

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.  
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VOL. II.

Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τῆς Θεοῦ, ἐκ ἴγνω ὁ κόσμος, διὰ τῆς σοφίας  
τὸν Θεόν, ἠδούκησεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ τῆς μορίας τοῦ κηρύγματος, ἵνα  
τὸς πιστεύουσι. 1 COR. i. 21.

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

HOR. de Art. Poet.

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**I**N entering upon this part of my design, I am sensible with what delicacy it becomes me to suggest, much more to propose, any material alteration in the plan of Preaching commonly followed. The reasons which support it, are laid before the Reader, and he has a right to judge of their importance.



That the manner of the Sacred Writers, considered as Teachers of Religion, has been observed by others, the Author is far from disputing. He does not pretend to the honour of being the first who has discovered this secret, if it could ever be called one ; but he does not remember any who have taken the trouble to illustrate the propriety and importance of it, in the view in which he means at present to consider it, and for this reason perhaps it has been so little followed.

To engage, therefore, the attention of those who are employed in the public offices of Teaching, to the Scripture plan, and to encourage them in modelling their essays in imitation of it, from an exhibition of the advantages which would attend it, is the humble design of the Author in this part ; happy if he shall be found to have suggested any hints, that may contribute to the improvement of the Preaching art, or rouse up others of more abilities to attempt it.

In

In order to judge of the importance and propriety of the Scripture manner of Instruction, it will be necessary to consider the end and design of Preaching, because, in proportion to it's aptness to promote these, it must be esteemed more or less proper, and if calculated in every respect to be subservient to these valuable purposes, will be owned to be the best.

The Christian Orator, it must be acknowledged by all, should endeavour happily to unite the arts of Instruction and of Persuasion. Separated, neither are sufficient: United, they cannot fail of success. Hence it is evident, that the knowledge and proper application of whatever can be subsidiary to this part of his design, falls properly under the consideration of the Preacher, and cannot be neglected, without running the risque of failing in it.

No doubt it is incumbent upon him to convey all the light he can into the mind;

to lay before his hearers sufficient evidence of what he would have them believe; and the nature, reasonableness, and obligations of what he would have them practise. But he who would stop here, would be equally defective in his duty, as a Teacher of Religion, as the Mathematician who should demonstrate to his pupils the propositions of Euclid, without ever teaching them how they were to be applied to any of the useful purposes of life. The views of the Preacher must extend farther than the instruction of his hearers. He must endeavour to convert these speculative truths, into so many principles of religious conduct. And in order to this, it will be necessary that he be well acquainted with the heart, and the various movements of it; with the nature of its several powers; the various manner of their operation, and their influence upon the conduct of human life: In short, that he be well acquainted with human nature,

nature, for, as a celebrated Poet justly observes,

“ The proper study of Mankind, is Man.”

Must the Physician who would practise medicine with character or success be well acquainted with the anatomy of the human body, and the diseases to which it is subject? And should we not call him Empyrick or Quack, in the art of spiritual medicine, and the manner of administering it, who should undertake to cure a vitiated temperament of mind, without a just knowledge of the constitution of it? What diseases are to the body, irregular passions, prejudices, &c. are to the mind, equally inconsistent with the sound health of it.

Hence it is evident, that he who would direct to a proper regimen for recovering from a bad, or confirming a good, constitution of mind, must have a due knowledge of the human heart, and the disorders that are engendered there. For it is from such knowledge that the Preacher, who

may be considered as a spiritual Physician, can be best enabled to deduce his prescriptions for the health of his patients. How this knowledge is to be acquired is the important question.

A great deal, no doubt, may be done, by a close attention to what one feels passing in his own mind; to the risings of his several passions, and the causes of them; to the manner of their operation, and the effects produced by them; but still it must be owned, that any knowledge of human nature that can be acquired in this way, must be limited in it's degree, as well as slow in it's acquisition.

Though human nature is, in respect of it's radical powers, the same in all, yet nothing can be more various than the manner of it's appearance, which becomes diversified according to the situation in which a man is placed; the objects presented to him; the pursuits in which he is engaged; and the combination of circumstances

stances which may influence his conduct. For the knowledge of these we must have recourse to History.

This, as it were, brings back upon the Theatre of Life, those who have once acted their parts upon it, makes their conduct to pass in review before us, and subjects it (more than if we had been the living witnesses of it) to our deliberate and critical examination. But for what purpose all this? Surely not for the sake of those who make the subject of it; not merely to perpetuate, with marks of distinguished honour, the memory of the good, nor to transmit a lasting slur upon the bad. This could neither benefit the one, nor hurt the other. It is intended for the sake of the living.

Nor must we imagine that all that is intended, is no more than to afford subject of barren admiration, or curious entertainment. No, It's principal object is the reformation of succeeding ages, by a review of the past. This at least, ought

to be the point aimed at by all History. But then it must be owned, that History, civil and prophane, generally aims at no more than the direction of our conduct, in our commerce or intercourse with this world. In this view, it contains only prudential rules for our conduct, by discovering to us the power of passion and interest, the importance of times and conjunctures, and furnishing us with a variety of incidents, which, by a proper attention to them, may be rendered highly useful to us. In these respects it serves better than any digest or collection of laws, or volumes of poetry and romance. But still it labours under one defect to man, considered in his connexion with another world, and as a candidate for the happiness of it. It never extends his views to eternity, nor raises them above the fleeting, transitory scenes of this life.

S E C-

## S E C T I O N I.

*Of the Manner of the Sacred Writers; in propagating religious Instruction, and the Hints suggested from thence for the Direction of ours.*

**B**UT if prophane History does not suffice for these purposes, how can this defect be supplied? Why, from the sacred History, the chief object and design of which, is the direction of the moral conduct of mankind.

Abstracted from this view, one can scarce conceive why so much of the sacred Volume should be historical. Considered in this light, the propriety of it appears with admirable beauty, and one is apt to think that the Spirit of God, under whose direction it was written, intended to suggest this application of it, from the number  
of



of historical facts with which it abounds. For what else is our Bible, but a History of the divine Providence respecting Mankind, adapted to the several dispensations under which they lived, the circumstances in which they were situated, and diversified according to the parts which they acted? A history of what others have experienced, and we have reason to look for, in consequence of our adherence to, or deviation from the paths of virtue: And therefore, must it not afford a most admirable foundation for those discourses, by which we would either recommend the one, or guard against the other?

Nay, if I mistake not, any Revelation would be but very imperfect, and not properly adapted to the purposes of religious improvement, that did not contain an exhibition of a variety of characters. Did it consist only of a collection of abstract truths, with respect to the nature of the Deity, and his administration of mankind, or the various regards they owed him, corresponding to the various relations in which they may be considered as standing to him,

it

it is evident the knowledge they could acquire from thence must be very obscure and contracted, and the influence of it upon practice proportionably weak.

Had it been told us that God is holy, wise, powerful, &c. and that man ought to be pious, devout, benevolent, temperate; and had we been left to form our ideas of these perfections and virtues merely from the definitions that might be given of them, is it not presumable that they would be very imperfect? Are not the perfections of the Deity best understood from his conduct towards man and his other intelligent creatures, and is it not this which constitutes what we call his *character*? Is not the nature of the several moral virtues best understood from an exemplification of them in real life? An attention to the constitution of the human mind, will not only shew the propriety, but the next to a necessity, of some such method of conveying a knowledge of the abstract truths of Religion. It seems, from the very frame of it, to stand in need of something sensible  
on

on which to rest itself: By these means it is enabled, with closer attention, to consider many of the objects set before it, which but for such help, would, if not entirely elude it's notice, be but very indistinctly perceived by it. From all which, duly considered, the propriety of the illustration of character, in the recommendation of virtue, will, it his humbly imagined, be abundantly apparent. And of the manner in which this is to be done, the sacred Volume has afforded us some specimens, in every respect admirable.

The reader will, I hope, bear with me while I point out a few of them, and offer some strictures upon them for illustrating the beauty and propriety of that scheme of preaching which I would recommend from them.

Here I might call the attention of the reader to *The Song of Moses*, (Exod. xv. 1—20.) This piece has ever been admired by the best judges for that sublimity of sentiment; that art, and yet simplicity, of composition; that

that elegance of diction ; that grandeur of imagery ; that fervour and glow of devotion which runs through the whole of it ; and it's admirable fitness not only to express the grateful sentiments of it's author, but to inspire all Israel with the same, in the review of the glorious deliverance which God had wrought for them at the Red Sea ; and thus to engage them to join with him in this solemn act of praise and thanksgiving to their common Lord.

Upon the beauty and excellence of this admirable ode I might offer a humble critique. But it has been already so well illustrated by Mr. Herfan, formerly Professor of Rhetorick in the College Du Pleffis, that I beg leave to refer the reader to his explication of it, in Mr. Rollin's Method of Studying the Belles Lettres, V. II. To add any thing to what he has said on this subject, would be only to detain the reader from a great pleasure, which I am confident the perusal of it will give him.

There

There is another Passage of History, which goes likewise under the name of, *The Song of Moses*. (Deut. xxxii. 1—47.) It is impossible to read and not admire it. It is also a very noble specimen of the manner of offering religious instruction which we recommend. Let us bestow a few thoughts upon it, and endeavour to point out some of the many beauties which are in it, but which are apt to escape the notice of the inattentive eye.

It was written by Moses, at the command of God, and is called, *a Song*, very probably because composed in verse, and adorned with all the flowers of Poetry, that it might the better take with the people to whom it was addressed, and be the more easily remembered by them.

It is indeed, a master-piece of true eloquence, and admirably calculated to touch every heart in Israel, which was not lost to all tender feelings, and as insensible as the rocks themselves. If any performance  
could

could merit regard from Israel, this (abstracting from the inspiration of God, who dictated it) had on many accounts the best title to it. It was delivered to them, not only by a person of the first rank and most distinguished character among them: He was also one, to whom they were under the greatest obligations imaginable, particularly, for that uncommon affection and zeal for them, which he had shewed in effecting their deliverance from the intolerable servitude of Egypt, conducting them hitherto with so much tenderness and care, through the various stages of a vast and howling wilderness, and bringing them at length, under the auspicious conduct of God, to the confines of the promised, and long expected land. Whatever could proceed from the lips of such a person deserved, and could not but challenge an attentive hearing from such a people.

Moses seems himself to have been abundantly sensible of the importance of his character, the obligations this people did lie under to him, and the authority which

which both these considerations should give to every thing he said to them.

This happy concurrence of circumstances he improved, not to gratify a spirit of pride in himself, but to promote a spirit of true piety in them; not to insult them for their former abuses of the divine kindness, but to guard them against the like for the future, and to engage them in a conduct such as should secure the continuance of it to themselves, and to their children after them.

For attaining these valuable ends, the best address and the most dexterous management were necessary, especially considering the character of those he had to deal with. He was abundantly aware of this, and with the utmost attention seems to have studied both.

He appears, from his acquaintance with this people, to have been apprehensive of the reception which an address of this kind, that served to expose the baseness of their conduct, should meet with, and therefore he, with no less dexterity than beauty  
and

and elegance, makes his exordium, by bespeaking the attention of the Heavens and the Earth, as if he would appeal to these inanimate parts of the Creation, from a people whom he had often before found inattentive to his instructions. “ Give ear, “ O ye Heavens,” &c.

Before their passions could have time to catch fire, and be inflamed by the unfavourable insinuation which the manner of his address carried in it, he immediately proceeds to celebrate the excellence of the divine character, in that wisdom, power, goodness and equity which were conspicuous in the whole of God’s administration towards them; and having composed their rising passions into a calm, they now become better disposed and prepared to listen to the heavy charge he was to exhibit against them, ver. 5. To have done it abruptly, or even sooner, would have defeated his design; but now they can bear whatever he is pleased to say to them. Something no doubt very ungrateful to



them there must have been in this part of the subject: Something very sharp in the reproof he gave them for their former defection from the service and worship of the true God, and in the suspicion he seems to entertain of a tendency in them to a still greater defection from both afterwards. Such reflections, such hints could not, at first hearing, but wound the pride of a people, naturally so haughty and impatient of reproof, had they not been previously prepared for them. But now, the plainness and freedom which he uses, comes to have quite an opposite effect, and to make them conclude, that certainly there must have been the justest reason for it, else he who was so meek, and had in every part of his conduct towards them, discovered so warm an affection, would not have used such sharpness and acrimony in his reproofs.

In the hope that he had wrought them into this happy temper of mind, he dilates and enlarges on this subject, and in a most beautiful manner, turns short upon them,

them, and while possessed of their attention, he appeals the matter to themselves, ver. 6. "Do ye thus requite," &c. in which he pays at once a compliment to them, and the cause he supported. He brings their conduct to be tried at the bar of their own reason, constitutes themselves the Judges, and leaves themselves to pronounce the sentence.

Having thus, by insensible steps, led them on to give decision, he gladly embraces the happy opportunity he now had, when their minds were soft and tender, and susceptible of the best impressions, to remind them, in a very beautiful and affectionate detail, set off with all the graces which the grandest imagery could give it, of the many favours with which God had distinguished them, both as individuals and as a people, v. 7, &c. And all this, that he might work upon their gratitude, and dispose them to the proper returns.

Well acquainted with human nature, he knew that the success of this address was not to be rested upon the influence of those principles, to which he had in the preceding part of it applied himself. He therefore next accosts their fears. To give these their full force with them, he places their sins, as it were, over against the divine favours, that so, thus contrasted, the turpitude and aggravations of them might appear in the most striking light, ver. 15, &c. And then he exhibits to them a picture of God, truly awful, incensed against the bold contemners of his authority, armed with Almighty Power, and scattering the thunderbolts of his vengeance with an irresistible hand amongst the workers of iniquity, ver. 19, &c. In the midst of the dismal scene which he here paints, he very artfully throws in a most affectionate wish for them, ver. 29. "O that they were wise, &c." in which he plainly hints to them, that a serious reflection upon the unhappy end of others, who had been unmindful of the God that formed them, and

and an anticipation of what awaited themselves, if they continued to walk in their footsteps, would be an instance of the truest wisdom, and the most probable means of preventing their ruin.

Having thus gradually wrought their minds into a habit of seriousness, and now possessed himself of their attention, it deserves to be observed how, with no less beauty and propriety than admirable dexterity, he returns to the representation of the awful greatness of God, which he had begun to lay before them, but had interrupted by his affectionate wish or prayer for them, that they might indulge a serious pause upon the important subjects, to which it had a tendency to lead their thoughts. And the detail he gives of the tremendous majesty and power of God, was such as could scarce fail to make them blush for the folly of their conduct, and tremble at the dreaded consequences of it, if they did not speedily reform. To bring about a reformation, serious reflection, vi-

vigorous resolution, and instant endeavours, were necessary on their part. They seem to be in a temper of mind happily disposed to all these. *Now* was the proper time to dismiss them. He accordingly does so, but not without a parting charge, admirably calculated to rivet in their minds all he had said to them, and make it produce its effects without delay, ver. 46. “Set your  
 “ hearts (says he) unto all the words which  
 “ I testify among you this day. For it is  
 “ not a vain thing for you, because it is  
 “ your life, and through this thing, ye  
 “ shall prolong your days in the land, whi-  
 “ ther ye go over Jordan to possess it.”

