be farther from the author’s intention. It was hinted before, and it is with pleasure repeated now, that there are many things in both, which justly entitle them to great merit and to equal praise. That there should appear so much defect, or even blemish in either, is not so much to be wondered at, as that there does not appear more.

Science, like the life of man, has it’s several periods ; and it needs be as little

wondered at that the one should not attain to maturity in it's infant state, as the other. All that can be expected in either is no more, than that the degrees of maturity, or rather the progress to it, should be proportioned to the stages they must pass through to it. Nay this gradual progression in the improvements of science, was not only what from the constitution of human nature, might have been expected, but what was also highly proper, and more conducive to the great end proposed, than if the discoveries made in it had been more early and rapid.

The human mind is not capable of taking in all at once, a wide compass of knowledge. It's faculties must by degrees, be enlarged for this purpose, and light let into it as it can bear. In the intellectual as in the natural world, a full blaze of light immediately succeeding a thick darkness, could serve only to dazzle and confound. The gradations of light, from an obscure dawn to the brightest splendor,



splendor, are in the one case as well as in the other, not only highly beautiful, but equally useful. Together with the pleasure they afford mankind in beholding every degree of it's increase, they at the same time, prepare for properly receiving and improving them.

What is a still greater confirmation of the propriety of this method of diffusing knowledge is, that this seems to have been the very plan upon which Providence has proceeded. To trace the gradual openings of this plan, and observe the connexion of it's several parts, might be at once an agreeable and useful employment. If with this view we attentively consider the subject, we shall soon find reason to conclude, that philosophy, with the greatest beauty and the justest propriety, occupies the place assigned to it, the intermediate period betwixt the times of ignorance and fable which preceded it, and those of brighter knowledge which followed after; and that it was no small improvement



provement upon the one, and a very happy preparation for the other.

It must be acknowledged, that for a course of ages, the Jews were distinguished from all around them by the brightness of their religious knowledge; and that this they owed, in a great measure, to the instructions of their Prophets. Betwixt Malachi, the last of them, and the appearance of the great Founder of our Religion, there was an interval of upwards of four hundred years ||. During this long period, it had been no wonder, considering the state of the world at that time, if it had, notwithstanding all the improvements in knowledge which it had formely received from the Jews, fallen back into the grossest ignorance again. Various are the methods which have been employed by God for the instruction and reformation of mankind. And is it not worthy of notice, how in this

|| Malachi died about An. ante Christ. 486. See Prid. Connect. &c.

period,

period, when they must have been otherwise without public teachers, he raised up a succession of eminent Philosophers, who if they could not instruct them so well as might have been wished in the principles and knowledge of Religion, yet served to check the rapid progress of vice, and, though by slow degrees, to promote the reformation of mankind?

Besides these, their appearance at this time answered another valuable purpose. The Philosophy they taught, by even the partial Reformation it had made in the religious faith and manners of mankind, and the spirit of enquiry it had excited, served to turn their attention to Christianity, when it was offered to the world; and enabled them the better to judge of its nature, evidence and importance.

Considered in these several points of view, the Philosophy of the antients must appear to have made a part of the plan pursued by Providence for the instruction  
of

of mankind; to have occupied the proper place for it; and in the measure intended by it, to have contributed to the most valuable interests of mankind and of Religion.

A due attention to what has been observed under this section, may enable us to form a proper estimate of the Philosophy of the Ancients, so far at least as it seems to have regarded Religion, and will at once shew us that it neither deserves the extravagant praises bestowed upon it by some, nor of the illiberal censures thrown out against it by others.

But to proceed in our design, let us consider,

## S E C T I O N

## S E C T I O N IV.

*How far the Entertainments of the Stage, as at present managed, are calculated to promote THE CAUSE OF VIRTUE.*

**A**NOTHER method pretty early introduced, under pretence of serving the Cause of Virtue, and ever since continued with various improvements, was the exhibition of Theatrical Performances.

It must be owned that Dramatic Performances, properly conducted and under due regulations, might be made highly serviceable to the interests of Virtue; but whether upon the whole they have been so in fact, is at least problematical. And that the Reader may judge for himself, how far it is fit for attaining such an end, it may not be improper to lay before him some obser-

observations upon the manner in which the stage has been, and now is generally conducted.

The Performances exhibited upon it are either of the Comic or the Tragic kind. Both professedly aim at the same end, but in very different ways. The one in a gay and humorous, the other in a grave and solemn manner. The one, by a burlesque on the foibles and improprieties in human conduct; the other, by an exhibition of striking pictures of vice, exposed with all the art of just painting and representation.

In short, the one is intended to laugh us out of our follies, by rendering them ridiculous; the other, to produce an indignation against vice, by rendering it odious. But though this be the professed design of both, how far the one or the other has succeeded, or is calculated to promote this end, is what we are now to enquire into.

The

The design proposed by the Theatre, as has been just now hinted, is truly noble, and such as could not be too much encouraged, were it invariably pursued, and the manner of conducting it such as was calculated to promote it. But so many are the ingredients necessary for conducting the Drama upon a truly useful plan, that there are but few, very few, if any, who have succeeded in it.

Not only is there necessary a proper choice of the subject, and a solid judgment in the manner of laying the plot, but also an extensive knowledge and correct taste in conducting it, so as to keep up the attention of the audience, interest them in the fate of the several characters, maintain each with just propriety, and make all the different parts lead on to the catastrophe, which unravels the plot and winds up the whole.

It is true, it has almost all the advantages, were they properly improved, that  
can

can arise from real life. But who does not know how early the stage became prostituted to the vilest purposes, and in place of being the mean of recommending virtue, was employed to turn it into ridicule, by making those who were most distinguished for it, the objects of the most sarcastic jest and ridicule?

Is it not well known, that in this manner *Socrates* was very early treated by *Aristophanes*? Does he not in his comedy, called, "*The Clouds*," introduce him in a manner plainly calculated to expose him to the contempt and rage of a licentious populace? and alas his success was but too great!

This it is true, happened in the first period of comedy. Then the supreme power being lodged in the hands of the people, the Poets who were their greatest favourites, forgetting, or at least disregarding all the rules of delicacy and decorum, took the scandalous liberty of saying what they pleased

pleased upon the stage, nay of introducing living characters upon it, without so much as the disguise of borrowed names.

But *now* it may be said, Comedy has undergone a reformation which will not tolerate such illiberal abuse. Very true. Soon after this a check was given to the licentiousness of the Athenians, by a change in the form of their government. The Poets were obliged to observe a greater caution and more decency. And even since that time, it will no doubt be alledged, that it has undergone still more improvements. But after all, must it not be owned, that it is yet so far from being unexceptionable, that it may be justly questioned whether, as it presently stands, it is not, or rather it cannot be doubted but it is a pleasing vehicle of the most dangerous poison ?

Upon this point I beg leave to quote the opinion of a learned Critic of our own country. Take it in his own words : “ In  
 “ the reign of Charles the second (says he)  
 VOL. I. K “ Comedy,



“ Comedy, copying the manners of his li-  
 “ centious court, became abominably li-  
 “ centious, and continues so with very lit-  
 “ tle softening. It is there an establish-  
 “ ed rule to deck out the chief characters  
 “ with every vice in fashion, however  
 “ gross. But as such characters, viewed  
 “ in a true light, would be disgusting,  
 “ care is taken to disguise their defor-  
 “ mity, under the embellishments of wit,  
 “ sprightliness and good humour, which,  
 “ in mixt company, makes a capital figure.  
 “ A young man of figure, emancipated  
 “ at last from the severity and restraint  
 “ of a College-Education, repairs to the  
 “ capital, disposed to every sort of excess.  
 “ The playhouse becomes his favourite  
 “ amusement, and he is enchanted with the  
 “ gaiety and splendor of the chief perso-  
 “ nages. The disgust which vice gives  
 “ him at first soon wears off, to make  
 “ way for new notions, more liberal in  
 “ his opinion, by which a sovereign con-  
 “ tempt of religion, and a declared war  
 “ upon the chastity of Wives, Maids,  
 “ and

“ and Widows, are converted, from being  
 “ infamous vices, to be fashionable virtues.  
 “ The infection spreads gradually through  
 “ all ranks, and becomes universal. How  
 “ gladly would I listen to any one who  
 “ should undertake to prove, that what I  
 “ have been describing is chimerical, but  
 “ the dissoluteness of our young people of  
 “ birth, will not suffer me to doubt of its  
 “ reality ||.” Thus our critic, with re-  
 spect to Comedy. After a sentence so de-  
 cisive, and from so able a judge, it would  
 be superfluous to add any thing, upon the  
 expediency of it, in its present form, for  
 promoting the knowledge, and diffusing a  
 relish of virtue, among those who attend  
 upon the exhibition of it.

As little, I am afraid, shall we be able  
 to find a proper system of moral conduct  
 in the performances of the Tragic class,  
 which makes such a distinguished figure  
 upon the stage.

|| Elements of Criticism. Vol. I. p. 56.

I am aware that the opinion of the justly celebrated Mr. Addison stands in opposition to this. A perfect Tragedy he calls the noblest production of human nature, and, as such, capable of giving the mind one of the most delightful and most improving entertainments; calculated, he says, to wear out of our thoughts every thing that is mean and little; to cherish and cultivate that humanity, which is the ornament of our nature; to soften insolence, soothe affliction, and subdue the mind to the dispensations of Providence §. An high encomium indeed upon this species of writing. It were to be wished that the effects produced by it, were any way equal to what he says might be expected from it. But notwithstanding all my veneration for the judgment of this truly great man, and excellent writer, I must take the liberty to say that there are many things (some of which respect the plot; some, the structure; and some, the manner and circumstances of the exhibi-

§ Spectator. V. I. No. 39.

tion

tion of our plays) which must ever concur to defeat the sanguine expectations of the admirers of the stage, in favour of much moral or religious improvement.

Many of the performances of the Tragic class, it is readily owned, discover no small literary and poetic merit, great judgment, and no less grandeur and elevation of sentiment, purity of diction, and delicacy of taste: But “a perfect tragedy,” it is suspected, has never yet appeared. And as for the common run of tragedy, it is too obvious to escape the notice of any, that the plot is oft times so laid, and the several parts so conducted, as to corrupt, rather than improve the morals of the spectators; to instruct in the arts of intrigue, to inflame the lawless passion, and lessen the horror of vice, from the manner and dress in which it is exhibited. *Amour* and *Intrigue* seldom fail to make a distinguished figure, in the performances calculated for our modern stage. In these it is no uncommon thing to see frailties, yea,

even vices, represented as virtues. *Pride*, dignified with the name of *Greatness of mind* — *Revenge*, called *Heroism* — A *Softness* of temper, approaching to effeminacy, honoured with the title of *sensibility*: While that firmness and resolution, under the influence of which one dares to be just and virtuous amidst all the temptations to the contrary, is branded with the epithets of savage and inhumane. And needs one to be told, how plays of such a complexion have a tendency to corrupt and debauch the mind?

The deformity of vice is no security against the danger of it. Accustomed to behold it, the horror of it gradually wears off and shocks us less, and so we stand more exposed to be hurt by the repeated solicitations; nay, if we do not save ourselves by a timely and speedy retreat, we run a thousand risks of being overcome by it. This sentiment is beautifully expressed by a Poet of our own country, in the following lines:

Vice

Vice is a Monster of such frightful mein,  
 As to be hated, needs but to be seen :  
 But seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
 We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

POPE'S *Essay on Man*.

And if, notwithstanding it's native ugliness and deformity, it is so apt to make an easy conquest of the unwary spectator, how great must be the danger from it, when as is oft the case in our modern plays, it is decked over with all those gaudy plumes, which may not only conceal it's deformity, but under such a disguise, captivate the unguarded and unsuspecting heart ?

But were the play, in it's plot and the execution of it, altogether unexceptionable, there are other things which must ever prevent the salutary effects of it.

The celebrated critic before mentioned very justly observes, that, " Fable operates  
 " on our passions, by representing it's  
 " events as passing in our sight, and by  
 K 4 " deluding

“ deluding us into a conviction of reality.  
 “ Hence in epic and dramatic composi-  
 “ tions, every circumstance ought to be em-  
 “ ployed that may promote the delusion †.  
 “ But if we once begin to doubt of their  
 “ reality, farewell all relish and concern.  
 “ This is an unhappy effect, after which it  
 “ will require more than an ordinary effort  
 “ to restore the waking dream \*.

By these observations, just and solid in-  
 deed, because deduced from an attention  
 to human nature, let us examine the claim  
 which this species of Dramatic writing  
 makes to the merit of promoting the cause  
 of virtue, by promoting the knowledge and  
 the love of it.

It is readily acknowledged that during  
 the action, we may, by a kind of fascina-  
 tion, which the charms of exhibition carry  
 along with them, be so transported with

† Elements of Criticism, Vol. II. p. 381.

\* Ibid. Vol. I. p. 102.



the scene before us, as to forget that those who act the different parts are but fictitious, and not real characters ; but this deception, and of consequence the pleasure which attends it, is but short lived. We go to the playhouse with the full conviction of this, and we return from it with the same, and therefore are apt to steel our minds, if we are but so disposed, against the salutary impressions they might receive from an exhibition whether of good or bad characters. We need only keep in view that they are but fictitious, that they exist only in imagination and not in real life, and they are not the objects proper to move and interest our hearts. We can easily persuade ourselves, if but our inclination leans that way, that the virtues of the one are set too high for human ambition to reach, and that the vices of the other are too shocking to admit of imitation.

Another thing that contributes to weaken, or render less sensible that impression of reality, which should be carefully kept  
alive,



alive, at least during the exhibition, in order to render them agreeable, is the dress of our plays; all of which, a few excepted, run, if not in the starched, fettered numbers of rhyme, in the style of blank verse.

That they should have all the ornaments and imagery that the fancy of the poet can give them, in order to interest the passions, is readily allowed. But may they not enjoy all these advantages without this species of versification? Mr. Addison indeed, thinks it happily adapted to tragedy, as a due medium between rhyme and prose §. It is true, it may, as he observes, sometimes enter unobserved into our common discourse, but must it not be owned, that in the seriousness of conversation, in the depth of politics, in the intrigues of state, in the soft interviews of amour, in the sudden sallies of passion, in the rage of anger, in the exultation of joy, or in the heavy pressure of grief and sorrow, no man stu-

§ Spectator, Vol. I. No. 39.

dioufly

diously seeks such manner of expression, or falls into it naturally, thro' all the windings of a long discourse? In these, and the like scenes, which often occur in the course of the drama, does not the use of it appear unnatural, and as such, has it not a tendency to defeat the very design of it's application?

Another great impropriety, inseparable from the stage, and of a very hurtful tendency, is the too frequent opposition betwixt the real characters of those who appear on the stage, and those they are obliged to personate in the drama.

A writer of approved taste and judgment has an observation with respect to music, which will apply with equal propriety to the stage. He says that, “ The effect of it  
 “ may sometimes be lost by an unh'appy  
 “ association of ideas with the person and  
 “ character of a performer. When we  
 “ hear at the Oratorio an Italian eunuch  
 “ squeaking forth the vengeance of divine  
 wrath,

“ wrath, or a gay, lively strumpet pour-  
 “ ing forth the complaint of a deeply  
 “ penitent and contrite heart, we cannot  
 “ prevent our being hurt by such an asso-  
 “ ciation §.” Such an unnatural discord  
 between, the character of a performer and  
 the part which is given him to act, is no  
 uncommon thing upon the stage. And  
 indeed, from the variety of characters  
 which are necessarily introduced on it, this,  
 as was hinted before, is unavoidable ; but  
 is not the ground of offence acknowledged  
 to be given in the one case, equally strong  
 in the other ?

This is not the only bad consequence  
 that arises from this practice. It is not  
 even the greatest. It deserves to be con-  
 sidered, if this mixt and unnatural junction  
 of characters, which we sometimes behold  
 in the player, and that dexterity with  
 which he can support a character upon the  
 stage, to which we know he can have no

§ Dr. Gregory's Comparative View, &c. Edit. 4. p. 160.

pretensions in life, has not a tendency, by a deceitful association of ideas, to lead us to suspect such an unnatural union in real life, where there may be no just ground for it; injuriously to conclude that many are but such actors upon the stage of life, as those we behold upon the theatre, and that they owe all the brilliancy of their character, not to any real merit they are possessed of, but to the drapery of outward ornaments, and the masterly skill with which they act their respective parts. Upon this principle is it not, that some have entertained a suspicion of the virtue of the best of women, because perhaps they have found some of a prostitute character under the guise of modesty? And should this circumstance, unavoidable in the drama, be found to lead, whether by a just or wrong train and association of ideas, to such a jealousy and suspicion of characters in real life, the consequences to society are too obvious to escape any, and too shocking to be thought on without horror.

These

These are not the only improprieties which appear in the conduct of the modern stage. What think you of these *Interludes*, or Entertainments of Music, which are introduced between the several acts of the play, while the scenes and decorations of the stage are shifting, and the actors change their dresses? In this practice there might have been a propriety, when, in the early age of tragedy, it was no more than a Hymn sung in honour of *Bacchus*, and had not become dramatic by the introduction of several actors. *Then* the length of the song, and the fatigue that must necessarily have attended it, made certain recitations highly expedient for the relief of the singer. But *now* it may be questioned if such Interludes are of any advantage; nay if they have not a tendency to counteract the very design which the play is intended to promote. If any are permitted, they should be only such as are connected with, or related to the leading parts of the drama, and yet (to use the words of the last cited writer) “we may see the  
“ want

“ want of public taste in the music per-  
 “ formed between the acts in tragedy,  
 “ where the tone of passion is often broke  
 “ in upon and destroyed by airy and im-  
 “ pertinent music §.”

This method taken to dissipate the spirits, which it is the design of tragedy to collect and compose, brings to my remembrance another glaring impropriety, and that is the manner of finishing the whole, by an Epilogue or Farce, the tendency of which is commonly to wear off any serious impressions, which the former exhibition might have made upon the audience, and throw back their spirits into a state of dissipation, as that which is best disposed to relish such entertainments. Such an Epilogue is but too common upon the English stage. Considered as the conclusion of an entertainment *professedly* of the moral and serious kind, it is in a very just and poignant burlesque, compared by an admi-

§ Dr. Gregory's Comp. View, p. 160.

rable writer of our own country ||, to a *Jig* after a sermon, as if it was necessary to send the people merry home, and they were in danger from remaining, but for ever so short a time, in a mood any way grave and sedate.

I am sorry to add, that many of these Epilogues or Farces are in their structure calculated to do more than dissipate, even to corrupt the mind, by that torrent of obscene wit and *double entendre* which is thrown out upon these occasions. And what is a sad presumption that our manners and taste are in no small degree already corrupted, notwithstanding our boasted improvement and refinement in both, do we not find that which in a private circle, would be called rude and barbarous rufficity, not only tolerated on the stage, but witnessed without any marks of disapprobation, very often with signs of seeming pleasure?

|| Spectator.

The



The modest Fan is lifted up no more,  
And Virgins smile at what they blush'd before.

POPE'S Essay on Criticism.

How unlike this to the Athenian audience, who, upon the first mention of something obscene upon their stage, all rose up and left the actors to infer their disgust, by their retiring from the theatre? And what pity is it, that we who pretend to vye with them in true politeness, and in refinement and delicacy of taste, should in this instance at least, fall so far short of them?

“ But it may be said, what if the justness  
“ of all these remarks should be admitted,  
“ they do not strike against the institution of  
“ the stage, but the bad regulation, or if you  
“ will, the corruption of it? Under proper  
“ management, there is nothing to hinder  
“ it's usefulness, as a mean of promoting our  
“ moral improvement and becoming highly  
“ serviceable to the cause of virtue.” Very  
true. But where have we ever heard of  
a stage thus regulated? Neither is it a  
VOL. I. L thing



thing we are encouraged to look for. The very nature of the entertainment forbids so much as the hopes of it. The profit of the actors and undertakers depends upon the attendance of a proper audience; and while this is voluntary and not constrained, it is evident, they will insist upon having the entertainment suited to their taste; and those who have the direction, and are to reap the profits, will be ready to gratify it. Thus the Theatre, in place of giving law to the public, receives it from them; and a reformation in the structure of our plays, and the management of the theatre, if ever it is to be expected, must, in place of being the *Cause*, become the *Effect* of a reformation in those who attend it.

- . Besides these particular effects of the Theatre, some of which relate to the pieces represented, some to the players, and some to the regulations of the stage; there are others which cannot so properly be said to arise from any of these, as from the entertainment in general, which point it  
out

out as a mean very unfit for promoting moral improvement.

Not to insist, that from the very nature of it, it is not calculated for extensive usefulness, the number of actors, and the expensive apparatus and machinery that is requisite, necessarily circumscribing it; has it not a tendency to discourage a taste for simple and natural pleasures; to cherish an impatience of home; a passion for fauntering; a neglect of the duties of private and domestic life; idleness, luxury, extravagance, dissipation of spirit, and a thousand other nameless evils || ?

In short, if we consult the opinion of the more sober and thinking part of mankind upon the subject of the stage, in the several periods of its existence, or observe the effects produced by it, we can, from

|| See Rousseau's Epistle to Mr. D'Alembert, concerning the propriety of establishing a Playhouse at Geneva.

neither entertain a very high opinion of it's importance to the interests of virtue.

Plato was so sensible of the danger that might arise from an improper management of the stage, or a promiscuous admission of the several pieces which might be intended for it, that he was either for banishing it altogether from his republic, or subjecting all the entertainments of this kind to a severe examination of proper judges, before they could be licensed for action\*. A very proper hint this to be attended to, where such exhibitions have the sanction of government, but perhaps not so much regarded as it ought.

Epietetus ||, who, though not a man of the world in the modern sense of the phrase, will be owned by all, who have read his writings with attention, to have been well acquainted with human nature, gives it as

\* Plato de Legib. Lib. 7.

|| Epietot. Enchirid. cap. 49.

his opinion, that there is no great advantage to be got by a frequent attendance on the stage, yea seems to insinuate, that we are in no small danger from it, if we are not at the proper pains to moderate our passion for it, and thereby prevent our being hurried into these excesses of conduct to which it would otherwise lead us.

At Athens, where the stage was first erected, so great did the corruption of it become very early, that we find it condemned by public authority. And among the Romans, though it seems to have had the sanction of government, yet so sensible were they of the dangers that might arise from a growing passion for it in the people, that it was at first introduced under severe restrictions §. Pompey was the first who established a permanent Theatre, and we find him severely censured for it. And even in some of the more degenerate periods of their common-wealth, it was far

§ Valer. Maxim. Lib. ii. cap. iv.

from meeting with general approbation. Nay, as late as the fourth Consulship of Nero, with Cornelius Cossus, it was looked on by the the less dissipated part of the Citizens, as a most unhappy but too successful mean of corrupting the ancient and venerable usages of their own Country, by introducing those of foreign states among them; and of contributing greatly to sloth, effeminate pleasures, and in short, to a shameful dissolution of manners ||.

Nor was the opinion of danger from the stage peculiar to antient times. Some of the best judges among the moderns have declared their apprehensions of it. “ All  
 “ great diversions (says M. de Rochefou-  
 “ cault) are dangerous to a Christian. But  
 “ of all that have been invented, there is  
 “ none we have so much reason to fear as  
 “ Plays. The passions are there so natu-  
 “ rally and artfully delineated, that they  
 “ raise and imprint them in our heart,

|| Tacit. Annal. Lib. xiv.

“ especially

“ especially that of love, and principally  
 “ when it is represented as chaste and ho-  
 “ nest; for the more innocent it appears  
 “ to innocent souls, the more capable they  
 “ are of being affected with it\* .” And  
 even our own government seems so sensible  
 of the danger that may arise from too great  
 an indulgence of such entertainments, that  
 they seldom chuse to encourage them,  
 in places of Commerce, or the Seats of  
 Learning: And any encouragement they  
 have given, is rather in a political, than  
 in any other view.