From the cursory view we have taken of this discourse of Moses to Israel, must we not admire the excellence of it? And from it, may we not take a hint of the many valuable purposes to which it might be applied in religion, and the most successful manner of attaining them?

But

But this is only one of the many valuable pieces of sacred History, which might be made serviceable for promoting religious instruction, and exhibit a specimen of the manner most useful for this purpose. Of the propriety of this manner of instruction, almost every address which we find made to Israel, upon any important occasion, by those who acted in public character among them, is both an example and a proof. For though, from what is recorded, it is abundantly evident that many of these addresses contain no more than the great and out-lines of what was delivered, yet there is enough recorded to shew that the manner, which it is the design of this part of our Essay to recommend, was that followed by them, as most promising of success

Let it suffice to direct the attention of the reader to a few instances, selected from a great many more which might be mentioned.

Of this kind is that short, but nervous address, which Moses, by the special command of God, made to Israel, when, encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, they wait with anxious expectation the message with which he was charged ||. Being now about to announce the Law to them, God orders them to be properly prepared for a dutiful reception of it. For this purpose he instructs Moses, in his name, to remind them of the difference in his conduct towards them and the Egyptians; of the judgments he had inflicted on the Egyptians, and the series of favours with which he had distinguished them; and to recommend to them a religious obedience of his Laws, as the best way to express their gratitude for the divine kindness, and to insure the continuance of it. When they were thus composed into a sacred seriousness, the descent of God upon Mount Sinai, which they looked for, is ushered in with a pomp and solemnity becoming the importance of

|| Exod. xix. 4—6.

the

the occasion, with a grandeur worthy of the Majesty of Heaven descending to Earth, and admirably calculated to make the deepest impression upon the spectators. The design of this awful and glorious scene was not confined to those who were the immediate witnesses of it: It was intended to extend it's influence to all who should afterwards hear of it. With this view, a description is given of it by the sacred Historian; a description, which while it is distinguished for simplicity, can be exceeded by none in sublimity, or the admirable tendency it has to produce in the soul sentiments of the most exalted devotion. Compared with this, how flat and insipid are the most magnificent descriptions, given us by the antient poets of the appearance of their Gods! Even that of Neptune given by Homer, and so much admired by the great Longinus †, deserves not so much

as

† See Longin. on the Sublime, Sect. 9th.

Fierce as he past the lofty mountains nod,  
The forests shake, earth trembled as he trod,  
And felt the footsteps of th'immortal God.

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His



as to be mentioned at the same time with it.

Another striking instance of this method of instruction, we have in the solemn address which Moses made to Israel, upon the intimation he had received from God, that he was not to be allowed so much as to set foot in that pleasant land, which the people under his care were to possess, but must content himself with a distant view of it from Mount Pisgah §.

Apprised that his death was at no great distance, he called together the people, then encamped upon the banks of Jordan,

His whirling wheels the glassy surface sweep ;  
 Th'enormous monsters rolling o'er the deep,  
 Gambol around him on the watry way,  
 And heavy whales in aukward measures play ;  
 The sea subsiding spreads a level plain,  
 Exults and owns the monarch of the main :  
 The parting waves before his courfers fly,  
 The wond'ring waters leave the axle dry.

POPE.

§ Deut. iv. 1—41.

and

and harangued them in a manner equally expressive of his affection for them and his regard for religion.

What he principally aimed at was to guard them against being corrupted, upon their settlement in Canaan, by the idolatrous practices of the nations around them, and to engage them to act a part worthy of the privileges with which God had all along distinguished them. With these views, he reminds them of the disastrous events which had befallen those who had followed and worshipped Baal-peor, one of the Gods of the Moabites, while those who had integrity and resolution enough to adhere to the true God, were still the objects of his most kind and favourable regard. To secure them still more against the temptations to idolatry which they might meet with, he appeals to them if they had seen any similitude, or resemblance of God upon the Mount from which they heard him speak to them; and from thence leads them to infer the impropriety of worshiping God under any visible repre-

representation, seeing he had never vouchsafed to give them any such, which he certainly would have done had he judged it expedient that they should have recourse to it in the worship of him. In the course of his exhortation, he desires them to survey the History of Providence respecting other nations, and in a very solemn appeal to them, asks, if ever they had heard any, who had been so distinguished as they had been, by repeated tokens of the divine favours, ver. 32—39. And then, while their minds were glowing with gratitude, or might reasonably be thought to be so, in the remembrance of all this, he shuts up his address, by warmly inculcating a respectful obedience to the divine law, as a conduct the best corresponding to the distinguished privileges which they and their ancestors had enjoyed, and necessary to secure to themselves, and transmit to their children, the safe and inviolate possession of them.

To

To the same purpose, and upon a similar plan, is the noble, pious, and spirited address of Joshua, the successor of Moses, to the people of Israel †. Considered as made in the close of a long life, and faithful service of God, it will be found to have an incomparable beauty, force, and energy in it. It contains his dying testimony in honour of the true God and of Religion: A most solemn acknowledgment, that after a long, a very long acquaintance with both, he had found no reason to alter his opinion of either, but was now ready to die in the same sentiments of esteem for them, in which he had all along lived.

Behold the people of Israel, with their princes and magistrates, assembled in the plains of Shechem around their illustrious leader, justly become venerable to them on account of his advanced age, and wise and prudent administration: Behold every eye in this numerous assembly is fixed upon

† Joshua xxiii. and xxiv.

him;

him ; every ear is open to what he shall say ; They are all attention. What a happy opportunity does this afford him of doing one signal service more to them ? And he does not neglect it. Well acquainted with the character of this people, and aware of the danger they were in of a seduction from the worship of the true and only God, to that which obtained among their idolatrous neighbours ; at the same time to prevent it, and, if possible, to confirm them in the wise choice they had made, he with a tenderness and affection, which could not have failed to conciliate their esteem and secure their attention, even if he had not been already possessed of these, accosts them, upon this occasion, in a long and solemn speech.

He begins by leading back their thoughts to the kindness shewn by God to their ancestors, and continued down in a series of favours even to themselves. He reminds them of the many signal interpositions of his Providence in their behalf and against  
their

their enemies, and of the many triumphs obtained over them. He brings to their view the high and distinguished honour to which they were raised above their neighbours, and the fruitful and pleasant land in which they were settled, under the divine auspices. And on this detail of the divine favours, and the gratitude which they ought to cultivate on that account, he grafts a warm and pathetic recommendation of the divine law as the invariable rule, and of the divine glory as the constant aim of their future lives. They with one voice approve of and agree to all he recommended. To make the impression the more deep and lasting, he not only made them renew their covenant with God, and recorded it in a book, but also, according to the simplicity of these early times, he erected a great stone under an oak, which was by the sanctuary of God, that it might be a visible monument to them and their children, of this solemn transaction, as often as they repaired to this place to worship their God.

How

How warm and pathetic is the address of Micah § to the people of Israel? Who can read it and not admire the manner in which the Prophet endeavours to bring them to a sense of the folly and impiety of their conduct, and thereby to a reformation of it? He introduces God into this address with uncommon beauty, in a manner and with a solemnity admirably calculated to rouse and awaken that inconsiderate people. He represents God addressing himself to the inanimate Creation, to the Hills and to the Mountains, as if he expected that attention from them, which Israel had hitherto refused, “Hear, O ye Mountains, &c. ver. 2. than which nothing can be conceived more truly sublime, or better calculated to shew the deep concern of his heart for their former insensibility, or to recover them from it. But as if it had already produced these effects, or at least in hopes that it would soon do so, he turns directly to his people Israel. “O my people, &c.

§. Mic. vi. 1—9.

ver.

ver. 3, 4, 5. Who can read this address with unmoved hearts? How admirable! how gracious the condescension that appears in it! The mighty God, though infinitely exalted above all his creatures, stooping to plead his cause with some of them; grieved as it were, at the unfavourable sentiments they had entertained of him, and at the alteration, on this account, in their religious regards towards him; desirous of their return to their duty, as the only way in which it was consistent with his honour to receive them again into favour. To shew that he never meant to deal with them in the way of absolute authority, or engage them in duty by mere dint of command, but in a way more liberal and ingenuous, he expostulates the matter with them, appeals to their own consciences upon the matter, and constitutes themselves judges in the controversy.

To enable them to judge properly in the case submitted to their decision, it was ne-



cessary they should have the conduct of God towards them, as well as theirs to him, at once before them. For this purpose, he recalls to their remembrance some of the most signal favours of his providence; particularly their deliverance out of Egypt, their settlement in the land of Canaan, and the friendly appearances he had often made in their behalf against their enemies. He instances one, which duly attended to, could not fail to have a happy influence upon them, viz. his favourable interposition to defeat the malicious designs of Balak, King of Moab, who according to a custom very frequent among the heathen, had sent for Balaam to curse Israel, before he would take the field against them; and thus, according to the impious and equally foolish superstition of those early times, thought to secure to himself a compleat victory over them.

In consequence of that serious mood into which Israel is wrought, by so solemn  
an

an appeal to them from God, and of the sense they had now obtained of the divine displeasure against them, by a comparative view of the divine conduct and their own, they § are made, with anxious concern to inquire (each as it were for himself) “where- with all shall I come, &c.” ver. 6, 7. And considering the character of this people and  
their

§ I am sensible that a very different turn is given to these words, by some writers of the most distinguished merit. Doctor Butler, in his Sermon on the character of Balaam, supposes the enquiry, ver. 6, 7. to be made not by Israel, but Balak ; and that, in consequence of the disappointment he dreaded, from the return which Balaam had made to him, after pretending to consult God upon the part he should act. Balak had sent for Balaam to curse Israel, not doubting but this curse would be effectual : Balaam apologizes for himself in refusing this, by alledging that God had expressly forbidden him to do it.

The Dr. seems to have imagined, that Balak thought that the offer made to Balaam did not please him ; that he expected a higher, and might only pretend the difficulty he was under as a sham to bring Balak to his terms ; and therefore he supposes the inquiry to be made by Balak, and the answer to be returned by Balaam. But to me it appears more natural to suppose the question

their proneness to superstition, nothing could be more natural than the manner in which they express their anxious concern upon this occasion. The 8th verse contains the return which God, or the Prophet by commission from him, made to this inquiry, in

put (or represented as put) by Israel, and the answer given to it by the prophet. A due attention to the design of the solemn address, in which we find both, seems to favour this conjecture. What the Prophet aimed at was to bring Israel to a proper sense of their sins, and thereby to a reformation. For this purpose, he desires them to consider the various instances of the divine kindness to their nation in ancient time, and particularly in the case of the attack meditated upon them by Balak. He desires them to consider the whole of the transaction, that they might know the *righteousness*, or rather, as it might be rendered (for so it is in many other places, as Ps. xxiv. 5. Ps. xxxvi. 11. Ps. li. 16.) the *mercy, favour or loving kindness* of God. And then, upon recalling to the remembrance of Israel this scene of goodness and mercy to them, they are introduced, with admirable beauty, as immediately captivated by it, and led to enquire how they might avert the displeasure and recover the favour of God. "Wherewith shall I come," &c. To which this answer is returned: "He hath shewed thee," &c. In this view, the words are all at once relieved of that obscurity, which in any other, hangs upon them, and the meaning is plain and natural.

in which, while he corrects a most dangerous mistake into which they had fallen, sets them right as to the course they ought to follow; and shews how ready God is to discover the acceptable manner of serving him, to those who sincerely enquire after the knowledge of it, with an honest intention to observe it.

In the analysis I have given of these passages of sacred History, I have not so much as attempted a minute particularity. My design did not require it. All I aimed at, was to take notice only of what tended to the illustration of the manner observed by the sacred writers, under the Old Testament dispensation, in inculcating religious instruction. To the above specimens of their manner, I might easily add many. But these may suffice as an abundant proof of it, and as a recommendation of that which the Christian divine should follow as far as circumstances will admit.

But here, I am aware, it will be asked,  
 “ If the method of inculcating virtue,  
 “ from the illustration of character and  
 “ history, be of such importance, why do  
 “ we not find it more frequently practised  
 “ by our Lord and his Apostles ? ”

To this it may be replied, that a regard to the circumstances of the times, and the character of the people among whom he preached, necessarily obliged our Lord frequently to vary his method : To these he always adapted it : He found the Jews, not only under the power of the grossest ignorance, but also of the strongest prejudices, in things relating to Religion, and particularly to the character of the Messiah, and the design of his appearance in the world. Their ignorance must be removed and their prejudices overcome, before he could hope for any success with them in inculcating the practice of virtue, and a situation such as they were then placed in, did not admit of one uniform method of instruction. It was necessary that his plan should be diversified

diversified according to the change he found in the temper and disposition of his hearers, and accordingly we find it was so ||.

Our Saviour's personal ministry was confined to the people of the Jews, and therefore, as they had the writings of the Old Testament in the highest veneration and esteem, we find him, not only often appealing to these in support of his mission and character, and deriving the strongest evidence of both from them; but also sometimes making the history of their nation and ancestors, the very text of his public discourses, when circumstances afforded him a proper opportunity of improving it in this manner. Is not his Sermon on the Mount (of all the discourses of his, which we have on record, the most large and complete) both an instance and a proof of this?

His great design in it is, to give mankind just notions of the nature of true hap-

|| See Dr. Gerard's Dissertations on Subjects, &c.

pines, and the course they should pursue for the attainment of it. This was the more necessary at that period, because not only the Jews in general, but even his disciples also, seem to have been in a gross mistake with respect to both. They fancied the perfection of happiness, at least in this world, to be reserved for the Messiah's Kingdom; and that an advancement to the posts of honour, power, pleasure and profit in it, was all that was necessary to put them in possession of it. Upon this principle, how frequent, how keen, were the disputes of ambition—the contest for rank and precedence, even among the members of the sacred College, notwithstanding all the pains of their divine Master to direct their ambition to nobler objects?

Many reasons of prudence made it improper for him, so early as this, to declare himself without reserve, upon the nature and constitution of that kingdom which he was about to erect in the world. His countrymen, to whom he preached, were  
not

not yet prepared for an open and full information upon these points. What he taught them however, might, had it been duly attended to, have removed many of the prejudices, and corrected many of the errors which they entertained concerning them. In the prosecution of the design he proposed to himself in this divine discourse, he was naturally led to make some severe strictures upon the doctrines and practice of the Scribes and Pharisees; and that not only because both were corrupt in themselves, but were also of the most dangerous tendency, by the effect which they were calculated to have upon others. And what gave these men so great an influence, was the reputation they had acquired among the people; the one, by pretences to high improvements in the knowledge; the other, to equally high refinement in the practice of Religion; and both, by their flaming zeal for, and blazing profession of it.