In this respect, like the public shews  
 among the Greeks and Romans, they may  
 be tolerated to afford entertainment to  
 those whose time hangs heavy upon them;  
 to divert those of a pragmatic, plodding,  
 intriguing turn, from disturbing the state;  
 and to dissipate that excess of wealth among  
 the industrious poor, which would otherwise

\* M. Rollin's Belles Lettres, Vol. IV. p. 341.

remain an useless heap in the possession of the rich and opulent. With such views as these only can they expect the countenance of a well regulated Government.

In the above strictures upon the stage, the Author has ventured to differ from some, equally approved for the goodness of their taste, and of their manners: Such he will always esteem. It is with pain he is obliged to differ from them: But if he cannot convince, he is, at least, happy to think he cannot offend persons of this character. The stage has afforded subject for many angry disputes. Both the patrons and adversaries of it, have perhaps with too much warmth, delivered their respective sentiments concerning it. Such heat of temper can be of service to no cause, and very often prejudices even the best. Sensible of this, the Author has studiously avoided it, upon this and the other subjects which have come under his consideration in these sheets. He has endeavoured to plead the cause he has espoused the best he can ;  
and



and persuaded that this may be done with all the force of argument, without being obliged to any of the illiberal arts of railery and bad manners, he has with equal attention studied the one, and guarded against the other :---And will reckon himself happy if the candid public shall be of opinion that he has done so.

## S E C T I O N V.

*Of the Subserviency of modern Romance to the Interests of Virtue.*

**A**S there are but comparatively few, whose situation and circumstances in life will allow them the entertainment, or if you will, the instruction of the stage, another method of conveying both has been devised, less severe than Philosophy, seemingly more serious than Poetry, and aiming at all the advantages of the stage, excepting

excepting that which arises from an actual exhibition of the Drama, I mean *Romance*.

It would be needless to trouble the reader with a particular account of the origin of this species of writing; or to trace its progress through the several countries it has passed in its way to our's; or to take notice of the several forms in which it has appeared, and the improvements it has received. Let us take it as we find it at present in our country, and consider how far it is calculated to serve the cause of Religion and virtue.

This mode of writing is, among many in the present age, in the greatest vogue. Hence those swarms of Romances and Novels, which every day issue from the press, meet with such a favourable reception from the public, and have so many admirers. However, I hope they will bear with me a little, while, in the execution of my plan, I take the liberty to offer a few strictures  
upon

upon this mode of entertainment and instruction, and examine the pretensions it makes to merit in these respects.

It is not denied but this species of writing might be made not only innocent and agreeable, but also highly useful, and conducive to many excellent and noble purposes. It can as little be denied, that among the writings of this kind which our own country has produced, there are some which discover an uncommon compass of invention, knowledge of human nature, sprightliness of fancy, correctness of judgment, elegance in the manner, taste in the structure, and neatness in the dress of them; and in which the principal characters are through the whole admirably supported, and every feature seems drawn from the life.

These works of fancy and imagination, as they are addressed, so they seem particularly suited, to the gay and lively. To such, if formed upon a proper plan, they  
might

might read lectures upon Morality, which they would not perhaps have patience to hear delivered from the pulpit, or in a more grave and serious tone. But is there no danger even to such, from too great an indulgence of taste for compositions of this class? They are people of this cast of mind who generally bestow most time upon them; and I own that, if their life must be spent in amusement, it is humane and benevolent in those who can, to provide that amusement for them which is most innocent. And good it were, that *this* was always so. But is it not, alas! too often the contrary? Framed to interest some of the most soft and tender passions, do not many of our romances serve to inflame them, by the scenes through which they lead them, and so do they not often become the pleasing vehicle of a dangerous poison? And perhaps it deserves to be considered, if the abundance of such writings is not one of those tainted sources, from which proceed, in a great measure, not only the corruption of the taste, but also  
of

of the manners, of the present age, and that spirit of intrigue, licentiousness, and dissipation, which must be observed by all, and is justly lamented by many. At least, if we may judge of their merit from a long observation of their effects, we shall have no great reason to extol it.

It is true, writings of this nature have encouraged a taste for reading, beyond what obtained in former time; but a reading, for the most part with no other view but for entertainment and amusement, and the pleasure they give, by exciting and gratifying curiosity; the one, from the intricacy of the story, and the other, from the variety of anecdotes with which it abounds and is diversified. But may it not be observed, which is more than a counterbalance to any advantage that can result from reading of this nature, that in proportion as the taste for it increases, it is for every other more grave species of composition diminished, and that to such a degree among the polite and elegant, or those  
 who

who affect to be called *Men of taste*, that they even appear nauseated at the most important and interesting truths, if they shall appear but in a plain and simple, and not in a gaudy and tinsel dress.

What! is Religion, is Virtue degenerated into a mere sound to please a delicate ear? Has Virtue no charms to recommend herself, independent of those glittering ornaments in which some delight to exhibit her to the view of others? Never does she appear more lovely than in her native simplicity. All borrowed ornaments serve rather to conceal, than set off her beauty to advantage. And yet, by being accustomed to behold her, decked out in all the finery in which the most inventive imagination can dress her, they come at length to look upon her with indifference where this is wanting. When she speaks to them without any parade, they are apt to turn a deaf ear to her. What! must he that tells me my house is on fire, or would save me from falling over a precipice, make a genteel

teel harangue to secure my attention, and awaken my regard for my own safety? Nothing can be more absurd than the very supposition. Not that I would condemn attention to the propriety and purity of diction, in performances of a grave and interesting nature. Far otherwise. Perhaps this is too little studied. But at the same time, will it not be owned that this may be carried too far? If at any period, what is called taste and fine composition, comes, even where the cause of real goodness is concerned, to be more relished by a certain class of people, than religious feeling and sentiment, it is full time to check the growing evil.

The manner of romance-writing, besides the inconveniencies already noticed, is attended with others, which go a great way to defeat the salutary purposes proposed by it.

In delineating the characters of their heroes or heroines, the writers of romance  
are



are like painters, who, though they own that *Nature* is the rule they are to follow, in forming their pictures of beauty, contend that *Art* has the privilege of perfecting them.

It is reported of *Zcuxis*, an ancient painter, that being employed by the inhabitants of *Crotona*, a city of *Calabria*, to make for their Temple of *Juno*, a female figure, he desired the liberty of seeing their handsomest virgins; and that out of these he chose five, from whose several excellencies he formed a most perfect figure in features, shape, and colouring, and called it *Helena*.

Like him, the authors of many of our romances, to form their hero or heroine, or their principal characters, borrow features from one, proportion from another, complexion from a third, and thus form a Phœnix, as much fabulous among the human, as among the winged kind; a creature, only of a lively fancy, not to be met  
with

with in real life, and indeed no where but in such romantic descriptions. Such a picture may admit of an apology in painters. In drawing the picture of *Beauty*, as they can find no original in any one person, from whom they can take it, must they not therefore form it from an assemblage of those features they can find and think best? If, according to the theology of ancient times, they are to form a picture of any of the gods or goddesses, it is but natural to reunite in the idea they form of them, as in their centre, all that beauty and perfection which are to be found scattered among their works, and thus to give their pictures all the heightening they can receive from the finest fancy, the nicest hand, and the most delicate pencil. But there can be no such excuse for the writers of romance. Their business is so to paint Virtue, that it may seem to be taken from real life, and so be the more easily copied back into it again. Whereas, by enlarging the proportions beyond what is human, this effect is in a great measure prevented.

The Reader considers the picture set before him, as an object rather to be gazed upon with admiration, than with the least hopes of an approximation to it, or a tolerable resemblance of it. Executed on this plan, such performances may please and dazzle the imagination at first sight, but will never fail to disgust a true taste upon a deliberate review.

But indeed it must be owned, that the greatest part of this species of writing does not fall under this censure. More are to be found whose fault lies in representing mankind too much as they really are, in dignifying vice with the venerable name of some virtue; in decking her with a borrowed but gaudy plumage, and thereby captivating the heart of the unwary and unguarded.

But were the features, proportions, and colouring of the pictures which are drawn, all such as might be found in real life, more is necessary to please and instruct, by an  
exhi-

exhibition of them. There must appear nothing unnatural in the manner in which they are brought into public view, or in other words (to drop the metaphor) a strict regard must be had to the manner in which the plot is laid and carried on, to the scenes with which it is diversified; and every transgression against the rules of character, time, or place, must be carefully avoided. For example, to introduce the grave Cato, prattling away in the language of a coxcomb---to represent a venerable Senator, in the dress of a Harlequin---Alexander the Great carrying on the siege of Tyre with a formidable train of artillery, and laying the town in ruins by a furious bombardment,---or the murder of Cæsar in a modern drawing-room, must, all at once, appear very gross improprieties, and by the disgust they would excite, defeat the design intended by such exhibitions. The junction of circumstances in any of these cases must appear so unnatural, as to destroy the very appearance of verisimilitude or probability. And yet, to keep up the

attention of the Reader, through a long series of events, and interest him in the issue of them, the fable in romance, as well as the dramatic writings of the stage, must be conducted so as to delude us into at least a temporary conviction of reality. To excite in us an ambition of profiting from the several parts of it, there must appear nothing unnatural or disproportioned; all must seem probable. But will the most enthusiastic admirers of this species of writing alledge, that a strict regard to these, and such other rules of propriety, is constantly observed? They will not. Some pieces indeed it must be owned there are, in which they are observed with the most exact delicacy. But there are many more in which it is otherwise. To mention only one instance, of the many which might be pitched on, *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*. This I single out, because it first occurs to me, not because the most culpable.

The

The general intention of the performance seems to be good, and it has no small share of merit in many parts of the execution. It contains an excellent burlesque upon the peculiarities of some characters which are introduced into it, such as those of the Sea Captain, the Lawyer, the Practitioner in Midwifery and Surgery, and the Country Justice. These, so far as he has occasion to touch them, are drawn with a very nice pencil, and in very natural colours.

But does it not deserve to be remarked as a glaring impropriety in laying the plot, that he introduces a Knight Errant as the hero of his piece, though all the scenes and adventures, through which he passes, refer to the present times?

It is acknowledged that the first institution of chivalry had something very noble for the object of it. Valour, generosity, and a high sense of honour were the peculiar virtues of it. It was admirably suited

to those feudal ages, in which it took its rise, was highly useful to encourage and improve that taste for arms, which in those times was so much valued, and necessary to repress the evils of various kinds, which arose from the confusion and violence of those rude ages. But still after all, when judged of coolly, it must be owned to have had something romantic in it, as it did, in a manner, wrest the sword of Justice out of the hand of the magistrate, and put it into the hand of every one, whose own ambition might make him aspire to this honour, or on whom the humour and caprice of another Knight might bestow it. But whatever might be pleaded for the institution of this order, and the honours which were paid to it in those ages of but comparatively little civilization, there can be no reason for continuing either in this, and therefore where can be the propriety of representing the hero of this romance in this antiquated character, which, in place of commanding respect



respect, is only calculated to excite contempt?

Several things in the character and conduct of this hero must be allowed to be praise-worthy, and as such are held up to the view of the Reader, that he might profit by them. But, besides that from the character in which he appears, it is all at once discerned to be only a fictitious one, it is submitted to the judgment of the Reader how far it is proper for imitation, because through the whole there appears such a strange mixture of perfection and foible, a series of adventures so dissimilar to those which are relished at present, that they cannot fail to excite a mean idea of the character in general; yea and beget a suspicion of insanity in the person who supports it.

To introduce our hero, in the course of his wild adventures, into every fray he hears of, though always with a view to support the injured; to engage him in the

elections for Members of Parliament, with a design to prevent the unhappy effects of venality and corruption, though at the same time he had no other right to meddle in those scenes of politics, but what the fancied privileges of his order gave him: To represent him in this manner, is to allow him virtue, courage, generosity, humanity, but to deny him that judgment and prudence, which are necessary to render any character respectable, or qualities the most amiable that can be imagined, extensively useful. Some episodes there are in this piece not unentertaining, but I might at the same time observe, that some of them have such a distant relation to the main design of it, that they ought to have been altogether omitted, or to have been shorter. But as my design does not lead me to offer a critique upon the whole of this performance, but only to illustrate some of the preceding observations, by a few strictures upon it, those I have made may suffice for that purpose.