Our Lord, like a teacher come from God, animated by an unshaken regard for his honour and the true happiness of mankind,

sets



sets himself, through the whole of this excellent Sermon, to expose the ignorance of the one and the hypocrisy of the other; and to shew how unfit any must be to guide in Religion, who like them, could make every thing, even the most sacred, meanly truckle to their pride, avarice and ambition. For this purpose he does not give into general declamation, unsupported by proof—he enters into the detail.—In a variety of the most important cases, he points out the corrupt glosses and false comments they had put upon the moral Law, by which they endeavoured, if not to set mankind entirely free from the restraints of it, at least greatly to weaken them; and by the interpretation he gives of it, he vindicates its honour, by giving just notions of the nature, extent and obligations of it, and thus restores its authority again.

From this general view, and it is no more, of this most justly admired discourse, it is abundantly evident, that the plan, and the principal illustrations of it, are taken from  
some

some well known history and characters, and that these are pitched upon as better calculated to explain the nature, and enforce the obligations of the great truths contained in it, than any elaborate and abstract reasoning could do without them.

This is not the only discourse of our Lord, which seems to have been formed upon this plan. We have but few discourses of his, so large as this, on record. But of those we have, there are scarce any in which instances of this manner are not to be found §. The History of the Old Testa-  
ment

§ Matth. xxiii. 1—34. Is it not evident to all who are in the least acquainted with the Jewish History, that our Lord, in this discourse, has a plain reference to several parts of it, in the illustration of the subjects which fall under his consideration? Could there remain a doubt upon this point, it might be easily removed, by shewing the reader what this History says, of the heavy burdens which the Scribes and Pharisees imposed upon others; of the phylacteries which they wore; of the titles of distinction which they so much affected; of the salutations in the public places which they courted; of the specious forms of devotion which they practised; of the nice distinc-  
tions

ment was not large enough to afford subjects for the many occasions, and the variety

tions which they devised with respect to oaths; of their scrupulous exactness in the less, and their shameful neglect in the greater, matters of Religion; and of their fondness for the form, but their indifference about the power of godliness.

Luke. xx. 34—38. Here our Lord adduces a proof, not only of the possibility, but also of the certainty, of a Resurrection; not from abstract reasoning, but by an appeal to a piece of ancient and sacred History, and the most fair and just deduction from thence. And if it be considered that the Sadducees, with whom our Lord reasoned at this time, admitted only the authenticity of the five Books of Moses, as some think; or according to others, gave them a great preference to the other writings of the Old Testament, this will not only shew the propriety of his appeal to them in this case, but also in a great measure account for his referring to no other part of the sacred history upon this point, which very probably he would have done, had it not been for these circumstances.

Every one, who with attention peruses the Gospels, which contain the history of our Lord's life, will observe many more instances (such as Matth. xii. 1—8. Matth. xxiii. Mark vii. 6—13. Luke. x. 25—37. Luke. xi. 37—51. Luke, xvii. 20. to the end, &c.) of an application of historical Relations to the purpose of Religious instruction, and that in a manner which seems to indicate the high opinion he had of the importance and usefulness

riety of circumstances in which he was led to discourse to the people, had he even been inclined to have borrowed them from thence. Is it not therefore observable, that when a subject did not occur from the sacred text, suited to his purpose, he formed his discourses upon some of the hints suggested to him from the circumstances in which he was placed? So fond was he of this manner of instruction—The scene around him, the conversation he had been himself, or heard others engaged in, or some incident he was informed of, furnished very often, both the occasion and illustration of some of his most instructive discourses \*.

Nay,

fulness of this method of promoting religious knowledge and practice.

\* Matth. vi. 25—34. Our Lord having found it necessary to guard his disciples against an anxious care about what might be called, the necessary supplies of Life, shews them that such an anxiety was altogether unreasonable and groundless. This he does by a beautiful appeal to what they saw every day happen in the animal and vegetable kingdoms. And if we suppose (which very probably was the case) that the hint of this illustration was suggested by the flying of birds and the produc-  
tions

Nay of such advantage does he seem to have considered this method, that when real history was wanting, or perhaps a prudent regard to the violent prejudices of the people forbid him to use it, he had recourse to Parable and Allegory : A species of instruction, in which the ground-work  
being

tions of the vegetable kingdom around him, and in his view, there is particular beauty in the passage.

Matth. xviii. 1—7. The contest among the disciples for precedence introduced this discourse, the evident design of which is to inculcate humility. And nothing can be more beautiful than the manner in which our Lord does this. He calls a little child who was in the company to him, and from thence takes occasion to recommend an imitation of the temper and conduct of children in meekness, candor, docility, and an indifference for what are commonly esteemed the great things of the present life.

Jo. vi. 26—60. The attentive reader will observe, that it was the reflection upon the miraculous manner in which our Lord had fed five thousand, and the crowds which flocked around him in consequence of this, which introduced this sublime discourse, wherein he takes occasion to caution his hearers against the indulgence of those worldly views for the future, from which they  
now

being founded, if not in matter of fact, yet in verisimilitude, and the whole so wrought up as to produce many of the effects of genuine History, it may be said to partake of the nature of it. And if to this we add, what I humbly think is far from being improbable, that many of the Parables used by our Lord were founded on history, or real life, though an uncommon delicacy and prudence made him dress it up, or if you will, disguise it in this

now followed him, and to speak of himself under the metaphor of the Bread of Life.

Jo. xii. 20, &c. The visit of some Greeks, who being profelytes either of the gate or of righteousness, had come up to Jerusalem to join in the celebration of the Passover, gave occasion to the following discourse of our Lord, than which nothing could be better suited to their circumstances, or better calculated, from the report they would make to their countrymen at their return home, to prepare them for giving a candid and attentive hearing to the Apostles, when, in the course of their ministry, they should come among them.

These are but few of the many instances which might be quoted in proof of our position, but they may suffice.

manner,

manner, it will not only account for his using historical incidents more frequently, but considering the circumstances in which he was placed, give a particular grace and beauty to the manner which he followed.

And as to the Apostles, their situation during the first period of their Ministry, and while it was confined to Judea, being very similar to their Lord's, the same reasons which influenced his manner of teaching, must have had a considerable influence also upon theirs.

Accordingly, it may be observed, that when they preached to, or reasoned with the Jews, (the only people to whom an appeal to scripture history could have any propriety in that early period) they commonly did both, from the writings of their own Prophets, which they had in the highest esteem. Witness the noble defence which Stephen, and after him, Peter and John made of Religion, and of their own  
conduct

conduct with respect to it †. And to these I might add many more instances equally in point.

When, after the Resurrection of their Lord, the sphere of their ministrations became greatly enlarged, and their commission led most of them to labour among the Gentiles, it needs scarce be observed that in such a situation, there would have been the greatest impropriety in this manner among them, till first they had established the authority of the sacred writings, and accordingly we do not find that they so much as attempted it. In their epistolary writings it could still less be looked for. These generally took their rise from something peculiar in the circumstances of the society of Christians or individuals to whom they were addressed, and therefore could but rarely admit of this method of instruction.

But had it been much seldomer used by our Lord and his Apostles than it really

† Acts iv.—Acts v.



was, there is one thing that abundantly declares their sentiments with respect to the propriety of it, when Christianity is established, and that is, the great number of historical facts, and variety of circumstances attending them, which are consigned to writing. Why so much particularity in the narrative of both, if it was not intended from thence to suggest a rich fund, not only of private meditation, but also of public instruction? Abstracting from some such design as this, a history much more general, than that which we have in the Gospels, might have sufficed.

Upon the whole, if with candor and attention we consider the part our Lord has acted in the character of a public teacher, we shall find, that in his own conduct, he has exhibited an example of the greatest wisdom and propriety in the manner of instruction, which he observed in the infant state of his Church; and in the materials with which his history abounds, has suggested to the ministers of his religion the  
 most

most useful hints for the direction of the course they ought to pursue, in the future periods of it.

## S E C T I O N II.

*Of the Advantages arising from an Attention to the Scripture Model of Instruction.*

**W**ERE there no other argument for recommending virtue from an illustration of scripture history and characters, than the practice of the sacred writers in this respect, as far as circumstances would admit, it ought, with all those who are engaged in the same laudable design, to be of weight sufficient to engage their imitation of it.

But the propriety of this manner of instruction is not without the approbation of writers of the most distinguished judgment and taste, both in antient and modern times.

Among the antients I need mention no more than Plato. His sole example is sufficient recommendation of such a manner. And does not every one, who is in the least acquainted with his writings, know, that the most celebrated of his moral pieces, are generally introduced with some remarkable fragment of history, which, at once, serves as the basis of his discourse, and gives a very proper illustration to it?

What Count *Algorotti* says with respect to historical painting, when drawn by the pencil of the celebrated Masters in that art, holds equally true with respect to those pieces which are done by the pen of the Christian Orator. “ The best way (says he) “ in my opinion, to symbolize moral and “ abstract things, is to represent particular “ events. For example, what can better “ express a Hero’s love towards his “ country than the virtuous *Decius*, confe- “ crating himself boldly to the infernal “ Gods, to secure victory to his country- “ men over their enemies? What finer em-  
blem

“ blem can we desire of emulation, and an  
 “ insatiable thirst for glory, than Julius  
 “ Cæsar, weeping before the statue of  
 “ Alexander, in the temple of Hercules at  
 “ Gades; of the inconstancy of Fortune,  
 “ than *Marius* sitting on the ruins of Car-  
 “ thage, and receiving, instead of acclama-  
 “ tions of an army, joyfully saluting him  
 “ Imperator, orders from a Lictor of *Six-*  
 “ *tilius* to quit Africa? Such representations  
 “ as these require no commentary. They  
 “ carry their explanation along with  
 “ them ” §.

To the same purpose with the former, and  
 equally in point, is the opinion of the critic  
 we have had occasion to mention once and  
 again before. Speaking of moral Poetry,  
 whether Epic or Dramatic, he observes,  
 “ That, besides making a deeper impres-  
 “ sion than can be made by cool reasoning,  
 “ it does not fall short of reasoning, in af-  
 “ fording conviction. The natural con-

§ Count Algarotti's Essay on Painting.

“ nexion of vice with misery, and of virtue  
 “ with happiness, may be illustrated by  
 “ stating a fact, as well as by urging an  
 “ argument. Let us assume, for example,  
 “ the following moral truths; that discord  
 “ among the chiefs renders ineffectual all  
 “ common measures; and that the conse-  
 “ quences of a slightly founded quarrel,  
 “ fostered by pride and arrogance, are not  
 “ less fatal than those of the greatest in-  
 “ jury. These truths may be inculcated  
 “ by the quarrel between Agamemnon and  
 “ Achilles at the siege of Troy. ||”

The celebrated Mr. Rollin, in his ob-  
 servations on the manner of studying the  
 sacred History, seems greatly to approve  
 of this method §; and in the account he  
 gives us of the Government of Colleges,  
 he favours us with the opinion of M. de  
 Fenelon upon this subject: It deserves to

§ Elements of Criticism, V. II. p. 372.

|| Belles Lettres. V. III. p. 94. Edit. 5.

be quoted. His words are, “ The stories  
 “ of the Old Testament are not only pro-  
 “ per to awaken the curiosity of children,  
 “ but by discovering to them the original  
 “ of their Religion, they lay the founda-  
 “ tions of it in their minds. A person  
 “ must be profoundly ignorant of the spi-  
 “ rit of Religion not to see that it is wholly  
 “ historical. It is by a texture of wonder-  
 “ ful facts, that we learn it’s establishment,  
 “ it’s perpetuity, and all that we are to be-  
 “ lieve and practise. It must not be ima-  
 “ gined that we have an inclination to en-  
 “ gage young persons to enter deep into  
 “ the knowledge of it, by laying before  
 “ them all these stories. They are short,  
 “ various, and calculated to please persons  
 “ of the dullest understanding. God, who  
 “ knows better than any other the spirit of  
 “ the Man whom he has formed, has placed  
 “ Religion in popular facts, which are so far  
 “ from overcharging the simple, that they  
 “ assist them in conceiving and retaining  
 “ the mystery of it ” §. The writers of

§ Belles Lettres, V. IV. p. 316.

that admirable moral collection, *The Spectator*, are distinguished for this manner of composition. All the writers of Tragedy and Romance go upon the same principle. And even among divines, there have not been wanting some, who have given their opinion in favour of this method, by copying it into some of their Sermons.

It is true, many of those who have attempted something in this way, seem rather to have been led into it, as it were, by accident, than from any settled opinion of it's superior excellence to the other methods, which are commonly practised. There are some however who must be excepted, and among these are the pious and learned Archbishop of Cambray ||, Bishop Hall §, and some even of the present age\*.

But

|| Dialog. on Eloq. p. 9.

§ Contemplations on Historical Passages of the Old and New Testament.

\* Dr. Dodd has attempted something in this way in one or two of his Sermons to Young Men.

Those

But however great the authority of these names may be, I would not chuse to recommend this scheme of instruction merely from a regard to them. Let us but ma-

Those formed upon this plan, are perhaps none of the least valuable of his discourses; and though not pursued so far in this tract as might have been done, shew what noble scope for the instruction and entertainment of his hearers the subject afforded him.

To each of his Sermons, in the collection published under the above-mentioned title, he has annexed a variety of striking Anecdotes. Could these have been wrought into the body of the discourses, they would perhaps have appeared with more beauty and propriety, and had a better effect. But I own it would be dangerous to encourage the introduction of many anecdotes from profane history into our sermons, because the judgment and taste of the preacher cannot always be depended on for a proper selection of them.

But as this is a danger that purely arises from a wrong choice or application of them, it can be no objection against the scheme we recommend. Nay, I cannot conclude this note without observing, that I do not remember ever to have heard these Sermons mentioned, but they were commended for the Anecdotes subjoined to them, which shews how taking the method of sermonizing we recommend might be made, if properly executed.

turely



turely consider the matter, and we shall find that it contains it's own recommendation, in the advantages which result from it—Advantages, some of which respect the preacher; and some, the hearers; besides those of a general nature.

With respect to the preacher, is it not admirably adapted to furnish him with the richest, yea indeed an inexhaustible fund of the most pertinent materials, for illustrating, adorning, or enforcing his subject with the greatest advantage? Whether he is to recommend any virtue, or dissuade from any vice, he is, by these means, enabled to paint the beauties of the one and the deformities of the other, as it were from real life; and so to do both with greater advantage than he could possibly have done in any other way. Viewed in this light, virtue and vice appear, in a manner embodied; so that the moral painter can trace the features, and hit the likenesses, with the utmost precision and exactness, and thus give the copy he draws, all the resemblance to the life or original that it can bear. What a large and rich  
field

field has the sacred History afforded for the pencils of a *Raphael*, a *Michael Angelo*, &c? Who can behold some of the pieces done by these masterly hands, and see how the canvas glows with expression, but must, while they admire their happy art and skill, secretly blush that they have themselves never attempted any thing similar, in another species of painting analogous to this?