When

When the Reader is pleas'd to review with attention what has been offer'd upon the subject of this Section, he will cease to wonder that so few of the pieces, written in the style of romance, should please those of a just and improved taste. Dressed up by the hand of Fancy, and set off with every tinsel ornament it can collect, they may attract the attention and excite the admiration of many, of whom it may be said, that

Some to *Concitt* alone their taste confine ;  
 And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line ;  
 Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit ;  
 One glaring chaos, and wild heap of wit.—  
 Poets, like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace  
 The naked nature and the living grace,  
 With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,  
 And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
 Others for *Language* all their care express,  
 And value books, as women men for dress :  
 Their praise is still,—The style is excellent :  
 The sense, they humbly take upon content.

POPE'S Essay on Criticism.

For

For such reasons as these they may please the superficial reader for a few moments, but as the hold they take off the more noble and sympathetic passions is but slight, the spell is soon broken by which they raised admiration. A little reflection rouses the enchanted person out of his pleasing dream, brings him to his senses again, and annihilates any good impressions it might have made upon him.

While the *many* thus gaze and wonder at the imagined beauties and perfections of those fashionable instructors,—the serious, thinking, judicious *few*, cannot help viewing their real blemishes and faults with a just, though perhaps sometimes silent contempt and displeasure.

If authorities were necessary to give weight to the preceding observations on Romance, these are not wanting. I shall satisfy myself, and I hope the Reader too, by mentioning only a few. Their opinion on this subject will be allowed to be decisive,

five, because the opinion of those who have given the most unquestionable proofs, —of their attention to human nature, in their observations upon it, and—of the delicacy of their taste in the manner in which they have communicated them to the public. Take their opinion in their own words. We should do it injustice by attempting to express it in any other.

“ When entertainment is made the vehicle of instruction (says Dr. Fordyce) nothing surely can be more harmless, agreeable, or useful. To prohibit young minds the perusal of any writings where Wisdom addresses the affections in the language of imagination, may be sometimes well meant, but must be always injudicious. Some such writings undoubtedly there are; the offspring of real genius, enlightened by knowledge of the world, and prompted, it is to be hoped, by zeal for the improvement of youth. Amongst the few of this kind which I have seen, I cannot but look on  
those

“ those of Mr. Richardson as well intitled  
 “ to the first rank ; an author, of whom  
 “ an indisputable judge has, with equal  
 “ truth and energy, pronounced, “ that he  
 “ taught the passions to move at the com-  
 “ mand of reason.” An author, I will  
 “ venture to add, to whom your sex are  
 “ under singular obligations for his uncom-  
 “ mon attention to their interests ; but par-  
 “ ticularly for presenting, in a character sus-  
 “ tained throughout with inexpressible pa-  
 “ thos and delicacy, the most exalted stan-  
 “ dard of female excellence that was ever  
 “ held up to their imitation. I would be  
 “ understood to except that part of Cla-  
 “ rissa’s conduct, which the author meant  
 “ to exhibit as exceptionable. Setting this  
 “ aside, we find in her character a beauty,  
 “ a sweetness, an artlessness—what shall I  
 “ say more ? a sanctity of sentiment and  
 “ manner, which I own for my part I have  
 “ never seen equalled in any book of that  
 “ sort : yet such, at the same time, as ap-  
 “ pears

“ pears no way impracticable for any wo-  
 “ man who is ambitious of excelling.

“ Beside the beautiful productions of  
 “ that incomparable pen, there seem to me  
 “ to be very few, in the style of novel, that  
 “ you can read with safety, and yet fewer  
 “ that you can read with advantage. What  
 “ shall we say of certain books, which we  
 “ are assured (for we have not read them)  
 “ are in their own nature so shameful, in  
 “ their tendency so pestiferous, and contain  
 “ such rank treason against the royalty of  
 “ virtue, such horrible violation of all de-  
 “ corum, that she who can bear to peruse  
 “ them, must in her soul be a prostitute,  
 “ let her reputation in life be what it will.  
 “ But can it be true, say ye chaste stars,  
 “ that with innumerable eyes inspect the  
 “ midnight behaviour of mortals; can it be  
 “ true, that any young woman, pretending  
 “ to decency, should endure for a moment  
 “ to look on this infernal brood of futility  
 “ and lewdness ?

“ Nor



“ Nor do I condemn these writings only,  
 “ that with an effrontery which defies the  
 “ laws of God and men, carry on their  
 “ forehead the mark of the beast. We  
 “ consider the general run of novels as ut-  
 “ terly unfit for you. Instruction they  
 “ convey none. They paint scenes of plea-  
 “ sure and passion, altogether improper for  
 “ you to behold, even with the mind’s eye.  
 “ Their descriptions are often loose and lu-  
 “ scious in a high degree ; their representa-  
 “ tions of love between the sexes are almost  
 “ universally overstrained. All is dotage or  
 “ despair ; or else ranting, swelling into  
 “ burlesque. In short, the majority of their  
 “ lovers are either mere lunatics or mock-  
 “ heroes. A sweet sensibility, a charming  
 “ tenderness, a delightful anguish, exalted  
 “ generosity, heroic worth, and refinement  
 “ of thought, how seldom are these best  
 “ ingredients of virtuous love mixt with  
 “ any judgment and care in the composition  
 “ of their principal characters §.”

§ Dr. Fordyce’s Sermon to Young Women. Sermon. iv.

Upon

Upon an opinion so explicit, and from so able a judge, I might rest the merit of this species of writing, so far as it is to be determined, or can be effected, by authority; but lest this opinion might lose of it's force with any, from a suspicion of it's being the effect of an illiberality of sentiment in the order to which he belongs, upon subjects of this nature, I beg leave to mention the opinion of another, against whom there can be no suspicion of this kind, either from his profession or character. It is equally express, clear, and in point, as the other. His words are “ notwithstanding the ridiculous  
 “ extravagance of the old romance in many  
 “ particulars, it seems calculated to produce  
 “ more favourable effects on the morals of  
 “ mankind, than our modern novels. If  
 “ the former did not represent men as they  
 “ really are, it represented them better; it's  
 “ Heroes were patterns of courage, generosity, truth, humanity and the most exalted virtues. It's Heroines were distinguished for modesty, delicacy, and the utmost dignity of manners. The latter  
 “ represent

“ represent mankind too much what they  
 “ are, paint such scenes of pleasure and vice  
 “ as are unworthy to see the light; and thus  
 “ in a manner hackney youth in the ways  
 “ of wickedness, before they are well en-  
 “ tered into the world; expose the fair sex  
 “ in the most wanton and shameless man-  
 “ ner to the eyes of the world, by strip-  
 “ ping them of that modest reserve which  
 “ is the foundation of grace and dignity,  
 “ the veil with which nature intended to  
 “ protect them from too familiar an eye, in  
 “ order to be at once the greatest incite-  
 “ ment to love, and the greatest security  
 “ to virtue. In short, the one may mis-  
 “ lead the imagination, the other has a  
 “ tendency to enflame the passions and cor-  
 “ rupt the heart ||.”

To conclude: I may venture to affirm that,  
 favourable as the reception is which Ro-  
 mances and Novels meet with from us, books  
 written upon the same plan, and of the same  
 tendency, would have given offence to some  
 of

|| Dr. Gregory's Comp. View, &c. Edit. 4. p. 77.

of those ancient states, which were most celebrated for a wise policy:

From Lacedemon, the works of the celebrated Poet Archilochus were excluded, because, however calculated to please, they were still more calculated to corrupt the heart and debauch the manners of the unsuspecting and unwary youth\*. How come books of the same or a similar turn to be in such high esteem among us, and to be read perhaps more than any others? Their Admirers will, no doubt, represent the encouragement given them, as an evidence of a great improvement in our taste and manners. But I suspect it is, on the contrary, a shrewd presumption of a sad corruption in both. And if this be the case, it is at least high time the public should attend to this growing evil, and attempt the cure of it. At Lacedemon the remedy was at hand, and the application of it easy. The Government could all at once give the necessary check. They needed only to pro-

\* Valer. Maxim. Lib. vi. cap. 3.

hibit the publication of such performances by severe penal laws enacted for this purpose. But I am persuaded no friend of religion, liberty, or learning would ever wish to see *our* government adopt such a measure. It would be incompatible with the true interests of any of them. In a state, such as our's, nothing should be more carefully avoided than the least infringement of the liberty of the press. This, it is true, has in many instances been scandalously abused, but still it must be owned, that it is even better to tolerate these abuses, than lay that liberty from whence they proceed, under any great restriction. This would draw after it consequences incomparably more hurtful than the other. But though it might not be proper for *Government* to interfere, there can be no good reason why the *Public* should not. It is to the public these writings are addressed, and therefore those among them who have the interests of virtue at heart, are called upon to attempt the so much needed reformation. It is only in their  
power

power to effect it. Neither is the task so difficult as it may at first sight appear. They need but to expose the improprieties, defects, and faults of such performances, and shew that vice, however artfully disguised, shall meet with no quarter; yea, that every attempt to recommend it, will be considered as an insult upon the public, and then the strain of our novels will be quickly altered to the better. They will not offend against the rules of the strictest virtue and decorum, when their authors find, that by so doing, they should but displease those of the best taste, and thus, by *their* severe but just censure of such performances, lessen the reputation and sale of them, and by these means, the profits expected from them.

## S E C T I O N VI.

*Of the several Kinds of Periodical Writings,  
and their Usefulness for promoting Reli-  
gious Instruction.*

**A** Professed zeal for the interest of religion and that of the public, which is inseparably connected with it, has engaged others to stand forth in their service, and endeavour to promote it by a great variety of Periodical Performances, under the well known names of,—*The Spectator, The Guardian, The Rambler, The Monitor, &c.*

Their zeal in this service deserves praise; and any aid offered to the interests of virtue ought to be gratefully acknowledged and cheerfully accepted, from whatever quarter it comes.



It would be a species of detraction highly culpable not to acknowledge the merit of these performances. Considered in those views with which they were written, it is very great, and they may be at once highly entertaining and useful. But it is evident, their design is to consider Man more as a member of Civil, than of Religious Society; more as a citizen of this world than a candidate for the happiness of another; and therefore their views are too narrow and contracted to answer the purposes of an extensive and religious instruction. It is true, there are some of their papers of the religious cast, and which seem to consider Man in his connexion both with this and the invisible world. These however, it must be owned, are but comparatively few, and thus at best, can be considered as only subsidiary to some other method of religious instruction, and formed on a more extensive plan.

It may perhaps be expected, that before I finish the first part of my design in this

undertaking, I should consider our different moral systems, and the several sorts of polemical writings upon the subject of religion, as they are all intended to be made somehow conducive to the end of public Instruction. Considered in this point of view, no doubt they deserve the attention of those who are capable of understanding them, and making the proper use of them; but as a sufficient apology for not comprehending the consideration of these in my plan, it needs only be observed, that but few are capable of judging of them; that they are adapted only to those who have made a considerable progress in letters, and have had their minds improved by science; and therefore can never be a proper conveyance of religious instruction to any extensive degree, because the bulk of mankind, who stand most in need of it, are least capable of being benefited by them.

Thus I have pointed out a few of the defects which attend some of the most remarkable

markable methods of moral and religious Instruction which have been practised.

## S E C T I O N VII.

*Of Preaching, and the general Topicks with which the Gospel furnishes the Christian Divine, for promoting the Improvement and Entertainment of his Hearers.*

**I**F none of the methods already considered, are sufficient for promoting the purposes of religious instruction, must we give up all thoughts of it? Is there no other expedient to be found, more promising of success? Yes; and *preaching*, notwithstanding all the fashionable contempt that is poured upon it in this licentious and dissipated age, is, I think, this expedient.