The Painter endeavours, by the eye, to find his way to the heart. The Orator principally by the ear. The eye, it is true, conveys the quickest and most delicate perceptions into the mind; but the ear is also capable of exciting very soft and tender feelings; and the Orator, by the means of both, which he may happily unite, has his audience in a manner at his command. Witness the wonders which have been done by a *Demosthenes* at Athens, and a *Cicero* at Rome. And what should hinder the Christian Orator to have a similar influence upon his hearers, did he but attend to, and know how to improve the advantages with which  
he

he is furnished from that very religion, which it is his business to teach?

But perhaps it may not be disagreeable to the reader to enter a little into the detail, and by some instances, to prove and illustrate the above observations.

Were the Christian Divine to attempt a proof of a divine Superintendance; and of the wisdom and goodness, as well as power, with which it is conducted, what noble scope is afforded for the several parts of this design, from an attentive consideration of the History of Joseph? Among other valuable purposes which it is calculated to answer, it was no doubt recorded to be a noble illustration of this important truth of Religion: And to this end it is admirably subservient. For who can trace the several vicissitudes through which he passed, and observe the order of their succession, but must, now when the event has unravelled the whole design, discern the clearest strictures of consummate wisdom in each of them? The end which Providence aimed at,

at, in the whole of this complicated scheme, was his elevation to the post of the highest honour and trust in Egyyt, next to Pharoah, that thereby he might become the happy instrument of preserving a people, who were afterwards to be honoured with the sacred Oracles, and by preserving alive the knowledge and religion of the true God in the world, were gradually to prepare it for the last and most perfect dispensation of it which was to be offered to them.

Take any part of this vast and complicated scheme of Providence separately, and there appears nothing very wonderful in it: Or, if there be any thing that strikes you, it is the seeming hardship and severity which Joseph met with. Abstractedly considered, the tendency of them is to lead into unfavourable conclusions against a divine Providence in general, or the manner of it's administration in particular.

But taken in their connexion (and a connexion there evidently appears betwixt them)

them) what a beautiful *whole* do they form? When the cloud is dispelled, in which the design of Providence was enveloped to secure the accomplishment of it, how must we admire the propriety, of what perhaps our ignorance pronounced a blunder? With what amazing dignity does the conduct of God, now it is unfolded, appear in the whole of this matter? Though encircled with light, yet he is concealed from human view by impenetrable darkness. He goeth by, and we see him not: He worketh on the right hand and on the left, and we perceive him not; and maketh our very ignorance subservient to the execution of his plans, which our knowledge of them might perhaps have prompted us to oppose.

From the plan of Providence, so far as it is discovered to us in this valuable piece of History, let us now turn our attention to the character of the illustrious Joseph, who makes the principal figure in it; and how many excellent hints does it afford, that may be easily improved by the  
Preacher,

Preacher, for the interest of Religion and Virtue ?

To do justice to such a character by a proper delineation of it, would require a most masterly hand, a delicate pencil, the the finest colours, and the greatest skill in laying them on.

A delineation of it is not what I aim at, were I equal to the task: My design does not lead me so much as to make the attempt. All I have in view is no more than to make a few strictures upon it, from the account we have of it in the history before us.

The sacred writers draw characters in a manner peculiar to themselves. They tell us what the good men they celebrate were, only by letting us know what they did. Let us then attend to this illustrious Personage; illustrious indeed by birth, but rendered still more so by his noble behaviour: Let us, I say, attend him through some of those complicated scenes through which he passed,

ied, and how can we but admire and learn from his conduct in each of them? During the first period of his life, we find little remarkable concerning him, but his sufferings. The first time we find him distinguished by the noble manner of his behaviour, is when the passion which his mistress entertained for him, opened to him, by the gratification of it, the prospect of a speedy elevation to honour and preferment, without the least risque of a discovery of the means by which he should be raised to it. In these circumstances how does he, with a firmness of soul, which nothing but Religion could inspire, and which bespeaks a strength of virtue uncommon in his juvenile years, despise the most flattering hopes that could be given him, when they could only be indulged at the expence of his innocence? Penetrated with a belief of Deity, a sense of honour and a sacred regard to the dictates of conscience, how does he, with a resolution that will ever do honour to his memory, prefer the favour of his God to the smiles of a *wanton*; and the pleasures  
which

which arise from conscious innocence, to those which are only to be obtained by criminal indulgence? *How can I do this evil, &c.* An appeal this to her conscience, which in the circumstances of the case, carries a remarkable beauty in it, a sharp reproof of her impudence, and a spirited intimation of his determined purpose to withstand every attempt she could possibly make to corrupt his virtue.

Trained up in the school of adversity, and under its painful but wholesome discipline improved in virtue, let us now behold him advanced to the highest honours in Egypt next to Pharoah, and become the prime Minister of his court.

Often have we seen those who have stood firm under the shocks of adversity, softened and corrupted by the pleasures of prosperity, elated with pride, unfeeling to the distresses of others, and unmindful of all but themselves. But so much the reverse of this was the case of Joseph, that his



elevation, which served to render his conduct more conspicuous, served also to render it more illustrious, and to set it off with new grace and beauty. In the high rank in which he is now placed, with what dignity does he appear as a Prime Minister? With what humanity, as a fellow subject? How does he happily unite the character of the courtier and the honest man; and happy in serving both at the same time, shew an equally prudent regard to the honour of his Prince and the interests of the subject §.

§ How different the character of Joseph, considered as a courtier, from the character of a courtier, as drawn by the masterly hand of the Baron de Montesquieu. “Ambition (says he) joined to idleness, and baseness to pride; a desire of obtaining riches without labour, and an aversion to truth; flattery, treason, perfidy, violation of engagements, contempt of civil duties, fear of the prince’s virtue, hope from his weakness, but above all a perpetual ridicule cast upon virtue, are, I think, the characteristics by which most courtiers, in all ages and countries, have been constantly distinguished.” Spirit of Laws. V. I. B. III. chap. 5. See from this contrast, to what dignity Religion can exalt a character, even that which perhaps of all others, stands most exposed to corruption, from the temptations that are inseparable from it.

I might also observe that, during his residence and power at the Egyptian court, a favourable opportunity offered itself of gratifying his resentment (if he had any) upon his perfidious and unnatural brethren, for their more than barbarous treatment of him in his younger years : An opportunity which another, of a spirit less noble and generous, would have grasped at; but which only served to shew the pleasure, which superior to every thing mean, little or base, he took in indulging the overflowing benevolence of his heart towards them.

But to pass over this and several other interesting scenes of his life, which I might take notice of from the history we have of it, let what I have observed above serve as a specimen of my design.

What a variety and dignity appear in this character ? Who can attend to it and not be charmed with it ; so charmed as to be fired with an ambition of imitating it in those things, which fall within their sphere and reach ?

Must he not be deficient in true taste, as well as in real goodness, who does not admire the excellence of his conduct; and grossly inattentive, who does not learn from it? Considered in the view we suggest, this piece of history is equally edifying and entertaining: Can there be any method thought of, better calculated to gain the belief, and fix the impression of some of the most important truths, than such an account of a series of events, all of them remarkable, and as it were, held forth before our eyes? Let us suppose that God had by any of his prophets, delivered to us, in the didactic way, all the instructions which may be derived from this piece of history, and that we had read them over ever so attentively, must we not be conscious to ourselves that they would not make the same impression upon us, as when we are taught to read them in real life?

In this way of instruction, it may be said that God has, as it were, given us a proof of the necessity of consideration in Religion,

gion, because though the serious and attentive may read the most useful lectures from this piece of history, to others it will only serve to tickle the fancy, like a well-wrought story, and so be considered purely as a piece of entertainment. The instructions which it suggests are not too deep to be reached by the attentive, and yet they are not near enough the surface to strike the superficial Reader. But to proceed.

Were the Preacher to attempt a proof of the excellence of Religion, from the happy influence it has upon it's votaries, in some of the most trying scenes of life, how could he do it better, than by pointing out some of the many reviving cordials which it ministered to Noah, under the banter and reproaches of a degenerate age, and the anticipated prospect and forebodings of a perishing world; to Abraham, in all the disadvantages he laboured under from his wandering and unsettled life, and particularly in that most affecting scene of it, the intended

sacrifice

sacrifice of his darling, his only son, Isaac ; to Job, when borne down under the pressure of the most painful and complicated afflictions ; to Shadrach, &c. under the frowns of a proud and enraged Prince, and the threatned destruction from a fiery furnace or ravenous lions ; to David, under the variety of distresses he passed through, from the time he left the peaceful scenes of a rural life, and mounted the throne of Israel, till that in which he left it to his son ? Were the Preacher to represent the triumphs of Religion over the soft delicacies of pleasure, even all these that a most magnificent court could afford, with what advantage might he do this, from a delineation of the conduct of Moses, the illustrious Founder of the State and Religion of Israel ? Can any thing better expose the folly of trusting to uncertain riches, or of building the hopes of happiness upon a possession of the good graces and favour of the great, than the consideration of the sudden fall, the unexpected disgrace, and miserable end of Haman ? In what point of light, can the inconsistency betwixt an immoderate



love of the world and a love of religion, in one and the same person, appear more strongly than when viewed in the conduct of the young man, who came to our Lord, desirous of knowing what he should do to inherit eternal Life, but went away sorrowful when he found that there might be some cases in which he could not at once hold religion and his possessions, and that in such circumstances, it was incumbent upon him to part with the latter? How odious and detestable does the nature of pride, hypocrisy, and uncharitableness appear when the mask is pulled off the ostentatious Pharisee? Though disguised, they assume the appearance, and are dignified with the name of religious, and thus are sometimes mistaken for it. What can afford a better opportunity of shewing, how opposite an intemperate zeal and persecuting spirit are to the genius of the religion of Jesus, than the severe rebuke he gave his disciples, for so much as proposing to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, for an instance of churlish inhospitality to them and their

Master ? To correct a spirit of censoriousness and uncharitable judgment, what excellent hints are suggested by our Lord, in the story of those who were destroyed by the fall of the tower of Siloam ? Were one to draw the picture of a devout man, what admirable strictures are afforded in the character of Cornelius, in that reverence and veneration for the Deity for which he was distinguished, and those acts of piety and beneficence in which they expressed themselves ? How amiable does the character given of Zacharias and Elizabeth appear, and who that attentively considers the description which the sacred historian gives of it, can be at a loss to illustrate the nature of that true piety, for which they are so justly celebrated ? What an excellent opportunity does the character given by our Lord of Nathaniel afford, of unfolding that singleness of heart, and simplicity of manners, for which the high encomium of an *Israélite indeed, in whom there was no guile*, was bestowed upon him ? And does it not suggest some of the most important hints

hints for cultivating this amiable disposition of heart and conduct of life ? In fine, for the instances are numberless which I might mention, what ample scope is afforded for the recommendation of the virtues of a holy life, in the history we have of our Saviour's ? What a variety of scenes did he pass through, and with what a noble dignity did he act in them all ? In his life we find an assemblage of all those graces and virtues which we are required to cultivate and practise, and the acquisition of which can become either ornamental to our character, or conducive to our happiness. In the person of Jesus, the Deity has made the nearest approach to us our present state could bear. Unveiled, he would be an object too bright for mortals to behold. The intellectual eye, as well as that of the body, can only perform its proper function, when the degrees of light, which are necessary for vision, are proportioned to its strength. Too much, as well as too little light, renders it incapable of discerning, but in a confused manner, the  
 objects



objects before it. The Deity therefore, to give us as perfect an idea of his nature, as ours can at present form, has been pleased to temper, as it were, the lustre of his perfections, with humanity, in the person of our Lord, and by thus enabling us to contemplate them, has given us a happy opportunity of acquiring, by a constant imitation, a growing likeness and resemblance to many of them. In what way, therefore, more promising of success, can the Christian Divine either teach the knowledge, or inculcate the practice of virtue, than by a frequent illustration of the several branches of our Lord's character, which is as it were held up to view, to attract attention and allure imitation ?

From the induction I have made of historical passages, it is easy for the attentive reader to discern how admirably adapted they are, by a proper management, to promote the purposes of Religion, to which we took notice they might be applied; and therefore, that had our plan of sermo-

nizing

nizing nothing else but this to recommend it, it deserves the attention of the teachers of Religion. But besides these, there are many other advantages that naturally result from it.

As it furnishes the proper materials with which to enrich a discourse, so it affords the preacher an excellent opportunity of interesting the hearts of his hearers, by enabling him to animate as it were every thing he says, and thus to communicate a spirit and energy to it, which it must have otherwise wanted.

Upon this plan he paints, not from fancy, but from real life; and what can give more value, as well as expression to all his pictures, than this, that they are copies which have a reality, not a fiction for their original?

The preacher should remember that his sole business is not to instruct his hearers. He should also endeavour to reform them.

For

For these purposes therefore, he must not only address the understanding, and place truth, which is the proper object of it, in such a favourable point of view, as that it may be seen undisguised, and as it really is, but he must also, if he would command their practice, endeavour to work upon and interest their affections. Nor is there in this any thing unfair, as some, who are averse to this method, would alledge. Their views of human nature must be very imperfect, if not wrong, who can think of managing it in any other way. For though it is the province of reason to direct what is proper to be done, the passions are the springs of action, and must set all in motion, and I know no method of sermonizing that may be made more subservient to this valuable purpose, than that which it is the design of this essay to recommend.

The judgment of the preacher must be employed in the selection of proper materials, and in the due order and arrangement of them; but to manage these so as to strike  
the

the mind with due force, to keep up the attention, and interest the hearts of his hearers, is in a great measure, the province of another power, viz. the imagination: A power however, which, though it must be indulged, must be also check'd, else like a fiery courser without a curb, it would be apt to lead into the wildest excursions imaginable. The method proposed is well calculated to answer both these ends—To raise the fancy, where it is not altogether dull and languid; and at the same time to restrain it, when from indulgence it is in danger of becoming licentious. For as there is no piece of history we would make the subject of any moral discourse, but must abound with such a variety of incidents, as cannot fail to strike out some new light to the mind that seriously considers it, must it not also, from the connexion of it's several parts, naturally serve to call back the mind from it's wild flights, when it would soar into the regions of airy speculation, and to remind it that no flights are to be indulged, in which they may loose  
fight

fight of their subject; no painting to be allowed, that does not tend to set off the whole by an agreeable union, and just relation of the several parts? In the limning art, the whole dexterity does not lie in adjusting and laying on the colours. The attitude, the proportion, symmetry and relation of the parts, upon which depends the beauty of the whole, rest in a great measure, upon the skill of drawing the contours. These once formed upon the canvas, and approved by a well cultivated judgment and taste, the Painter's business is, by properly laying on the colours, to form the light and shade, and thus to give his piece expression, beauty, perfection.