I know the propriety of this method of Instruction will be warmly controverted by

those who are unwilling to submit to it; and it is but reasonable they should have a fair hearing. The cause is important. All are concerned in the issue of it. Let it be tried at the bar of reason, and let us submit to the decision of this impartial judge.

Conscious of the goodness of the cause, I humbly offer myself as an advocate for it; and in favour of this method of instruction I beg leave to plead,

1. The authority and example of our Lord; and if these are found to be on it's side, they afford an argument, the force of which should be irresistible, with, at least, all his votaries; and it is only with such we would reason and expostulate the matter.

Need they be informed, that the first character in which our Lord appeared on the stage of public life, was that of a preacher of righteousness? That in this character,  
he

he went about from place to place, as opportunities of usefulness offered themselves, preaching to his countrymen the doctrines of the kingdom of God; and by his heavenly discourses, endeavouring at once to instruct them in the nature, and gain them to the love and practice of virtue?

And as a regard to the interests of mankind made his return to the invisible world necessary, after the stay of a few years in this, did he not institute a standing Ministry for carrying on the religious instruction of mankind, through the successive ages of his Church, promising to be with them, even to the end of the world? That those who were immediately to succeed him, in carrying on this noble design, might be the better qualified for a respectable and successful discharge of their office, did he not take them to be the immediate attendants on his person and the witnesses of his conduct; and thus give them the happy opportunities of learning from his instructions and example, both in public and in private life?

life? Now what are we led to conclude from the practice of our Lord himself, the commission he gave to his Apostles, and their practice in consequence of it; if it be not the importance and usefulness of this method of instruction? Had it not been proper for attaining the end proposed by it, we may safely affirm it would never have had the honour of being an institution of his.

I know that some of the enemies of our Religion attempted very early to turn it into ridicule, and branded it with the epithet of *Foolishness*. But it lost nothing in point of honour, by these and such like rude attacks upon it. They happily served, on the contrary, to minister the occasion of some of the most noble and spirited defences of it. Thus we find one of it's first Ministers, one equally distinguished for his knowledge of antient and polite Literature, as for his attachment to Christianity, boldly challenging the Literati of the several religious professions, to instance  
any

any mode of religious instruction, that could so much as stand a comparison with this. “ Where (says he) is the Wise? where is “ the Scribe? where is the Disputer of this “ world? Hath not God made foolish the “ wisdom of this world? For after that, “ in the wisdom of God, the world, by “ wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God “ by the *Foolishness of Preaching*, (so he calls it, in just derision of those who would in this manner reproach it) “ to save “ them who believe §.”

If by the *Wise* he understood, as some learned men conjecture, the gentile Philosophers, who affected to be called σοφοί, till Pythagoras introduced the more modest title of φιλοσοφοί: If by the disputer of this world, or as it might be rendered of this age, he meant the gentile natural Philosophers, by way of distinction from the moral, or those Jewish allegorical Doctors, who delighted in intricate questions,

§ 1 Cor. i. 20, 21.

which



which gendered strife, evil surmifings, &c. (1 Tim. vi. 3.) there is no small beauty in the challenge which he gives them all.

He singles out the most celebrated Literati, both among the Jews and Gentiles, and is not afraid to signify the mean opinion he had of all their instructions, and the manner of conveying them, compared with that of the Gospel. He submits the decision to their own judgment, and fairly defies them to give it against the Gospel, and support their opinion with proper argument.

Considering the literary character of our Apostle, this could not be considered as a vain and arrogant boast, but a noble and spirited testimony in favour of that religion which he once zealously opposed, but now as zealously preached.

Nor have the friends of Christianity only declared in favour of the propriety  
of

of this method of instruction. Their attachment to it, might be suspected to be the consequence of it's deriving it's institution from the Founder of their religion. There were some of it's most virulent enemies who approved of the wisdom of this method. And here *Julian* the Roman Emperor, deserves to be mentioned as one who had so high an opinion of this manner, that had he lived but a little longer he was to have established a similar method for diffusing and establishing the Gentile religion through the several provinces of the Empire\*. And indeed his opinion, abstracting from what it derives in this case from his opposition to Christianity, deserves no small regard, on account of the parts and learning, for which all the historians of his life tell us he was distinguished.

\* Of this Dr. Prideaux informs us, from Gregory Nazian. Connect. &c. Vol. I. p. 390.

Nay, the propriety of this method of instruction is supported by an argument of still greater weight, than any which arises from opinion, namely, the many noble triumphs which religion hath, by its means, gained over the ignorance, prejudices, passions and vices of mankind, and the advantages both of a civil and religious nature, which have from thence accrued to them. Of these it might be easy to give a pompous detail from the earliest times. But to look no farther back than our happy Reformation from Popery, how blessed and valuable the effects of it to us, both as Men and as Christians! With it learning revives; the sciences rear up their drooping heads; the thick clouds of ignorance, which once involved our land in common with others, are dispelled; a spirit of free enquiry is encouraged; the fine and liberal arts are patronized; a more generous way of thinking upon every subject is introduced; liberty is restored, and the most valuable interests of mankind secured upon a firmer and more lasting foundation than before.

Who

Who that is acquainted with the history of this period, does not know that these blessings are, in a great measure, derived to us from the honest and bold efforts of our first Reforming Clergy, and the zeal of the people for religious instruction? But for these, we might have remained to this day dupes to the impious policy of Rome, and those who were the abettors of it. Our minds might have been still enslaved to prejudice and error, our bodies to tyranny and despotism, and both to vice, without entertaining a thought, or exerting an endeavour, to shake off either. It is true, a great variety of causes concurred to carry on and compleat our happy Reformation, but it is certain, that, without the help of this mean, they would not so speedily, nor so extensively, have produced their effects §.

§ See Dr. Robertson's Account of the Rise and Progress of the Reformation, in his History of Charles V.

Such

Such as we have now hinted was the influence of Preaching in early times. And if we will but suppose the teachers of religion to be animated with an honest zeal for diffusing the knowledge of it, the most happy effects may be always expected from it.

What excellent opportunities does it afford them, of a more easy and speedy communication of knowledge, than they could possibly have in any other way?

Before the invention of Printing, the trouble and expence of writing Books was so great, that but few could have access to the knowledge contained in them. And even now, tho' the labour and expence of publication are greatly abridged, we can only enjoy the advantage of books under such restrictions, as must greatly obstruct and retard the communication of religious knowledge, and thereby lessen the happy effects of it.

In these circumstances, were the method enjoined by our Lord, and practised by the Ministers of his Religion, through all the intermediate ages of his Church, down to the present, to be laid aside, it would be more easy to guess, than to describe the consequences which might justly be dreaded from it. A return, especially in the lower class, to ignorance, barbarism, and the most abandoned wickedness, is no more than we should have reason to fear. And should it be granted (though by the by I think it is doubtful) that those in the higher stations in life might, from their acquaintance with the other branches of science, escape these evils, yet, is it not highly probable, they would not long remain unaffected by the unhappy consequences of them? In a society of the most corrupted and debauched manners, what could they look for, from which any rational pleasure or improvement might be expected?

These hints, could none other be suggested, might, one should think, not only reconcile all to this method of religious Instruction, but also make them vie with each other in promoting the success of it. But this is not all. Much more may be said in favour of this method of instruction.

Let us look into the Sacred Oracles, from which the great subjects of it are derived, and we shall find that they afford the Preacher abundant materials for the entertainment and improvement of his hearers, if he has but the proper talents for communicating them, and that degree of a well cultivated taste that will enable him to do it in a proper manner.

What subjects can be more deserving of our serious attention than those we are invited to contemplate, whether we consider them with respect to their own excellence, or their importance to us? The kingdoms of Nature, Providence and Grace  
present



present to us all their rich and inexhaustible stores.

Does the contemplative mind find an exquisite pleasure in every new and important discovery in science? Upon this principle does the scholar search the records of the most distant ages, and think his labour abundantly rewarded by the acquisitions he makes to his knowledge? And is there not enough in the Sacred Oracles to gratify the mind which has a turn for critical inquiry, or a relish for the most sublime and useful knowledge?

It is indeed impossible to reflect upon the deep researches of the Astronomer; the curious experiments of the Chymist; the accurate investigations of the Mathematician; the profound and laboured disquisitions of the Philosopher, without being filled with a high degree of admiration and pleasure. But how much better suited to raise the one, and to afford the other, are those subjects which religion presents to us

if contemplated not only with a spirit of Investigation, but of Devotion also? Compared with these, what can be deserving of our attention? Let the Statesman think of Politicks; the Courtier, of Honour; the Soldier, of Victories and Triumphs; the Miser, of Riches; and the Voluptuary, of Pleasure: as for the Christian, he may look down upon these with a noble and generous indifference, if not contempt, because he has objects presented to him incomparably more noble to engage his mind, and direct his pursuits.

If he contemplates the works of Nature around him, what a grandeur, majesty and beauty, appear in each of them; even in those, which taken in comparison with others, may be called the meanest? In them all, what bright strictures are to be seen of exquisite wisdom in the contrivance, of almighty power in the execution, and of the most diffusive goodness in both? Every object he beholds, like a faithful mirror, reflects the glorious Being who made it.

If,

If, from the works themselves, the Christian shall ascend in contemplation to their great Author, and search after the knowledge of his nature and perfections, he is apt, it must be acknowledged, to lose himself in the greatness, or rather the immensity, of the subject; and in his reasonings upon it, to run into error, from the weakness of his finite capacity. But if he looks into that Revelation of the nature, perfections and government of God, with which he is favoured in the Sacred Oracles, what streams of divine light pour in upon his mind?

It is true, his views of God, after all, can be but imperfect in the present state. He cannot by searching find out God, nor know the Almighty to perfection. But amidst all the disadvantages of his present situation, what comfort must it be to him to be assured that the only reason why he cannot *now* know more of this glorious Object, is because it is infinite, and his faculties are not equal to greater discoveries concerning it.

it. But that in a better world, when the clouds, which now hang upon the mind, shall be dispelled, and his capacity enlarged to the utmost extent his nature can admit of, he shall see this glorious Being face to face, i. e. with a degree of evidence, which if not the evidence of sense, shall be something analogous to it, in point of clearness and certainty.

In the Sacred Oracles God is represented in a character the most illustrious that can be imagined; as possessed of every thing that can be called perfection; that can challenge esteem, or command reverence: as a Being not only the first, but the Author of all others; not only the greatest, but, which is the highest recommendation of his character, the best also; the centre of all excellence, and the inexhausted source of happiness to all those orders of creatures who are capable of enjoying it. Here his Majesty appears awful in his commands; his Power terrible in his threatenings; his Condescension gracious in his intreaties; his

his Wisdom consummate in his counsels ;  
 his Bowels tender in his chastisements ;  
 his Kindness encouraging in his promises ;  
 his Love rich, exuberant, diffusive in the  
 whole of his conduct and administration to-  
 wards us.

How lofty and sublime are all the descriptions which the sacred writers give of him ? Inspired with the most venerable sentiments of him themselves, they stretch imagination to it's utmost limits, and ransack all nature for imagery, grand enough to convey them to others ; and after all are forced to confess that such knowledge is too high for mortals, that they cannot attain to it.

What we see every day passing in the world around us, affords us the best reason to conclude, that, as this world is the work of God's hand, so it is the object of his continual and auspicious care. But still that knowledge of his Providence, which can be collected within the narrow

compass of our small experience and of a short life, must be very contracted. But if we look into those Histories of it with which the Sacred Oracles abound, dim and contracted as our views of it must at present be, we shall find reason to admire it, as a most complicated, but at the same time, a most finished scheme : A scheme consisting of a great number, an almost infinity of parts, and yet all uniting, as in a common centre, in the good of the whole. A scheme which bears the brightest strictures of wisdom, power and goodness, and thus tends to inspire the soul with holy wonder ; to sooth it into humble resignation ; to raise it into confidence and hope ; nay, to elevate it into transports of joy and delight ; in short, to tune it, in every circumstance of life, to adoration and praise.