These observations may be transferred from the limning to the preaching art, as in many respects the analogy is very strong betwixt them. What contours are in the one, the great lines of a character, or piece of history, are in the other. The relation and connexion of the parts must be attended to. Separated from each other,

OR

or joined by unnatural union, what a shocking appearance must they make ! Properly fitted and adapted, how beautiful and comely ! On these hints it were easy to enlarge. But enough it is hoped has been said, to evince the justness of the observation which they were adduced to support.

Another advantage the preacher would have by a frequent use of this method is, that it would furnish him with excellent opportunities of exposing the deformity of vice, and lashing it with just severity, without falling under the suspicion of a particular application intended against any of his hearers, than which nothing could more effectually contribute to prevent his success.

In nothing perhaps, is more knowledge of human nature, more prudence and delicacy necessary, than in this part of the Christian Orator's task. A zeal for the honour of religion, and the most important interests

terests of mankind, will not allow the friends of either to look on with indifference at the prevalence of vice. But how to give a successful check to it, is a question often puzzling to the greatest sagacity. Knowledge is not more necessary, than prudence and a wise management, in the manner of attempting a reformation. To combat the prejudices and vices of mankind sword in hand, is ever unpromising of success, and he must be unacquainted with human nature who will attempt it in this way. The attack should be carried on, rather by sap, than by open assault: The contrary method would only serve to irritate, and provoke the man's angry passions against his friendly, but in this instance, indiscreet monitor, and by making him consider the admonitions given him, as the effect of passion, rather than of an honest zeal for religion, defeat the design they were intended to serve.

It may be alledged that this inconveniency might be prevented, and all the good ends  
 proposed

proposed by the method we recommend, gained in another way—such as by figuring out the case as possible—or by expressing one's fears, and dropping a suspicion, that it does actually exist, without so much as hinting any thing that might seem to point at individuals. Such a method as this, where scripture examples or characters to the purpose cannot be found, is the next best, and should not be neglected: But as guilt is generally very suspicious, it is not improbable that it would immediately take the hint, and consider all as levelled directly against itself: Whereas, by the delineation of a scripture character, similar to that which he would wish to reform, the Preacher has a happy opportunity of exposing vice, and the danger of a continued indulgence in it, and by thus engaging the man to make the application to himself, to bring about a reformation, without his so much as suspecting that he was discovered, or in the Preacher's view.



Thus the Preacher holds up a glass to his hearers, in which they may behold their own features, and see what manner of persons they are: He constitutes them judges of their own character, and by the sentence which in a borrowed character they pass upon themselves, he extorts a decision from them, which in any other way, he could not have procured, on account of the partiality of self-love.

In this manner it was that Nathan acted, when, by commission from God, he went to reprove David King of Israel, for the heinous sins of adultery and murder, of which he had been guilty in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah. Who but must admire the address with which the Prophet carried on his design?—It was equal to its success. There was scarce any other, all circumstances considered, by which he could, unsuspected, have had access to the heart of this royal offender. The elevation to which he was raised, and the power of which he was possessed, would have made the want of prudence in conveying the re-

proof,

proof, equally dangerous to the monitor, as it would have been indelicate to the Prince.

In the mood David then was—possessed of the object of his wishes, by the removal of Uriah, and Bathsheba's becoming the partner of his bed, he would have taken it highly amiss that any of his subjects, even those who were clothed with the most sacred character, should dare to disturb him in the midst of his pleasure and jollity. The Prophet, therefore, like one well acquainted with human nature, avoids whatever could make him refuse an attentive and candid hearing, by making him dread the intention of a particular application. And when, by a similar case which he had figured out, and which the King believed to be real, he had led him into a fair and unbiassed decision, he then boldly tells him, “Thou art the Man”. And then, though not before, he might boldly tell him so, because then he had the King upon his side against the offender; David against himself.

It is true it may be said, this manner of reproof seems to have failed in the very instance particularized, and therefore the Prophet is obliged to make the application to the King, since he would not to himself. True—But this says nothing against the propriety of this manner, but against the insensibility of David's heart at this time, not yet recovered from that stupor (if I may so call it) with respect to Religion, into which he was thrown by the inebriating draughts of criminal pleasure in which he had indulged. In a case such as his, where the mind seems to labour under a temporary numbedness, terms more plain, like a stimulating medicine, must be used to recover it's sensibility. But it is to be hoped, that the instances which make this manner necessary, are not so frequent as some people's fears would represent them.

Where the mind is not become callous, and any degrees of tendernefs yet remain, the man who is addicted to any particular vice, when he hears the nature of it exposed

posed in a promiscuous assembly, is quick enough to discern the deformity of his own character, which perhaps never shocked him before, till he was thus taught to view it in the person of another; and happy at the same time, in the hopes that he has yet passed undiscovered, and that there is no particular application intended against him, he blushes in secret, he becomes his own accuser, he reproaches himself for his fault, and instantly sets about a reformation and amendment, which is all the Preacher drives at.

These are not yet all the advantages the Preacher may derive from this plan. It would, if more followed, serve gradually to wean him from that violent attachment to system, which, from the course of his early studies, and the general run of books hitherto written upon Religion, he is apt to contract, than which there are perhaps few things that have carried after them worse consequences to Religion. Not but it might be useful, highly useful, for the

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young

young divine, to be so far acquainted with systems, as to be able to form to himself some regular, connected, and consistent scheme of religious truths. The fault lies not here, but in that passion he is apt to contract for systems, if he is not careful early to check it. “ The bad consequences of such systems (i. e. of forming the articles of religious belief into systems of metaphysical subtlety) have been, says an ingenious author, “ various. By attempting to establish too much, they “ have hurt the foundation of the most interesting principles of religion. Most “ men are bred up in a belief of the peculiar and distinguishing opinions of “ one religious sect or other. They are “ taught that these are equally founded on “ divine authority, or the clearest deductions of reason. By which means all “ their Religion hangs so much together, “ that one part cannot be shaken without endangering the whole. But wherever any freedom of enquiry is allowed, “ the folly of some of these opinions, “ and

“ and the uncertain foundations of others,  
 “ cannot be concealed ; and when this  
 “ comes to be the case, a general distrust  
 “ of the whole commonly succeeds, with  
 “ that lukewarmness in Religion, which  
 “ is it’s necessary consequence. Another  
 “ bad effect of this speculative Theology  
 “ has been to withdraw people’s attention  
 “ from it’s practical duties. We usually  
 “ find that those, who are most distin-  
 “ guished by their excessive zeal for opinions  
 “ in Religion, shew great moderation and  
 “ coolness as to it’s precepts. But the  
 “ worst effects of speculative and contro-  
 “ versial Theology, are those which it pro-  
 “ duces on the temper and affections.  
 “ When the mind is kept constantly em-  
 “ barassed in a perplexed and thorny path,  
 “ where it can find no steady light to shew  
 “ the way, nor foundation to rest on ; the  
 “ temper loses it’s native cheerfulness, and  
 “ contracts a gloom and severity, partly  
 “ from the chagrin of disappointment, and  
 “ partly from the social and kind affections  
 “ being extinguished for want of exercise.

“ In general, it would appear that Religion,  
 “ considered as a science, in the manner  
 “ it has been usually conducted, is but  
 “ little beneficial to mankind, neither  
 “ tending to enlarge the understanding,  
 “ sweeten the temper, or mend the heart.  
 “ At the same time the labours of inge-  
 “ nious men, in explaining obscure and  
 “ difficult passages of sacred writ, have  
 “ been highly useful and necessary. And  
 “ as it is natural for men to carry their  
 “ speculations on a subject, that so nearly  
 “ concerns their present and eternal hap-  
 “ piness, farther than reason extends, or  
 “ than is clearly and expressly revealed,  
 “ these can be followed by no bad conse-  
 “ quences, if they are carried on with that  
 “ modesty and reverence which the subject  
 “ requires. They only become pernicious  
 “ when they are formed into systems,  
 “ to which the same credit and submission  
 “ is required as to holy writ itself §.”

§ Dr. Gregory's Comparative View, &c. Sect. V.

Besides

Besides the inconveniencies just now mentioned, allow me to observe that systems have given rise to metaphysical distinction, and technical terms, many of which serve only to perplex the subject, and conceal the ignorance of those who would attempt to explain it. This is the veil behind which the ignorance of many seeks to sculk and hide itself: And he who would attempt to draw it aside, or remove it altogether, may be assured that the sticklers for system will raise the cry of heresy against him, as the ignorant and superstitious among the Athenians did against the great Socrates, when in place of introducing any dangerous notions into their Theology, he only endeavoured to correct those which they had early imbibed, and which were truly so. The croud, from the veneration they have for their leaders, join in the cry, and raise it still louder against the bold innovator.

Their



Their conduct in this respect, as it is less criminal, so it is not so much to be wondered at, as that of those who encourage them in it. Long accustomed to have all their religious instructions conveyed to them in a certain vehicle, they come at last not only to be fond of it, but to imagine that every other must be improper.—They contract a liking for certain phrases.—These become venerable and sacred by long use, and claim a preference to others from a prescription in their favour. And yet, as all language is in a continual fluctuation, they come at last, to convey ideas quite different from the original intention of them, and so to promote ignorance in place of knowledge. These phrases might, when first introduced, have been abundantly intelligible, but in process of time, by the several variations which language undergoes, become utterly obscure. Take a plain proof of this. — Call upon those who are continually chiming them over, and ringing them in the ears of all around them, to explain their meaning, and you will

will not find one in a thousand who can do it: And no wonder indeed, because they have no determinate ideas affixed to them, and yet the passion for system hands them down, and makes the man, from the frequent use of them imagine he understands them fully. This is a species of deceit which mankind are very apt to practise upon themselves. They can talk fluently upon Religion in a certain sanctified stile, and therefore flatter themselves they are adepts in the knowledge of it—They are unwilling to be at the trouble of a laboured inquiry. — This indulges their sloth, and at the same time sooths their pride—Glad to imagine themselves more knowing than they really are, no wonder they should be averse from the detection of a deceit, which all at once humbles their pride and sets them upon the acquisition of knowledge in a more laborious course. A proof of these observations we have in that *local* divinity (if I may so call it) which we often meet with. Talk to the people in a set of phrases they have been long accustomed to hear, from those  
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they were early taught to venerate, and they are pleased—I wish I could say, always edified likewise. But preach the same truth to them in other language, they can find no relish in it; and can scarcely believe it to be the same, because exhibited in a different dress. And what is the consequence of such conceit? Why, very often, a rooted aversion to the young Preacher, who has not learned, or does not chuse to speak their language—all the opposition in their power to his settlement, and sometimes all the disturbance they can give, after it.

These, and many more inconveniences which I might take notice of, are the genuine consequences of a violent attachment to system, and are of a nature so serious and important that they deserve attention. They might, in a great measure, be prevented by a more liberal manner of instruction, particularly by a more frequent illustration of scripture-history and characters.

It

It is observable that the scriptures deal very little in definitions of the particular doctrines of Religion. They consider them as so many separate principles of action, and therefore refer us to their influence upon life, i. e. to their effects, as the best way of becoming acquainted with their nature and the manner of their operation, and so hint to us, that the best method of conveying the knowledge of them to others, is by an illustration of that history in which they are transmitted to us. Thus for example, did we, in explaining the nature and influence of faith, refer to the life of Abraham, who in so eminent a manner acted under the direction of it, would it not give us an opportunity of illustrating both, with a satisfaction far greater than could possibly be given by all the learned distinctions, cramp terms, and obscure definitions of the schools?

I might illustrate this observation with respect to the other doctrines of Religion, by tracing in the same manner their influence

fluence upon the lives of it's votaries, but this may suffice, and at the same time shew, that did this method more generally prevail, the other would gradually wear out, and all the unhappy effects consequent upon the indulgence of it, would of course cease.

Neither needs the systematic Preacher to be afraid of losing his popularity, by adopting the method we recommend. He may equally maintain it by the one as by the other; nay with due pains, he may greatly increase it, and increase it too without any just ground of censure on that account. A popular Preacher is with many a character of contempt. How comes it to be so? One should think it would convey a quite different idea.—Why does it not? The reason is, because it leads one to conclude that his manner is accommodated to the taste of the populace, or formed upon the stiff and pedantic rules of the schools. And had there not been too frequent reason given for the reflection,  
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it could not have so much prevailed. Popular every Preacher should study to be, who would wish to be successful—But the mean popularity that is to be acquired by pleasing without edifying, as an honest man he ought to be ashamed of courting; and as a man of ambition, why should he in this way court popularity, when it may be attained in another, far from criminal, and more respectable? No doubt the people who have been long accustomed to the systematic manner, will not all at once, be reconciled to the other—But the violence of their attachment to it indicates, that it is more than time to wean them from it. And if another method can be substituted in the place of it, by which they, as well as those of a better taste, may be pleased and edified (and I humbly think this is abundantly practicable, as there is nothing incompatible in the character of a good and popular Preacher) such method must be owned by every impartial person to deserve the preference. After frequently revolving the subject in my own mind,

mind, and conversing with others who may be supposed to have turned their attention most to it, I can think of no method more promising of success for refining the taste, and enlarging the views of the Preacher, and at the same time for promoting the entertainment and instruction of the hearers, than that under consideration.

This brings to my view another advantage (and it is none of the least) which the Preacher may derive from the prosecution of the plan proposed; and that is, an improvement in a branch of knowledge but little studied, and yet indispensibly necessary to his success, I mean the knowledge of human nature.

• In this branch of knowledge it tends to improve him by leading him to view human nature in such a variety of lights, by discovering to him the manner in which it has acted in certain circumstances, and the good or bad consequences of such a conduct. And may not every one see how this improvement

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ment does not terminate in the Preacher himself, but extends it's happy influence to others, by enabling him to point out to them that course of life which they ought to follow, and to enforce his instructions by the strongest motives, from a display of what would be the probable consequences of an attention to, or disregard of them.

The Preacher is not solely the gainer by this method of sermonizing—It carries along with it many advantages to the hearers also: And as their improvement is what ought to be aimed at in all public lectures upon Religion, in this must consist a great part of it's excellence.

One particular advantage of discourses formed upon this plan is, that they are calculated to strike the mind more forcibly, and thereby to secure the attention, better than any other way that has yet been adopted.



Such is the constitution of the human mind, that it is incapable of attending long to things in their own nature spiritual and invifible; much lefs to a jejune, ftiff argumentation concerning them. The mind wearies—the attention is loft, and our thoughts begin to wander and ramble. He therefore who would attempt by dry difputation, or unaffecting narrative, to interest the heart, and by the influence of it's tenderest, which are it's fineft feelings, to reform the life, is not more a ft ranger to the nature of christianity, than he is to the nature of man.

Our ftrongest impressions are from fenfible objects. Hence therefore, among other reasons, it was, that an emblematical or fymbolical fervice of Religion obtained in the early ages of the world. In thofe early times, mankind had received but little improvement from fcience: Their fituation did not allow them to beftow much time upon the ftudy of it: Their feelings muft, of courfe, have been  
lefs

less tender and delicate, and therefore God was pleased, as it were, to manifest himself to their senses, and in this manner to affect their minds, since their circumstances would scarce admit of doing it in any other. This will in a great measure account for the nature of the Mosaic institution of Religion—It was not arbitrary—It was, of all others, the best suited to the rude state of the world, and the genius of the people of Israel, at that time. It is true, a great part of its ritual might also be intended to lead forward the views of that people to the Christian dispensation, which was so long of opening for no other reason, but because the world was not sooner prepared for receiving it. When it takes place, the gross services of the former dispensation cease, the reasons no longer remaining which first introduced them. But though the dispensation of the gospel is a most refined and spiritual one, still a few rites of a sensible nature are continued under it. These seem intended as an intimation, if not of the necessity, yet of the importance of

some such, in our present embodied state, and a hint to us, that to inculcate abstract and divine truths with advantage, it may be highly useful to clothe them, as it were, with matter, and thus, in a manner, render them visible. Now what excellent advantages does the proposed method of instruction afford the Preacher for this purpose? Does it not enable him to draw his picture of virtue from real life, and to exhibit it with such grace and dignity, as can scarce fail to win upon the hearts of all who are not obstinately prejudiced against her, or insensible of her charms? Does it not likewise enable him to paint vice with such haggard looks, such deformed appearance, and followed by so dismal a train, as are enough to fright all from her, or at least, to put them upon their guard against the dangerous addresses of her Syren tongue? Its aptitude to serve the interests of Religion in this way, is too apparent to need a proof:

While

While I insist on the advantage of this plan of instruction, from the tendency it has to secure the attention of the hearers, I cannot omit taking notice of a circumstance, though it be purely adventitious, which is greatly in its favour, and that is—the rareness of it. Human nature is so framed as to be fond of novelty—The most agreeable objects cease to please, from the constant view of that sameness in them which we are accustomed to behold. Upon this principle, how fond does almost every audience seem of a variety of Preachers? They may upon the whole, be well enough pleased with him who labours in word and doctrine among them, but it requires great art and address to keep up that fondness that will secure a punctual attendance upon, and a close attention to the instructions offered by him; and yet both are necessary to render his services eminently useful.

Attentive therefore, to this (if you please so to call it) foible of human nature,

ought not every minister, by all fair means, to avail himself of it, and by diversifying his manner, and thus gratifying the taste of his hearers for novelty, to promote their instruction?

The Preacher is indeed restricted as to the repast he is to lay before them. Fancy must not be allowed to roam in quest of new dainties. What God has provided, that he must serve up. And though in this there be such an abundance, as must remove every pretence for a foreign supply, yet lest the entertainment, by being always prepared and served up in the same manner, should excite disgust, would it not be proper to give a different garnish to it, when by such innocent art, the taste is like to be better pleased, and the relish for things spiritual and divine increased and heightened?

Religious instruction offered in this manner to the mind, will not only command its attention, but make a deep and lasting  
impression

impression upon it, and so render the knowledge thus acquired proportionably useful.

The most important instructions conveyed to the mind, in the way of unaf-fecting narrative, or metaphysical argu-mentation, may afford some pleasure in the mean time, while the advantage of them is before the mind; but when this is re-moved by the presence of some new objects, and kept out of view by a continued suc-cession of them, the traces made by them, which were at first but slight, are entirely worn out and effaced. Whereas the cir-cumstances which attend those instructions that are offered from historical facts, are like colour, attitude and shape in pictures—like remarkable objects in a landscape—they serve to distinguish the subject with which they are connected, in such various points of view, that should they be forgot in one, they may be remembered in some other. And thus the mind, by the power it has of associating its ideas, is with great facility, or at least, without much trou-  
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ble, enabled to bring back to its remembrance, what must have otherwise escaped it.

As a happy consequence of all the former advantages, this method of instruction would be productive of another of the greatest importance; so great, that all the rest derive their subserviency to this.—It would be admirably fitted to have the most powerful and happy influence upon practice, and that not only by the rich variety of facts with which it would store the mind, but also by the ease with which the mind would be hereby enabled to apply them to the most useful purposes in life. By observing the correspondence betwixt our own situation and that of others, and attending to the part they acted, and the consequences of it, we may not only learn, but are strongly induced, to act with propriety. If the character exhibited to our view be a good one, it affords a very powerful motive to the imitation of it, not only in the demonstration that is hereby given us of the practicability of what is required, but also

also in the attractive virtue it carries along with it:—A virtue, by which it steals upon our affections, insinuates itself into our very souls and, by imperceptible degrees, assimilates us to itself. Neither is the exhibition of bad characters without its great use in life.—It will, in a manner incomparably more strong than any general discourse upon vice, expose the deformity of it, and the dangers to which it lays its votaries open, and thus in the fall of others, teach us our own frailty, and from their ruin, how to prevent our own. Thus they will serve to us, in our passage through life, as beacons to those who sail in a dangerous sea, a faithful warning of the hazard to which we are exposed—An intimation that our only safety lies in keeping at a distance from these rocks upon which they are erected, and upon which others were unhappy enough to have perished.

But besides the advantages I have taken notice of, which are all of a particular, there are some which are of a general nature.



nature. Of this last kind, the following is none of the least considerable, that from an attention to Scripture History and characters, we are enabled to bring a vindication of Religion and it's votaries ; of the one against the charge of unreasonableness ; and of the other, against the imputation of a fond credulity or wild enthusiasm, by shewing that the practice of virtue is perfectly consistent with the nature of man, and cannot be neglected without offering a kind of violence to it. Let us examine and then judge.

To carry back our enquiry as far as the time of Noah : What was it that made him undertake the building of an ark for the preservation of himself and his family, amidst the wreck of nature ? What made him persevere in the attempt, amidst all the ridicule and discouragements he met with from that corrupt and licentious age in which he lived ? Was it not his faith, or confidence in the divine intimations which had been made to him that this was the  
only

only method by which he could escape being swept off, with the rest of mankind, by the overflowing deluge? In what manner shall we account for the conduct of Abraham, in leaving his native country to go in quest of a settlement in a strange, foreign and distant one, and in submitting to all the inconveniences he was exposed to, during his unsettled situation there? How shall we account for all this, in consistency with that good sense for which he appears to have been all along distinguished? In what way, but by resolving it into a sacred regard to the divine authority which required it, an unshaken confidence in a superintending Providence, and a just sense of the obligations he was under to acquiesce in the appointments of it? Nay, what could have prompted him to set about the sacrifice of his only son Isaac? Was he a stranger to the bowels of a parent? Was he indifferent about the duration of his family, or the interests of the Church of God, which were connected with it? Neither was the case. He received his son  
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at a period both of his own life and of Sarah's altogether unexpected, to be the foundation of his numerous family and the Church of God. He was accordingly the hope of both, and the darling of his father's soul. Thus dear to him, what principle could be supposed to operate more strongly in his breast than affection, if possible still stronger than parental, from the circumstances of the case? Difficult as it is to conceive another more powerful yet another there was—and what else could this be, but an inviolable regard to the authority, and an unshaken faith in the promise and power of God? \*

What was it that made Moses, educated in the court, and as heir apparent to the throne of Egypt, to act the part he did? What could move him, not only to give up all his great hopes and fine prospects, but also to draw upon himself the resentment of one of the most powerful potentates

\* Heb. xi. 19.

then

then upon earth? Will humour and caprice account for his conduct? No—In every other respect so sensible, we cannot so much as suspect him of this. He was animated in the whole of his conduct, as an apostle informs us, by a constant respect to the recompence of reward, and a view of him who is invisible to our bodily senses. What seem to have been the principles upon which Joseph formed his life, in the various scenes through which he passed? Take one of these as a specimen of the difficult part he had to act in the rest. Consider the attack that was made upon his virtue by the repeated sollicitations of a wanton woman, from whose favour he had every thing to hope, from whose resentment he had every thing to dread. How was he able to resist her charms, her sollicitations, her promises, her threats, the stimulus of passion, the temptations of present pleasure, and the hopes of future grandeur? Take the answer to this question, in that he gave to her shameless importunity. “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.”

A.

A conviction of the divine omniscience, a sense of honour, and his obligations of fidelity to his master, as well as to his God, were the principles which animated him to a conduct, which points him out to succeeding ages as the deserved object of their highest veneration for these virtues. I might carry down this enquiry through many successive periods of the Church of God, but what has been noticed above is a sufficient specimen of my design. Now what is it we are led to conclude from all this? Is it not that these and such like principles as seem to have influenced the conduct of those illustrious worthies, were as so many laws to them, by which their moral conduct was governed? In the material world around us, we find there are what we commonly call *Laws of Nature*, ||  
or

|| The laws which obtain in God's government of the Moral World, might with just propriety be called *Laws of Nature*, as well as these which prevail in what is commonly called The Natural World, because equally the Laws of that God, who is the governor of universal nature. However, as the phrase, in the common ac-  
ception

or certain general laws, which are uniformly observed in what regards the subsistence, operations and harmony of it's several parts : And by an attentive observation of the phænomena, or effects which fall under our notice, we are enabled to deduce the nature of their causes, and the general laws by which they acted. And can we behold all the rest of the creation under certain laws, adapted to their respective natures, and imagine the moral world is subject to none ? There are many reasons which would make this supposition absurd. I cannot therefore help thinking that an order, something analogous to what is found in the natural, obtains also in the moral world ; and from what has been advanced in the preceding pages, it is humbly presumed it may be traced.

But it may be asked, what are those laws by which the motions of the moral world  
 ceptation of it, is understood to refer to those laws by which the material part of the creation is governed, we shall consider it in this sense too, as often as we have occasion to use it in this Essay,

should

should be governed? They are those truths, whether perceived by the light of nature, or discovered by Revelation, which may be called, *The Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*. These may be justly called Laws to the Moral World, from that force of evidence they carry along with them to support their authenticity, and that just authority with which they demand an attentive regard.

In the Science of Natural Philosophy, we have recourse to experiments, and by these examine the various phænomena which fall under our observation. Proceeding thus, in the analytic method, we shall be enabled, not only to trace the connexion betwixt the moral conduct of mankind, and certain principles as the causes of it, but also to find out what these principles are. For when we find many in different ages and countries of the world, of the greatest variety of tempers, and educated upon very different plans, yet in similar circumstances, agreeing in  
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the great lines of their conduct, may we not from thence safely conclude (it is more than an hypothesis) not only that something much the same, call it *Principle*, *Law*, or what you will, has animated them, but also that this is a general law, to which it was the will of the author of nature they should give obedience?

I know some will be apt to call that folly, which we have called wisdom, in the conduct of those illustrious personages we have lately spoken of; and to elude the force of our conclusion, will ascribe the part they have acted to the influence of superstition operating upon their minds—upon their hopes or fears. One may give things what names he will, but it should be remembered that names do not alter their nature, and assertions are not to be admitted for proofs. Nay, in the present case, it were no difficult matter to bring a proof of the very contrary of what is alleged.



It is acknowledged that hope and fear are principles implanted in our nature: And are there no objects corresponding to these? Or if there be, do they not deserve to have a regard paid to them, proportioned to their importance? If this be allowed, what can be better calculated to work upon them, than a conviction of the omniscience, rectitude, wisdom, power, and other attributes of God; the prospects of a world at present invisible to sense; and a distribution of rewards and punishments there, proportioned to our conduct and behaviour here? Is it either superstition or enthusiasm to regard these? Who that believes the reality of them can do otherwise? How does Joseph acknowledge the force of them in that nervous and pathetic exhortation? *How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.*

Not that we are to imagine that Joseph was under an absolute, or any other necessity to have acted the part he did, than that which should have determined every reasonable man, viz. That it was his ra-  
tional

ditional choice, from a full conviction of the propriety of such conduct, in preference to any other possible in such circumstances: And that he could not have acted otherwise, without doing what he must himself condemn, i. e. acting unlike a rational creature, and offering a kind of violence to the dictates of reason and religion? And traced to it's source, what else is this but acting in contradiction to the principles of our nature? Upon this supposition it is that the Apostle John says, that he who is born of God *cannot* § commit sin, i. e. he cannot do it, without the most severe reproaches against himself, from a consciousness that he ought to have done otherwise, and that by committing sin, he does what is most unreasonable.

It is very common for many to deny in one case, what without seeing the contradiction or absurdity they admit in another similar to it. So it happens here. Many are unwilling to admit the force of

§ 1 Jo. iii. 9.

the principles we have mentioned above, because they are sensible that the very admission of them carries in it a condemnation of their own conduct, in disregarding them. Thus they act with respect to Religion: And yet, upon the acknowledged obligation of principles, do they not act every day, in all the other transactions of life? Upon what foundation is the whole science of politicks raised? Upon what, but an acknowledged connexion betwixt certain principles and a practice corresponding to them? Upon this also are formed all the stratagems and manœuvres practised in the military art. To illustrate these observations a little: Suppose a man of solid judgment, profound sagacity, and deep penetration, well acquainted with another and his principles; would he not form a more than probable conjecture of the part which that other would act, in any given circumstances, from the knowledge of his principles. But why from this? Why! Because he considers him as a reasonable creature, whose conduct must be determined by some motives; and he concludes there are

none

none so likely to have an influence upon him, as those principles which he has adopted, from a conviction of their justness, and their propriety as a rule of action, in all cases where there is scope for the exercise of them.

It is true one may mistake with respect to the conduct of another in certain circumstances, but if he do, it is either because he does not fully know him, or he is, for the time, under some foreign influence, some uncommon bias which either hinders his principles from acting, or turns the direction of them into an unnatural channel. In such a case there can be no certainty what part a man will act, and therefore we say, *he is a man of no principles*, or at least of none that are permanent and steady.

In some cases an exception from the common course must be admitted in the natural as well as in the moral world. For though nothing can be more regular

and uniform than the laws of nature, and the manner of their operation, yet if these are any how obstructed, or if the direction of their force be altered, either the effect will not take place at all, or it will be different from what was looked for. But as such suspension or inversion of any law of nature, is no argument against the existence or force of it, so neither is the seemingly inconsistent variety, or discrepancy that is sometimes to be seen in the conduct of man, any argument against our general position. All it amounts to is no more than this ; that every principle of Religion must be allowed it's course, i. e. meet with no obstruction, in order to produce it's proper effect.

Nay, properly examined, this very variety and seeming inconsistency in the conduct of some, which is thought to be an objection against our position, will be found to be a proof of the justness of it.