The scene presented to the devout and contemplative mind, is beautifully variegated. When wearied in one tract (if wearied it can be, in the contemplation of  
such

such grand and noble objects) it may turn into another, sure of finding entertainment and improvement in each.

The nature and perfections of God, and the various manner of their exertion in his Providence and Government of the world, are subjects not to be exhausted by the most improved faculties in the greatest length of time. They are sufficient to afford the most pleasant employment to the devout mind.

But if to encrease it's pleasure from variety, we shall, with the angels who encircle the throne of God in their adoring multitudes, humbly endeavour to explore the profound depths of redeeming Love, what new wonders open to our view at the exhibition, during the progress, and in the conclusion of this glorious scene? Here the discerning eye may behold the unfathomable depths of wisdom; the tender bowels of mercy; the warm ardors of love; the awful terrors of justice; the spotless beau-  
ties



ties of holiness ; the stupendous miracles of power ; and the illustrious triumphs of grace ; each acting their part in this glorious plan, and all uniting in the most agreeable harmony to carry it into execution,

These are not the only wonders in this plan which strike the mind. It is impossible to enumerate them all. In every point of light in which it can be viewed it is truly wonderful. Wonderful, in short, whether we consider the dignity of it's author ; the depth of contrivance ; the difficulty of execution ; the excellence of the manner ; the propriety of the means ; the extent of it's object ; or the variety, worth, and duration of it's effects.

While we are considering the Sacred Oracles as a rich and inexhaustible fund of entertainment and instruction, I might shew, that as they give us the justest views of of God, of that Government which he exercises over the world, and of his grace  
to

to his rebellious subjects, so they contain the most perfect rule of virtue, and the most encouraging motives to the practice of it, in the promise of a proper assistance, and the assurance of a most noble and glorious reward. But it is unnecessary to enlarge.

How copious these themes? How excellent the materials, of which the Christian Orator may avail himself? What is there wanting here that can be necessary to engage the attention; to penetrate the soul with a reverence for the Deity and a love to virtue; to fire the imagination; to interest the affections and inflame the devotion of the Christian; to collect our scattered and dissipated thoughts; to calm the irregular workings and agitations of our passions; to work our minds into an habitual seriousness of temper; to promote the improvement of all the virtues of a holy life; to nourish hope; fortify resolution, and encourage trust; to raise the soul to a noble elevation above this world; to give  
an

an enlargement to our views, a greatness to our designs, a dignity to our actions, and a happy direction to the whole movement of our lives : In a word, to form our souls for exercises, the most rational and manly in this world ; and for happiness, the most noble and refined in the next ?

And now, after having observed so much, may I not be bold enough to ask (in the words of an excellent writer) where is there to be found any book but the Bible, “ which  
 “ contains so much to inform, impress and  
 “ delight reflecting minds, laid together in  
 “ a manner so extensively adapted to the  
 “ various turns of understanding, taste and  
 “ temper ; which people of different and  
 “ distant countries, through a long suc-  
 “ cession of ages, have held in so much re-  
 “ verence, and read with so much advan-  
 “ tage ; where it is difficult to determine  
 “ which are most distinguished, ease and  
 “ simplicity, or sublimity and force, but  
 “ where all are so beautifully united ;  
 “ where there is so little to discourage the  
 weakcit

“ weakest spirit, if docile, and so much to  
 “ gratify the strongest, if candid; where  
 “ the fancy and the heart, the intellect  
 “ and the conscience, are applied to by  
 “ turns with such familiarity, and yet such  
 “ majesty; in fine, where the frailties, dis-  
 “ orders, and distresses of human nature are  
 “ all so feelingly laid open, and the reme-  
 “ dies which Heaven has provided so ten-  
 “ derly applied § ?”

By a proper application of the various to-  
 pics with which he is furnished, what  
 might not the Christian Divine do, in the  
 way of entertaining, as well as instructing  
 mankind, those of the best taste not ex-  
 cepted ?

How many have succeeded, in both these  
 respects, in Poetry, History and the Drama,  
 who have had next to infinitely less advan-  
 tages from their subjects ? What think you  
 of *Milton*, and the just applause he has ac-

§ Dr. Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women, Sermon II.

quired

quired by his “ *Paradise Lost* ” ? It is true, the talents of this great Poet were indeed distinguished. Few can equal, can stand a comparison with them. But distinguished as they were, it is a question, if they would have enabled him to shine with such lustre, upon almost any other subject.

The performance possesses a high degree of merit, in point of execution, but it is the dignity of the subject, and the materials with which he was furnished from the sacred Code, which gave such a noble air of grandeur and majesty to the whole. An instructive hint this to the Christian Orator, which, with a variety of other considerations of a vastly higher nature, should animate him with a laudable ambition of excelling in the art which he has undertaken, of setting off all the great truths of religion to the best advantage, that so through the divine blessing, they may have the happiest influence upon the hearts and manners of mankind.

Thus

Thus, some of the most remarkable schemes which have been devised and followed for promoting religious instruction have fallen under our review, and been examined in a variety of lights. It may not now be improper for the reader to pause a little, that from a comparison he may be able to judge of their respective merit, and determine to which the preference is due.

The cause has been pleaded at the bar of Reason. At this, the Author would ever wish to have it heard and examined. In an appeal to this he flatters himself, his readers will readily concur with him.

Like all fair judges let them now pronounce upon the evidence before them, unbiaſſed by the authority of names or opinions. He trusts to their candor; he waits their decision; and it is not without some degree of confidence, that their judgment will coincide with his upon this subject.

The

The Author is no advocate for, no friend to Priestcraft in any point of view. Neither is he for paying any regard to the grave decisions of the clergy, any further than they are supported by Reason and the sacred Volume, from which they profess to have taken them. But if they shall be found agreeable to both, it would be equally unfair to disregard important truths, merely because delivered by them, or to turn *Sceptic* and *Libertine* to avoid the suspicion of being under Priest-influence.

The Author expects from his Readers a conduct more rational and sensible; that they will dare to avow what reason, unbiassed, must approve: And if now their opinion is in favour, not only of the reasonableness, but also the usefulness of Preaching, considered as a mean of religious instruction, the author hopes he will find the less difficulty in carrying their attention along with him, while he takes a cursory view of



## P A R T II.

*Of the several Schemes or Models of Preaching, and the various Alterations and Improvements they have undergone.*

**I**N this, as in every other art, the progress, by which it can arrive at any considerable degree of improvement, must be very slow; and indeed, considering how many are the things which must have an influence upon it, it cannot be otherwise.

It will not be unpleasant, and it may be useful to trace it's several gradations in the periods it has passed through; and that we may be able to do this the more distinctly, we shall digest what observations

we have made under the following sections :

## 'S E C T I O N I.

### *Of the Practice of the Jewish Church.*

OUR Enquiry into the origin of the Practice of Preaching, and the various manner in which it has been carried on, shall begin by looking into the practice of the Jewish Church. From this some light may be derived upon this part of our subject, as that Church was at first constituted by the special appointment, and all along supported under the immediate auspices of God. It is true, there are several things in the constitution of that Church, which, however suited to the genius of the people of Israel, and that early age of the world in which they first obtained, cannot be adopted under a dispensation so different  
from

from theirs as ours is ; but still it is far from being improbable, that from them was borrowed the hint upon which our Practice of Preaching has been founded.

If we look into the history of the Jewish Church, and carry back our views as far as their annals will lead us, we shall find that God consecrated a whole Tribe, or the Descendants of the family of Levi, to the services of Religion ; and that these, according to the different ranks and stations assigned them, were to be assisting in carrying on the offices of it, and instructing the people in what related to it §.

As those of the Sacerdotal order (which was restricted to the descendants of Aaron, a branch of the family of Levi) had the direction of the ritual of religion committed to them, and were appointed to preside in the several parts of it's pompous service,

Numb. iii. 6, &c. Numb. viii. 11, 14, 15, 19. Deut. x. 8. & pass.

this necessarily determined their residence to the neighbourhood of that place (wherever it was) where this was appointed to be performed, and so circumscribed their usefulness, as teachers of religion, to a circle around them; or at most gave them an opportunity of being serviceable to those who lived without it, only at their high and solemn festivals, when there was a general rendezvous, at least of the males, from the several Tribes.

To guard against the inconvenience that might arise from the restricted residence of the Priests, God appointed no less than forty-eight cities for the accommodation of the Levites, whose immediate attendance was not required at the Tabernacle and Altar \*, that so dispersed through the several Tribes, they might be the more extensively useful, in diffusing the knowledge of religion among them †.

\* Josh. xxi.

† Levit. x. 11. Deut. xxxiii. 10.

I know there are some who consider the office of teaching assigned to the Levites, as restricted to the decision of any cases of controversy that might arise concerning the ceremonial of their religion and worship, and think the injunction, Levit. x. 10. decisive upon this point. But whoever attentively considers the context, will easily observe that any injunction there given them, was not so much with respect to their office in general, as a caveat against such an unhallowed conduct as that of Nadab and Abihu, whose crime, we are told, ver. 1. consisted in a presumptuous deviation from the divine instructions, in the manner of their oblation, or, as it is there expressed, in *offering strange fire before the Lord*. And if one may venture a conjecture from the injunction given ver. 9. we should be apt to imagine that the profanation of God's altar, of which Nadab and Abihu were guilty, was the consequence of their having drunk to excess of some intoxicating liquor, and therefore God, ever watchful over the honour of Religion, which is in some

measure connected with the conduct of it's Ministers, gives it in strict charge to Aaron and his family, who were consecrated to the services of it, that they should carefully guard against all incbrating drink, especially when they were about to address themselves to any of the sacred duties of their office, that so they might ever be able to distinguish *betwixt holy and unholy, clean and unclean, and teach the Children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord had spoken unto them.* When the meaning of this place is properly considered, and taken in it's connexion with what goes before and follows after, it must seem strange that any have ever so far mistaken it, as to imagine that their office, in the way of teaching, was solely confined to the cognizance of matters relating either to the forensic or ceremonial Law.

It is indeed evident from many parts of the history of Israel, that there were some of the Levites appointed to act in the character of Judges among them ||, but it

|| 1 Chron. xxiii. 4.      2 Chron. xix. 8.

would

would be most unreasonable from thence to conclude, that they had nothing to do with public teaching or instruction, when there are several places, besides those already referred to, which plainly indicate the contrary: Nay, if we will but consider God, in his administration to this people, under the character of the Founder of their religious, as well as civil polity, we can never imagine he would have restricted any of the ministers of his religion, from teaching his subjects the duties of a moral nature, since, in the regard paid to these (or, in other words, in *Holiness to the Lord*) consisted the glory of his kingdom, as well as the happiness of his subjects, and to promote these was the ultimate end of all his laws.

Important as the original design of the institution of this order was, it is certain that a sad degeneracy soon crept in among them; and that, forgetting the dignity of



their character, and the importance of their office, they became inattentive to both.

This very probably it was, which suggested to Samuel the hint of instituting schools or colleges (for before his time we do not hear of any) for the religious instruction of those, who might be afterwards employed in the immediate service of the altar, or in executing any commissions from God to his people, in the character of Prophets: Hence they were afterwards called, *The Schools of the Prophets*, and continued in considerable reputation, as it is generally thought, till about the time of Malachi (when prophecy ceased) not only as nurseries for such as were afterwards to be employed in the service of Religion, but also as seminaries for promoting the knowledge of it: But as to the manner in which they did so, we can say little, as we have but very few, and these dark and imperfect hints concerning it.

In the first ages of the Jewish commonwealth, any writings of the religious kind which were then extant among them, were probably no more than those of Moses, which contained, as it were, the platform of their religion: And considering their unsettled situation in the wilderness, and the various cares which would necessarily engage their attention after their settlement in Canaan, it is probable, they were but comparatively few of that numerous people, who could read or understand the sacred Volume, small as it then was.