Do

Do you see any of the votaries of Religion, whose avowed principles and conduct stand in sad opposition to one another? And do you infer from thence, that the one is not of force or authority sufficient to influence the other? Your conclusion is unjust. Such opposition of conduct to principle may justify a conclusion against their sincerity, or against the weakness, though not of the principles themselves, of their faith in them; or their inattention to them in the time of action; but it can do no more. Their conduct is a plain proof what those principles are, which bear sway in their minds for the time, and of consequence a proof, that did the principles of Religion take fast hold of their minds, and were they still present to them, they would operate in the same way, and never fail to produce their genuine effects.

Would you know the sentiments of our Lord and his Apostles on this subject? You may learn them from the stress they every where lay upon *Faith*. By this

(without troubling myself or the reader, with the distinctions of systematic or polemical divines) I here understand a firm, rational and well-grounded belief of the great articles of our Holy Religion. This is, as it were, the fundamental article of the whole Christian system, and that (I know not what to call it) which gives a force and strength to all the principles of it, or rather, by removing every obstruction, sets them at full liberty to act in their natural course and without controul. Hence it is that our Lord and his Apostles, are at such pains to bring mankind to believe the great and leading Articles of Religion, or the testimony of God concerning them. They well knew that if they did but once believe them, the force of these principles would be morally irresistible, and thus the Gospel would become *the power of God to their Salvation*. But why to them only who believe? Can there be any merit in their Faith abstractly considered, which can entitle them to salvation? or is this condition upon which it is to be bestowed

bestowed merely arbitrary? No, neither is the case. Faith is required from very different views. Because the author of our nature, well acquainted with the constitution of it, knew that if it did subsist in it's full vigor and force, it would be a commanding principle in the life, and powerfully influence to the practice of those several virtues, which are necessary either to promote the improvement of our nature, or qualify us for the enjoyment of that happiness for which we are formed. And accordingly, to the happy influence of this principle the Christian's victory over the world is ascribed §.

Attend to it, and you will find that faith is never spoken of in scripture as a speculative principle. It is all along represented as that principle which actuates all the motions and operations of the Christian life, and is as it were, the very soul of it. It is true, a faith in the principles of Religion is not always productive of that

§ 1 Jo. v. 4.

full



full effect, which we say might be expected from it. But any defect in this respect may be easily accounted for, from the weakness of our belief. For in the natural, as well as in the moral world, however powerful and efficacious the cause itself may be, if there is any thing which hinders it from acting with full vigor, this must necessarily be discerned in the effect. And what is an additional proof of the justness of this account is, that wherever this principle seems to have prevailed in it's full force, nothing in the Christian life has been found too difficult for it—It has triumphed over all opposition with ease.

I know that to this doctrine and our reasoning upon it, some will be apt to object, that it seems calculated to give too much scope to enthusiasm; and that the influence of this has appeared wonderful in Religion, as well as the influence of that faith which is most rational.

I would

I would not willingly give the least encouragement to enthusiasm, neither do I apprehend that in the present case any is given. For what if it should be granted that enthusiasm has produced the most wonderful effects in Religion, and that all that is necessary to give it full force, is no more than to believe that the principles upon which it acts, are rational and just, still our position remains unshaken by such concession. For surely it can by no means follow, that because some through ignorance, the force of prejudice, the unhappy effects of a melancholy frame of mind, or diseased temperament of body, have adopted wrong principles and acted upon them, therefore there are none right; that because some are out of their senses, none can be sure that they are in them. The principles of enthusiasm and of true religion are widely different.

The principles upon which the enthusiast acts, appear to every one but himself erroneous and irrational. They would  
do

do so to himself too, did not the distemper of his mind hinder him from discerning and judging of them aright. In his unhappy situation, his opinion concerning them is no more to be regarded, than that of a man in the jaundice with respect to colours. The one, as well as the other, thinks he is in the right, and yet to every other person, nothing can be more evident than that both are wrong. Whereas the principles of true Religion appear rational and just, not only to the persons who have adopted them, but to all who judge of them with candor—They decline no examination, and the more they are canvassed, the more they are approved. And though some times, through the violence of prejudice or passion, one may be led to act contrary to them, yet in his cool and sedate moments, he never fails to give the suffrage of his reason for them.

I am aware that others, from this attempt to establish a connection betwixt religious principles and a religious practice,  
will

will be apt to raise a cry, as if it were subversive of that very morality of conduct which it is intended to promote, by destroying the liberty of the human will, and thereby that moral agency which depends upon it. But after the most mature consideration, I cannot see this conclusion to be just, from any thing that has been advanced in the preceding pages. It is acknowledged that natural causes produce their effects in a certain, stated way, and cannot in any other, i. e. they act by a kind of necessity, and are determined in their operations. But when I say that the connexion betwixt certain religious principles, and their influence upon practice, is similar to that which by certain general laws, obtains in the natural world, it is by no means intended to deny the liberty of the human will, or to give the least countenance to the doctrine of absolute fate or necessity. Without maintaining either of these, may it not be asserted, in perfect consistency with the freedom, or moral agency of man, that something similar to  
this

this connexion betwixt cause and effect in the natural world, does also obtain in the moral? For if we allow the liberty ascribed to man (and which it is necessary he should have, to make him accountable for his conduct) to consist in a power of examining, and judging upon his examination, what is proper to be done; and of chusing and acting in consequence of this, it is evident, he is in the strictest sense free, and yet such a connexion betwixt his principles and practice as has been supposed, does actually subsist.—To plead for liberty in any other view, would be to plead for downright licentiousness.—It would be to exalt the idea of human liberty at the expence of reason, and to declare *that* man the most free, who pays the least regard to it: And what else is this, but to sink the man into the brute?

Possibly some who see the justness of the conclusion to which our reasoning leads, but who are unwilling to own it, may be apt to insist that should we tell them, before  
they

they admit the force of it, upon what foundation this alledged connexion is established, or what obligations are upon mankind to regard these principles. They have a title to be satisfied in this enquiry, if they are not so already. This is reducing the question to a narrow compass, and looks like the last resource to which infidelity, suspicion, and vice are reduced. But out of this imagined strong hold it will be easy to force them, by only resolving this connexion into the constitution of our nature, and the will of him who has thus formed it.

This is as it were, tracing the matter to a first principle—appealing to the common sense of mankind.—Beyond this we cannot go, and he who would insist on more, is no longer to be reasoned with it. Did a man ask you why you eat? Would you not tell him, because it is necessary to maintain life? Should he ask you again, how you know this? Would you not tell him, that you know it from the cravings of the appetite of hunger? Should he still  
 press

press you farther, and ask you how you come to know it from these? Would you not answer that your nature is so framed that you are obliged to regard these instinctive feelings? And if he were not satisfied with this account of the matter, would you not give him up as a person no longer fit to be reasoned with, because one step farther you could not go with him? —The cases are not unlike, and the application is easy. The reasoning in both ultimately terminates in an appeal to first principles. Upon the whole, we are led by the fairest deductions of reason to conclude, that however the dissipated and debauched part of mankind may represent the matter, as a kind of apology for their own conduct, the obligations of Religion arise out of the nature of man, and that he cannot neglect, much less act contrary to them, without doing what may be called *unnatural*, because the reverse of what might be expected from a creature so framed and constituted as he is, and therefore, that the obligations of Religion are such

as,

as; in his sober and sedate moments, he must approve, however in the hurry and flutter of passion, he may seem to despise them.

Having now, in this section, pointed out some of the many advantages which might be expected from a regard to our proposed plan of religious instruction, allow me before I conclude it, to obviate an objection which some will be apt to make against it. Alarmed, as if an alteration in the doctrines, were necessarily connected with an alteration in the manner of our sermons, they will perhaps cry out against it, as a dangerous innovation. In answer to this it may be observed, that not only is this manner coming nearer to our scripture plan, than that which is at present commonly practised, but also that if it be the antiquity of the present method that renders it venerable to any, this is rather supposed than real; for from what has been observed under Part II. nothing can be more evident, than that since the apostolic times, the man-



ner of sermonizing has appeared in very different forms, and in every country under that which seemed best suited to the genius and taste of its inhabitants, and the circumstances of the times. If these should be consulted, as undoubtedly they ought, it is evident that the manner of Preaching, in place of remaining fixed, must, if success is aimed at, in many things be diversified: Or if there be any one plan which bids fairer than another for promoting at once the entertainment and instruction of a religious audience, it seems to be that which it is the design of the author to recommend in this essay. And in the meantime, he is happy to observe, that some examples of it have been set by some of the greatest masters in the Preaching art of the present age—Examples such, it is hoped, as will excite a laudable ambition and emulation in all, who would either acquire reputation to themselves, or promote the cause of religion with success among others, in the character of Preachers.

C O N-

## CONCLUSION.

**I**T is impossible to conjecture into whose hands these sheets may fall—Very probably persons of the most opposite turn of mind may look into them. The Author will account himself happy, if in the variety contained in them, something should be found suited to such a diversity of characters, and he is not without hopes that it may. To render the subject of this treatise as useful as he can, he will endeavour, in the following addresses, to point out the valuable purposes to which it may be applied.

### *I. To the abettors of Scepticism and Infidelity.*

PERHAPS there never was a period, since the commencement of the Christian Æra, in which Infidelity did more abound than the present. You may perhaps imagine this a presumption against Christianity,

as if it had gained credit only during the dark ages of ignorance and barbarism, but could not bear to be examined in the bright light of this. But suspend your judgment for a little and you will perhaps find reason to own, that the prevalence of Infidelity, at present, may be accounted for in another way, more favourable to Christianity, as well as agreeable to truth.

My design in this address is not to enter into all the intricacies of the controversy betwixt you and Christians upon the subject of the expediency of Revelation, nor to trace it through all its windings, but to offer some things, in a plain and familiar manner, to your consideration, which candidly attended to, may dispose you to listen to what may be offered in defence of that Revelation, which, from the great Author of it, is called Christian.

The subject of the first part of this Essay may serve as a proper ground work to this design.

Come

Come let us reason together upon this so long and warmly controverted subject: The *perfection* of human reason as a *sufficient* guide in Religion: Let *truth*, not *victory*, be the object we contend for: In our search after this, candor is indispensibly necessary.

You have, Gentlemen, long taken to yourselves the character of Free-thinkers: You did so by way of honourable distinction: Think with an honest freedom, unwarped with prejudice, and we shall allow you the name, in the most honourable sense in which it can be given you.

The question betwixt us to be discussed is—How far *reason* is sufficient as a *guide* in Religion or not.—You maintain the affirmative. That we may not mistake one another, nor our subject, it will be necessary to pave the way for our inquiry into it, by a proper definition of the terms of the question. This is the more necessary, because you cannot but be sensible that an equivo-

cal use or application of the terms, can serve only to perplex and confound. The meaning of the words being once fixed, neither party will have cause to complain of unfair play in the application of them.

To avoid involving the term *Reason* in the obscurity of metaphysical jargon or school distinctions, let us consider it in the sequel of this address, as expressive of that power of the human mind which is employed in the search and investigation of truth; and by the due exercise of which, it is capable of discerning the evidence of such as falls within its reach. When it is enquired whether this faculty be a sufficient guide in Religion, the meaning is not—Whether it be sufficient to discover to man all that his Maker requires of him in the circumstances in which he has placed him. This is readily acknowledged: Because, from the moral character of the Deity, we are sure that nothing will be required as a duty of any man, for attaining the knowledge of which he

he has not had the proper advantages. In this view, however weak the faculty of reason may be in any, or how great soever the disadvantages may be, under which he labours in the exercise of it, still it may be said to be sufficient. But what then?—This is nothing to the present purpose. The question if properly understood, must comprehend a great deal more—The meaning of it must be—Whether or not it is sufficient to make all those discoveries, which are necessary to promote the highest improvement of our nature in this world, and thereby the most complete happiness of it in the next, of which it is capable.

To determine properly this important question, is now incumbent upon us. The consequences of the decision, whatever it be, are important and interesting; and therefore no decision should be given, till the subject be narrowly and candidly canvassed.

The most probable, as well as the shortest way of coming at the knowledge of what reason is capable of doing in the case under consideration, is by enquiring what it has already done—This is to judge from fact or experiment. If you agree to this rule or standard of judgment (and I humbly think you can have no reasonable objection against it) let us have recourse to the discoveries made by reason in it's highest state of culture and improvement.

We go not back so far as those ages which were called fabulous. These were, compared with others which succeeded them, ages of ignorance and barbarism. Let us appeal to the writings of the most famed sages of Greece and Rome. They were themselves the ornaments of antient, and their writings are the admiration of modern times. If any where, sure we may expect to find among them, the noblest discoveries, from the most vigorous exertion of the intellectual faculty. Do but peruse  
with

with candid attention, the substance of those lectures which were delivered at the Lyceum, the Academy, &c. these once celebrated schools of learning; or if you think this is setting you upon too laborious a task, read but the history of Philosophy drawn up by the learned *Formey*, which is no mean epitome of it—Or to reduce your task into a still narrower compass, attend to what has been offered on this subject in SECT. 2 and 3 Part I. of this Essay—Then speak out the honest sentiments of your heart, and say, if you can, that the Bible (however much, for certain reasons, despised) does not contain more useful instruction upon the subject of religion, than all of them put together. And if by the utmost efforts of genius and application, these sages did so little in so long a course of ages, it concerns the patrons of infidelity to shew what presumption there is that others, without a foreign aid, would do no more.

It cannot be alledged, with any shew of justice, to lessen the force of the conclusion  
to



to which this observation leads, that the attention of these Philosophers was but little employed this way.

It is readily granted, that in the ages immediately preceding those to which we refer, the Priests, ambitious of managing the people as they pleased, thought for them and themselves too, i. e. they kept the people as much as possible from thinking upon Religion at all. But must it not at the same time be granted, that the Philosophers who sprung up in a long succession of ages after these, took the liberty of thinking for themselves, and carried their enquiries after moral and religious truth as far as their reason could carry them; nay very often much farther, the consequence of which was, that they bewildered themselves in the most perplexing mazes?

Now make the experiment — Ranfack all their writings which have come down to us, and try if you can compile one rational

tional system of Religion out of them all, such as you can either approve yourselves, or take upon you to recommend to others. With a design similar to this was the attempt made by the Eclecticks, as I observed before—The issue shewed how vain were their hopes, how little their success.

Had the Philosophers we have been speaking of all lived in one and the same age, and that one remote and distant, and unimproved by science, you might alledge that the small discoveries they made, and the many errors they fell into, were no argument against the perfection of reason, considered as a guide in Religion. But there is no room for so much as an insinuation of this kind. In the collection of philosophic writings which have come down to us, we have the accumulated discoveries of many ages, each improving upon the preceding: Every new enquirer carries his views as far into the wide extended field of science as the intellectual eye could carry him, and borrows from the discoveries of his predecessors,

deceffors, every hint which he could render fubfervient, either to his own improvement, or the enlarged difcovery of truth. And yet after all, how comparatively poor are the difcoveries they have made? Can you confider this, and not learn to fufpect that the guide you have been pleafed to dub with the title of *infallible* or *perfect*, is not deferving of it?