The task of instructing them in the knowledge of religion, seems to have belonged, as was hinted before, to those of the Aaronic and Levitical family, and such as were bred in the sacred College of the Prophets,

The knowledge of religion, it is probable, they would endeavour to promote, not only by verbal instructions, but also,  
according

according to the simplicity of those early times, by a symbolical and emblematical service, which, by having a more just and determined meaning affixed to it, than there was under a Pagan Hierarchy, would answer both these valuable purposes: Would by gratifying that taste for external pomp and parade which they had contracted by their long stay in Egypt, remove every plausible pretence for a return to their Idolatry; and give those impressions of religion which they conveyed, a more powerful influence, than they could have otherwise had, in that early and rude age of the world, when the minds of mankind were uncultivated by knowledge, and their feelings were none of the most delicate.

In the succeeding periods of their Church and Commonwealth, together with the emblematical services of religion, their instruction seems to have been carried on by the discourses of their Prophets; but these, in place of being stated, were only occasional teachers, raised up by God, as  
the

the exigencies of his Church, or the ends of his government, made their appearance necessary. And indeed, if we may judge from that proneness which the people discovered to Idolatry before the Babylonish Captivity, we must conclude that they were strangely ignorant of the Sacred Oracles, and that, if they had any stated institution among them for the illustration of them, it was either very remissly or unfaithfully executed.

Soon after the captivity, we find a regular plan of public teaching set on foot, and continued ever after, though the execution of it does not seem to have been committed to those of the Sacerdotal or Levitical order, but to others, and that rather by concert among themselves, than from any express appointment of God concerning it.

Ezra, upon his return from Babylon, having collected as many copies of the sacred Volume as he could, and from them made out *one* as correct as possible, assembled  
the

the people at Jerusalem in one of the streets, and there publicly read the law to them ||. From thence might have arisen their public assemblies for religious instruction, and afterwards the erection of synagogues for their better accommodation in attending upon it.

At first, it is highly probable that no more was intended than a public reading of the Scriptures ; and as there seems to have been no particular appointment with respect to the persons who should carry it on, any one might be pitched upon, whom the assembly judged fittest for this purpose.

Afterwards, it is likely, their pride might have prompted some of them, not only to read a portion of Scripture, but also to offer their commentaries upon it : And this, by a very easy progress, will account for that swarm of *Scribes and Inter-*

|| Nehem. viii.

*preters,*

*preters*, which sprung up among them; and who, by the variety, boldness and invention, more than the solidity of their interpretations, or regard to the Law, soon acquired a reputation for Learning and Piety.

A regard to order and decorum made it soon necessary to settle the plan of their public service, and to appoint one who should preside, or take the direction in it.

The design of the synagogue-service is evidently held forth to us, in the account which *Philo* gives of it. “ It is, says he, “ the custom of our nation to apply themselves every Sabbath day to the study of “ wisdom, and to hear with attention the “ public lectures that a doctor gives about “ it. This custom still continues among “ us, and our synagogues are nothing else “ but schools, wherein virtue is taught, the “ mysteries of religion are explained, and, “ vice

“vice is reprov'd §.” For these purposes they were wont to introduce their service by Prayer, next to read certain portions of the Law and the Prophets, and then to offer an exposition of them, or a word of exhortation from them: And for this last part of the service (though the most important) any person was pitched upon, to whom the ruler of the synagogue chused to pay the compliment †. And when the public service of the synagogue was thus carried on by any member, who might be called by the caprice of the ruler to perform it, and of whom many might be very unfit for it, it was no wonder that the religious instruction of the people was so little promoted by it.

Neither was the matter much mended, when their Rabbis or Scribes were, from the character they had acquired for learning, invited to take this office. Nay it

§ Apparat. Biblic. V. I. p. 228.

† Acts xiii. 15, 16.



was this which introduced that corruption, both in religious principles and practice, among them, for which our Saviour so severely, but no less justly, reproves them.

These had their different schools, and differed widely in their religious sentiments; but in this they all agreed, that not satisfied with the instructions conveyed to them in the sacred Code, they were for mixing with them many inventions of their own: And in order to gain credit to their whims, they had the assurance to alledge, and from the character they had already acquired, the art to make the people believe, that those *traditions* (for such they were afterwards called) were of the same origin, and consequently of the same authority, with the written law, and handed down to them *orally* from the time of Moses §.

Thus

§ You are to know, says Maimonides, that Moses, at the time he received the Law from God, received likewise the interpretation of it. The text was first given  
him

Thus their commentaries, from the veneration the people had for their Authors, came, at last, to be adopted as of equal authority with the original text, or written Law. These, in a succession of ages, swelled to an incredible bulk, and were, by Rabbi Judas, digested into a Collection, called, *The Mishna*. Upon this other Commentaries were written, which they called, *The Gemera*, or compliment of the *Mishna*,

him, and then the explanation, which taught him what that authentic text contained, and this is the manner in which he taught them both to Israel. When Moses retired into his tent, Aaron came to him, and learned of him the Law which God had given him, and the interpretation of it, and then he stood up and placed himself at his right hand. After Aaron, came in Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, and Moses repeated to them the same things which he had said to Aaron; after which they placed themselves, the one at Aaron's right hand, and the other at Moses's left. Then came the seventy Elders, and Moses gave them the same lesson which he had given to Aaron and his children. And, last of all, came all the people to seek the Lord, and to learn of Moses the Law and it's interpretation. So that Moses repeated the Law four times to Aaron, three times to his children, twice to the seventy elders, and once to the people.

After

*Mishna*, and both these united compose their *Talmuds*, which contain a body of Jewish Doctrines, Laws, Customs and Casuistry, according to the opinions of their most approved Doctors.

After this account of their most esteemed writings, let those, who can submit to the mortification, look into them, or but

After this he withdrew, and Aaron repeated the text, which he had learned by heart, after having heard it four times from Moses. Then he went out, and after him his children did the same thing; and after they were gone, the seventy elders also repeated the Law to the people. By these means they all heard the Law and the interpretation four times. The chief among the people divided among them the care of teaching both the text of the Law, and the explanation of it. But the text was written, and the interpretation of it was preserved by tradition. Thus Maimonides, *Apparat. Biblic. V. I. p. 305.*

This account of the manner in which the Interpretation of the Law was at first given, and afterwards handed down, needs no remarks. Let the reader judge of this well told story for himself.

——— *Credat Judæus Appella*  
Non ego. ————— HOR.

think of the Talmudical and Cabbalistic stuff, with which the Scribes were wont to entertain their hearers (of which they may see a large collection in Dr. Lightfoot's *Hor. Heb.*) and he will cease to wonder at the gross ignorance of the Sacred Oracles, to which the Jews were at last reduced, and will see the propriety of our Saviour's appearance at that particular period, to restore the true interpretation of the divine Law, and bring about a reformation in their manners, which had been miserably corrupted by the false glosses they put upon it. Such as we have now taken notice of, was the nature of the synagogue-service at our Saviour's appearance, and during his residence among us. And though this service was to cease upon the institution of the Christian Religion, and the obligations of it could be no longer binding upon the profelytes to that religion, yet so far as was consistent with the ends of his Religion, our Lord seems to have conformed to it, and to have appointed public assemblies for worship and devotion, and a manner to be observed

observed in them, in some things similar to what obtained in the synagogues. In one thing, however, the manner of these Jewish and Christian Assemblies widely differed. In place of committing the direction of the public offices of teaching, to the members of the several assemblies in general, he appointed that, from the time of the abrogation of the Mosaic, and the commencement of the Christian Dispensations, a certain Order of men, consecrated to this purpose, should preside in them.

Thus, in our enquiry, we are brought down to that happy æra in the Church of God, which commenced by the institution of the Religion of the blessed Jesus, his Son and our Saviour, which leads us to the consideration,

## S E C T I O N II.

*Of the Practice of the Primitive Christian Church.*

WHAT the manner of our Lord and his Apostles in their public ministrations was, may be best learned from the sacred writings, which contain the authentic accounts of it. But the consideration of it we shall pass over at present, as it will fall more properly under the design of the third part of this Treatise, and present the reader with some strictures upon the manner of those who lived nearest to the Apostolic times, and therefore were called *The Fathers* of the primitive Church. In their writings some may perhaps expect to find models in every respect proper for our imitation, in the manner of conducting our public instructions, and many, inspired with

with a kind of enthusiasm in their favour, think they are really such.

Indeed we should do injustice to their merit, did we not own that some of them have discovered a great depth of erudition, and no inconsiderable powers of persuasion; no small refinement of taste; and a manner, considering the genius of the times in which they lived, abundantly agreeable, though not always chaste and correct. In their defences of Christianity against its first adversaries, they discover a strength and energy of argument, and in their devotional pieces, a warmth and fervor of affection, that must render them justly deserving of the praise of those who come after them; and such as must afford an entertainment, accompanied with improvement, to all who, with a candid and devout mind, peruse their writings. But though some of them have succeeded very well in the preaching art, I cannot help thinking that they are not the proper models



dels for the young modern preacher to form himself upon.

No doubt they are, as the Archbishop of Cambray observes, the channels of tradition, and inform us how the Church in the several ages interpreted the doctrines of our religion § ; but I cannot help thinking that their judgment upon these doctrines ought not to have that weight allowed them, which the learned prelate seems to plead for, and that as little should their opinion determine ours. For in the interpretation of Scripture, authorities should have no weight, any farther than they are supported by reason and the sacred text. And, excepting the opportunities which these ancient Fathers had of being better acquainted with the manners and usages, to which there are frequent references in scripture, by living, some of them in the countries, and all of them nearer to the

· § Dialog. concerning Eloquence, p. 128. Dial. III.

times in which our Saviour and his Apostles lived, I know no advantage they had, which we want, for the interpretation of scripture; and we have the accumulated advantage of their interpretations, and of those of the intermediate and present ages, to assist us in ours.

In their Homilies and public discourses, it must be owned that some of them discover a great degree of correctness, both in judgment and taste; and have communicated their instructions in a manner well calculated both to entertain and improve the candid and attentive. But the same cannot be said of them all. In their interpretations of Scripture, some of them, unable to reconcile the maxims of the Religion of Jesus with those of the Schools of Philosophy, in which they had been educated, have gone into a spirit of mysticism, and taken a wild and unwarrantable freedom in changing every thing, even the plainest piece of history, into a moral Allegory; and giving loose reins to their ima-

gination, have sometimes run into an unintelligible jargon. Besides, their compositions are often so loose, their style so turgid and swelling, and so full of little turns of wit, childish jingle, quaint antithesis, and far fetched similes, that the young preacher, who 'would read them much before his taste were formed, would be in danger of having it rather corrupted than improved by them. They have their beauties, and they are many and shining too; and great allowances are to be made for their defects and blemishes.

By this time Eloquence had begun to decline, and a corruption of taste to gain ground; and it is no wonder they should feel the effects of it's prevalence. It is even surprizing they were not more affected with it.

If to this we add the consideration of the liveliness of their fancies, the fervor of their devotion, their zeal for religion, and the taste of those among whom they lived  
for

for a splendid and gaudy species of Eloquence, we need not wonder that they were led into a style, generally florid and highly ornamented, without being at the proper pains to chasten it into a degree of correctness, which times of more refinement in taste might think necessary.

But leaving these early times, let us carry our views downward. In this enquiry we shall pass over the intermediate ages betwixt these first and the Reformation, because in those ages (most of them ages of ignorance and barbarism) little is to be looked for in the way of models: And we shall come directly to consider,

## S E C T I O N III.

*The Practice since the Reformation.*

**I**N the execution of this part of our design, we shall confine our views to our own country, as with the interests of it we are most connected.

In tracing the different manners of instruction which have obtained since the Reformation, it would be very difficult, if at all possible, to ascertain the precise periods at which they took place: Nor indeed is it necessary that we should attempt it, because, so far as concerns the changes they have undergone in our country (to which our present inquiry is restricted) none who are acquainted with the history of it, can be ignorant.

They

They insensibly slide into one another, like the gradations of light and shade in a picture, so that it is extremely difficult to say where the one ends, and the other begins

For some time after the Reformation, the progress of improvement in this, as in the other branches of science and composition, was very slow and gradual. The peculiar circumstances of those times had a very powerful influence upon the temper and taste of the Clergy; and these but too much discovered themselves in all their performances from the Pulpit.

What our first reformers seem to have laboured most, was (for the preservation of what they called Orthodoxy, and as a barrier against the return of Heresy) to form the Theology of the Bible into a kind of system, such as best suited their own sentiments, or those of the party to which they were most attached. Than this perhaps nothing could be a greater  
obstruction

obstruction to the knowledge of the Scriptures, and the interests of Religion, closely connected with it. For thus tied down and confined to a system, as in so many trammels, the restrictions they were under, not only cramped a spirit of free and rational enquiry, which was necessary for duly understanding the scriptures, but also communicated a stiffness to their discourses and compositions, which to one of a taste the least improved, must have been highly disagreeable,

Besides this, several other things contributed to render their manner of Preaching, in this period, very uncouth.

About this time, the learning of the schools was that only which was in vogue. The Clergy deeply tinged with the pedantry of it, brought a great deal of it into the pulpit, and affected a vain shew and parade of learning, by the multitude of scholastic and technical terms, and the Greek and Latin Quotations which they introduced



troduced into their Sermons. They were wont to crumble down their discourses into a vast number of divisions and subdivisions, by which they give one reason to suspect, that they sought opportunities of hauling into them every thing that could but serve to eke them out, to the no small disgust of every person of the least judgment or taste who heard them. For though amidst such a variety, there might be some things, which, abstractedly considered, might be allowed to be useful, yet must they be denied to be pertinent, because however they might have a remote connexion with one another, they very often had scarce any with the subject in hand. In a word, their manner in many things, was silly and puerile. Nor is it at all to be wondered at that it should, considering how they had but lately emerged out of their ignorance and barbarism, in which the Christian world, and particularly this Western part of it, had long lain; and that, heated with a spirit of controversy, for which those times were distinguished, they had yet scarce begun

gun to think of the cultivation and improvement of their taste. To this period very probably it is, that a celebrated Poet of our own country alludes, in the following lines :

Once School-Divines this zealous isle o'erspread ;  
 Who knew most sentences was deepest read ;  
 Faith, Gospel, all, seem'd made to be disputed,  
 And none had sense enough to be confuted.

POPE'S Essay on Criticism.

A method loaded with so many improprieties, could not long continue in vogue. Divines, weary of the stiff, dry and unanimated manner of the Schools, to which they had been long shackled, eagerly seized the first opportunity to break loose from it. Such opportunity was not long wanting. The period which succeeded this afforded it.

Then there were some powerful efforts made to introduce arbitrary Government, and the unrestrained exercise of it. The people, especially in the Northern part of  
 the

the kingdom, unable any longer to brook the measures which were gone into by those in the administration, were roused into a kind of enthusiastic warmth in defence of their civil Liberty. And as the attempts upon this were also accompanied with some upon their religious Liberty, this heat of temper soon discovered itself in Religion likewise. And there being nothing perhaps more difficult than to ascertain the bounds to which it may be indulged, it was enflamed beyond what cool reason could approve.

Opposition served but to increase this prevailing spirit still the more. Such of the Clergy as suffered for an opposition to the measures of the Court, found it necessary to screw up the passions of the people as high as possible: While, on the other hand, that wildness which was thus produced, served in its turn to inflame the Clergy into a still warmer zeal for the support of their Party.

Such

Such a spirit, both in the clergy and people, was the almost unavoidable consequence of the humour of the times in which they lived. It diffused itself on every side, and all who were not disposed to chime in with the measures of a corrupt Court, and an Ecclesiastic Hierarchy, then thought equally corrupt, caught the spreading flame. There was not then so much as a possibility of *seeming* to be religious, without feeling, or pretending to feel, this temper. From thence it is easy to guess what the strain of sermonizing must have been at this time. Warm, pathetic, loose and incorrect, and deeply tinged with enthusiasm; their discourses were little more than a play upon words, tortured to serve the purposes of the wildest fancy, and the most unintelligible mysticism. With this view, such passages of the Prophets, the Song of Solomon, or the Revelations §, as were  
 most

§ I hope I shall not be mistaken, as if I meant to throw any reflection upon these parts of the sacred Volume. Nothing can be farther from my intention. My design is only  
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most obscure, were selected, as the themes or subjects of their discourses. If but the  
found

to take notice of a fact, relating to the manner of preaching during the period of which I write, and to take the opportunity of this note modestly to animadvert upon the conduct of those, who *still* seem to delight in the choice of the most obscure places of scripture, as the foundation of their discourses; when others, more plain and equally to their *professed* purpose, might be found elsewhere, and particularly in the writings of the New Testament, which, in a special manner, contain the Religion of the Christian.

The Prophetic Style must, from the very nature of it, be in many places involved, intricate and obscure; and tho' no doubt a great deal of this is worn off, by the completion of many of the Prophecies, which serves as a key to them, yet still there remains so much obscurity upon them, that if we can, by the helps we now have, penetrate through it, it must take great pains to dispel the cloud, and occasion to a popular audience a needless waste of time, in coming at the plain and simple truth contained under it. As to the *Song of Solomon*, considered as a subject of sermonizing, take the opinion of a very good judge, in his own words: "A composition it is, " of which I must needs say, that how naturally soever it " came from a monarch of his character, in these early " days of Eastern imagination and Eastern ardor, it should " by no means be made a model for Christian writers.

found answered their purpose, no matter  
 though the original design of the words  
 WAS

“ In the New Testament, though produced from the same  
 “ origin, we find very little of this sort, and that little in  
 “ the chastest and purest strain, at the same time that we  
 “ are required and taught to worship God, who is a spirit,  
 “ in spirit and in truth. But, when we disapprove of  
 “ the practice as indiscreet, must we condemn it too as  
 “ sensual? Or because, in some it may have been the  
 “ ebullition of a lascivious fancy, shall we pronounce it  
 “ to be so in all? Certain it is, that, among such as have  
 “ used it, there have been not a few eminently distin-  
 “ guished by the purity of their manners.” (Dr. Fordyce’s  
 Sermons to Young Women, Sermon 10th.)—And with  
 respect to the Book of the Revelations (a few of the first  
 Chapters excepted, which are pretty practical) the same  
 objection lies against the use of it, as the subject of *public*  
 instruction, as against the Prophets: Yea, in this respect,  
 the objection must be greater, because many of the events  
 foretold have not yet happened; and so we can often  
 form but a vain, or at most but a probable conjecture  
 concerning the meaning of those places, which are pre-  
 dictions of them; and of this observation what a striking  
 proof have we in the practical pieces and commentaries  
 (Lowman’s Treatise and some few others excepted) which  
 have been written upon this Book?

The choice of subjects which a preacher makes, is, if he  
 be not a slave to the writings of others, no mean proof of  
 his



was against it. From thence the preacher was furnished with an opportunity of giving

his turn of mind, and the peculiar way in which he inclines to exert himself. And when those in which he seems most to delight, are such as are involved in all the obscurity of ancient allegory and customs, he gives reason to the more judicious part of his audience to suspect, that he aims at raising a mean popularity to himself, by flattering a weakness incident to humanity, and which prevails in no inconsiderable degree in those, whose minds have not the advantage of the culture and improvement of a liberal education; the weakness I mean, is that propensity they discover to be entertained and delighted with what favours of the *mysterious* and *marvelous*.

Nothing can be better calculated to afford the preacher, who can persuade himself to take the advantage of it, the opportunity of gratifying this passion, than the choice of such subjects, and the manner in which he is obliged to handle them. But how far this conduces to the edification of his hearers, or a rational religion, a little reflection upon their religious creed, or system of faith, will easily discover.

It is a sincere regard for the interests of religion, not an inclination to censure any of its ministers, which prompts the author to make this remark, and therefore he hopes they will not only bear with him, and excuse the freedom he has used in it, but also, that they will be pleased to consider it with the same candor with which he has made it, and then he cannot entertain a doubt of their admitting the propriety of it.



an unlimited range to his wild imagination, of inflaming the passions of the people, and at the same time, of concealing his own ignorance of the true meaning of his text, under the laboured pains he ordinarily took for what he called, an illustration of it.

Though, in these respects, their discourses were justly blameable, yet it must be owned, that there appeared in many of them a warmer spirit of devotion, and a livelier sense of divine things, than has obtained since.

When the passions of the people, which had been heated by the spirit of faction and party, and the convulsions of the state, had time to subside, and the tempers of all were become more cool, the discourses of the Clergy became more cool and temperate also. And indeed, to the honour of this period, it must be owned that there sprung up a taste for the liberal arts and sciences, unknown to former times, the happy effects of which were abundantly discernable in the

Theological

Theological compositions of this age. Many of its divines were eminent, as for their sublime piety and extensive knowledge, so also for a strength and energy of style, and a taste and correctness in composition, which will stand the examination even of times of still greater literary improvement. And it may be justly said that the preaching art, if not carried to perfection by any, yet did it receive a high degree of refinement from many of them. Disgusted with the dry explications of a system, the brawls of controversy, or the rants of a wild enthusiasm, which distinguished the former periods, they studied a manner more rational, and therefore better adapted to promote the knowledge and interests of virtue; a manner happily removed at a proper distance from the raptures and uncommon fervours of enthusiasm on the one hand, and from what might be reckoned cold, frigid, and unanimated, on the other.

The acquaintance which divines, in this period more than in any of the former, began

began to cultivate with the writings of antiquity, contributed not a little, as I have already hinted, to refine their own taste, and thereby to improve the manner of their preaching.

Filled with an admiration of the learning and taste of these divines, those who succeeded them studied to improve by an imitation of them. They were ambitious of an acquaintance with the learned sages of Greece and Rome. They perused their writings; they were pleased; they were delighted with their sentiments, and the manner in which they expressed them. So far the study of the antients had a most happy effect. But transported with a kind of enthusiastic admiration of them, they began unluckily to think, they could in no way so well acquire a reputation for learning to themselves, or please and edify their hearers better, than by disclosing those famed sources of ancient knowledge: And in this opinion they gave themselves an unlimited range in all the wilds of metaphysical

physical reverie, or the labyrinths of philosophical discussion.

A discourse formed upon any other plan, or in a different style, in their opinion, betrayed a want of learning, genius and taste. Had you gone into any of our churches while this humour prevailed, you would have been apt to imagine yourselves transported, by some unaccountable enchantment, into the Lyceum, the Academy, or some other of the Schools of the ancient Philosophers, of whom the Preacher was an admirer, and would have thought that his intention was, rather to instruct his hearers in the doctrines of a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Seneca, than in those of Jesus Christ.

Such abstract and metaphysical disquisitions might afford the Preacher a large theatre, upon which to display his knowledge of ancient learning, but could afford little instruction to the great body of his hearers. The novelty of phrase, the stiffness

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ness of argumentation, and the jejune manner which obtained in these philosophical compositions might please a few, but could not fail to offend incomparably more.

On this account our Preachers were soon obliged to alter their method again. They exchanged this last for another, more agreeable indeed to a popular audience, I mean that of *declamatory harangues*, to which very often the text had scarce such a relation, as to serve for a proper motto to it. These indeed, as they laid less restraint upon the preacher, so they gave less to the hearer. In such there was room for all the ornaments of imagery and picturesque description, therefore these for a considerable time won the palm of applause. But there is at least one defect, and a capital one too, which they labour under, and that is, that they are for the most part, so airy and flimsy, and have so little of body or matter, that when you come to analyse them, you find there is but very little substance in them. A thought

or

or two wire-drawn, and diversified in the drefs in which they are exhibited, are all the admired contents of one of them, and fo, like a diet too weak and thin, they become unfit for fupporting, much more for invigorating the fpiritual and divine life §.

Thus we have carried down our enquiry to the prefent time, and every reader can eafily conceive many reafons why it fhould flop here.

§ See Theodorus; or, A Dialogue concerning the Art of Preaching; to which the author acknowledges himfelf indebted for feveral hints in this laft or third fection.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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S.