It will be to no purpofe to alledge that their bad fuccels proceeded, not from any defect in their mental powers, but from the want of a proper application of them. If you chufe to infift on this, it is incumbent upon you to prove it. But this, I am perfuaded, you will find not only difficult, but impoffible, and yet till it be done, there is no regard due to fuch a charge. But to fave you the trouble of fuch a fruitless attempt, let me obferve (and I beg you will confider) that the works they have left behind them carry irrefragable marks of the contrary, the plaineft evidence of the indefatigable pains with which they carried on their inquiries.

quiries. Is not this apparent from their success in those cases where the subjects of their enquiries lay more level to the powers of the human intellect? Are they not to this day admired for the knowledge they discovered in the art of government, the manœuvres of war, &c. and can it be imagined that the powers which enabled them to excel in all these, would carry them so short a way in their speculations in Religion (where they discover all the signs of equal application) had not many of the objects of it been, as it were, too large and disproportioned to their faculties, or removed at too great a distance to be reached by them?

I know you will alledge the improvements made by the moderns in religious knowledge, as a proof how adequate the powers of the human mind are to the discoveries necessary for the direction of religious conduct, so as to promote the highest possible improvement of our nature.

But

But here give me leave to observe, that it may be questioned how far the discoveries ascribed to them are the fair acquisitions of their own intellectual powers. It is justly to be suspected, that for many of them, they are obliged to that Revelation which they so much despise. It is true, our modern Deists may reason better upon the subjects of Religion than the most renowned Literati of antient times, but this, instead of saying any thing against, speaks loudly for the expediency of a Revelation; because laying aside the advantages which the world has derived from this pretended Revelation, as some affect to call it, they will find it difficult to account for their more enlarged and juster notions of Religion, upon any other principle than that alledged above.

The advantages in point of knowledge which those derive from Revelation, who are born and educated in a country where all have access to it, are so imperceptibly acquired, that they very often come to  
 imagine,

imagine, because it flatters their pride, that they are all the fruit of their own boasted enquiries and philosophical acumen. But what indeed is no small presumption, if not a proof of the contrary, and a proof that a Revelation has actually been made to the world, is that wonderful and sudden change which the world has undergone, with respect to religious knowledge, since the introduction of Christianity into it, or rather that blaze of light, which it *all at once* carried along with it.

We have seen what Philosophers have written upon this important subject, the latter always improving upon the discoveries of the former. But whence comes it, that all at once (account for this if you can upon any other principles than those of the Christian) there should appear in the world a system of Religion, that so far from borrowing from those which had been published before it, it in many respects widely differs from them all, and corrects most of them? A system too ushered into the world,  
not

not under the auspices of some great Lawgiver or Philosopher, but of one equally despised for the meanness of his own appearance, and of those who were first employed in his service. That the books which contain this system of Religion, were written by those whose names they bear, and did appear in the world at the time alleged, is past all doubt. And if so, it must be owned, that such extraordinary discoveries could not be made all at once, without calling in the aid of Revelation; because, could we suppose them all attainable by the due improvement of reason, yet they could only be made by slow and gradual steps, and in consequence of the most happy culture of mind. A sentiment similar to this, and a full conviction of the justness of it, seems to have possessed the the minds of many of the Jews, when prejudiced as they were against the blessed Jesus, they were forced in admiration of his knowledge, superior to what they had been acquainted with in their most celebrated teachers, as well as superior to what might  
be

be expected from his education and rank in life, to inquire—“ Whence hath this man this wisdom? §” —A proof this, that his wisdom was not the fruit of any distinguished advantages of education: What rendered it most illustrious, was the want of them. Think seriously on this—The conclusion to which it leads is truly important. But to return from what you may perhaps think a digression. You will, I hope, readily excuse it, as you must own I was insensibly led into it, from it’s connexion with the subject under consideration.

But what if it should be admitted that some of the famed sages of ancient or modern time, have made the most happy discoveries in Religion? This will by no means be decisive in the point on hand. What must become of the poor unlettered peasant? Is he not equally the subject of a moral government as the Philosopher, and equally accountable for the part he acts?

§ Matth. xiii. 54.



And where is the guide he is to follow, to conduct him to the perfection of his nature and happiness? It is acknowledged that there are some truths, which may be called primary, of a nature and obligation so evident, that they are no sooner set before the mind, than it can with ease judge of them; it, all at once, admits them. But certain it is, there are many others, which are only discoverable by a train of reasoning and argumentation. How, supposing these ever so important, shall the illiterate come at the knowledge of them? The original strength and vigor of the intellectual faculty, it is acknowledged, may be as great in them as in the Philosopher—but the improvements in knowledge do not depend altogether upon these; but very much upon the culture bestowed upon the mind by a proper education, and the advantages one may afterwards have for the successful prosecution of his enquires after it. And is it not well enough known, that the situation of the lower class of mankind affords them but very few, and these scanty advantages  
for

for this purpose? Judge in this case from what you may every day see. How many are there who remain next to stupidly ignorant, notwithstanding all the advantages they have for the attainment of knowledge? But little as it is, would it not probably be less, were they left to the discoveries of their own boasted reason?

It will answer no purpose to say, that they may have the advantage of the discoveries of the learned. According to your scheme, their own reason should be sufficient for them, without being obliged to others for the assistance of theirs. Or if they are to take assistance from any, why not from revelation (that is from God) as well as from any of their fellow creatures?

Vanity, I suspect, lies at the bottom of infidelity with many. They think their reason affronted, by being obliged to have recourse to any other aid in supplement of it. But such do not consider, that were their reason as perfect as they alledge, their

obligations to God in the one case, would be the same as in the other, and consequently their ground of boasting no greater. And if God shall see meet, for wise reasons, to carry on the designs of his administration by the method which the Christian contends for, as best adapted to promote them, what cause has man to complain? None surely. And are not some of the wise ends proposed by this method of administration, obvious to the considering and attentive? I humbly think they are. Let us consider the Deity, as the author and object of Religion:—In the one of these characters he is deserving of our highest reverence, esteem and gratitude: In the other, he is the most proper to direct the manner in which these should be expressed. “True,” you may say, “and he has done so, when he has left it to the direction of Reason. This is as much the gift of God, as Revelation would be.” That reason is the gift of God is readily granted, but whether it was ever intended to take the direction in the case just now specified, is the point in dispute; or rather, if we allow ourselves  
to

to be determined by matter of fact, it is evident that it never was. For is it not well known, from the most authentic records of ancient time, that some modes of worship were adopted, which, as they proceeded from the most unworthy sentiments of the Deity, must in place of honouring him, have been the rudest affront to him? Witness the many barbarous and inhuman sacrifices which were offered up to him, and the shameful prostitutions that were practised in his very temples, as so many acts of devotion. Neither is it to be considered as an imputation upon the wise author of reason (as I shall have occasion to shew afterwards) that it did not prevent all those gross errors both in principle and practice, into which the heathen world fell: It will be sufficient to vindicate the wisdom of God in the gift of it, if it can be made appear, that it answered the end for which it was given; and should it be alledged that one end of the divine administration in the imperfection of human reason, and the narrow and contracted sphere within which it acts, might

be to keep man ever mindful of his dependance on the Deity, which he might otherwise be but too apt to forget, what would there be improper in the supposition? Nay, to a creature so framed and situated as man, would there not have been the greatest propriety in such conduct? Let us attentively consider the matter, and we shall find cause to think, that reason was never given to man to be the sole guide of his conduct. It is evident it is not so, with respect to the animal life: What relates to it, is more under the direction of appetite, and certain instinctive feelings. Why? Because without these, the cool suggestions of reason would be too weak to enforce that regard to the animal life, which is necessary, indispensably necessary to support and maintain it. And if we may argue from analogy, may we not infer the expediency of some other principle in Religion?—Shall you own reason imperfect in the less, but call it sufficient in the greater concern;—in a matter, where the cases in which it is called to act and determine,

mine, are incomparably more numerous and difficult, as well as important and interesting? Take care: Attend whither this conclusion would seem to lead you.— Either into the grossest absurdity or impiety.—Absurdity, in maintaining so glaring an inconsistency; or impiety, in charging it upon God. Be not ashamed to own the imperfection of Reason; the most famed sages of Greece and Rome were not.\* And if it was acknowledged by

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them,

\* Quod si tales nos natura genuisset, ut eam ipsam intueri & perspicere, eademque optima duce cursum vitæ conficere possemus, haud erat sane, quod quisquam rationem ac doctrinam requireret. Nunc parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibusque depravati sic restringimus, ut nusquam naturæ lumen appareat. Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum, quæ si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret. Nunc autem, simul atque editi in lucem & suscepti sumus, in omni continuo pravitate & in summa opinionum perversitate versamur, ut pene cum lacte nutricis errorem sumpsisse videamur. Cum vero parentibus redditi, demum magistris traditi sumus, tum ita variis imbuimur erroribus, ut va-

nitati

them, this, to say the least, should make others modest in the encomiums they bestow upon it, in opposition to Revelation.

nitati veritas & opinione confirmatæ, natura ipsa cedit.  
Cic. Tuscul. Disput. Lib. iii.

How does the great Socrates, that bright luminary of the heathen world, in his famed dialogue with Alcibiades upon Prayer, acknowledge the uncertainty of our best reasonings upon that subject, and the need of a Divine Instructor, in order to the acceptable performance of it? Hear his opinion in his own words: *Αναγκασιον ουν εστι περιμενειν εως αν τις μαθη . 'ς θεω προς θεους και προς αιθροποις διαγινωσθαι — ο παιδευων ουτος εστιν ο μελει περι σου, — και ουδεν απο της ψυχης προτον αφελοντα την αγλην, η εν παρθεσα τυγχανει τοτηνικαυτ' ηδη προσφερειν δι αν μελλεις γνωσινσθαι το μεν κακον ηδε και εσθλον. Νεν μεν γαρ ουκ αν μοι δοκησ δυνηθηναι. i e.* It is necessary to wait till one shall teach us how we ought to behave both to the Gods and mankind. This Teacher is he who takes care of you. It is necessary that the darkness which at present hangs upon your mind be dispelled, before you can discover rightly what is good and what evil. For at present you do not seem to me to be able to do this.

Remarkable to the same purpose is the prayer of Simplicius, in his Commentary on Epictetus, in the conclusion of his last chapter.

What

“ What, you may say, are we to reject  
 “ reason altogether in Religion ?” God  
 forbid. Do not imagine there is any af-  
 front intended to reason, by what has been  
 said in behalf of Revelation—It is readily  
 allowed every degree of honour that is due  
 to it : He who gives less, affronts himself.  
 It is of the most important service in Reli-  
 gion, and indispensably necessary as a stan-  
 dard by which to judge of the claims of  
 Revelation, and for understanding the doc-  
 trines contained in it. But is there no  
 medium betwixt rejecting, and trusting  
 to it altogether in Religion ? There is, and  
 this is what the Christian would chuse to  
 observe. But after all that has been ad-  
 vanced by the ablest advocates for the suf-  
 ficiency of reason, and against all Revelation  
 as incredible and fictitious, I hope I may be  
 allowed to say, in the words of a very com-  
 petent judge, that “ No man, in serious-  
 “ ness and simplicity of mind, can possibly  
 “ think Revelation useless, who considers  
 “ the state of Religion in the heathen world  
 “ before Revelation, and it’s present state  
 “ in



“ in those places, which have borrowed  
 “ no light from it : particularly, the doubt-  
 “ fulness of some of the greatest men, con-  
 “ cerning things of the utmost importance,  
 “ as well as the natural inattention and  
 “ ignorance of mankind in general. It is  
 “ impossible to say who would have rea-  
 “ soned out that whole system, which we  
 “ call natural Religion, in it's genuine sim-  
 “ plicity, clear of superstition : But there  
 “ is certainly no ground to affirm, that the  
 “ generality could. If they could, there is  
 “ no sort of probability that they would.  
 “ Admitting there were, they would highly  
 “ want a standing admonition to remind  
 “ them of it, and inculcate it upon them.  
 “ And farther still, were they as much dis-  
 “ posed to attend to Religion, as the better  
 “ sort of men are, yet, even upon this  
 “ supposition, there would be various oc-  
 “ casion for supernatural instruction and  
 “ assistance, and the greatest advantages  
 “ might be afforded by them. So that to  
 “ say, Revelation is a thing superfluous,  
 “ what

“ what there was no need of, and what can  
 “ be of no service, is, I think, to talk quite  
 “ wildly and at random. Nor would it be  
 “ more extravagant to affirm, that man-  
 “ kind is so entirely at ease in the present  
 “ state, and life so completely happy, that  
 “ it is a contradiction to suppose our con-  
 “ dition capable of being, in any respect,  
 “ better §.” An opinion so expressed and in  
 point, from one who bestowed so much  
 attention upon the subject under consider-  
 ation, and was so well qualified to judge  
 in it, must be allowed to deserve regard.  
 It should, at least, make you cautious of  
 taking a side in opposition to it, till once  
 you have examined the grounds upon  
 which it was formed: And if you examine  
 and canvass them with a candid and cri-  
 tical attention, I am not afraid but your  
 opinion will be the same with him. But  
 as I know that however respectable his  
 character (and none could be more so)  
 prejudice will be apt to detract from his

§ Dr. Butler's Analogy, &c. Part II. Chap. i.

testimony,

testimony, under pretence that it would be  
 biased by his profession, suffer me to quote  
 the testimony of one who could lie under  
 no such suspicion, and whose candor or  
 abilities none have ventured to arraign.  
 “ Let it be granted, says he, though not  
 “ true, that all the moral precepts of the  
 “ Gospel were known to somebody or other  
 “ amongst mankind, before (i. e. our Sa-  
 “ viour’s time). Suppose they may be picked  
 “ up here and there : Some from *Solon* and  
 “ *Bias* in Greece ; others from *Tully* in Italy ;  
 “ and to complete the work, let *Confucius*, as  
 “ far as *China*, be consulted ; and *Anacharsis*,  
 “ the *Scythian* contribute his share. What will  
 “ all this do, to give the world a complete  
 “ morality, that may be to mankind the un-  
 “ questionable rule of life and manners ?  
 “ I will suppose there was a *Stobæus* in those  
 “ times, who had gathered the moral say-  
 “ ings from all the ages of the world.  
 “ What would this amount to, towards  
 “ being a steady rule, a certain transcript of  
 “ a *law* that we are under ? Did the saying of  
 “ *Aristippus* or *Confucius* give it an autho-  
 rity ?

“ rity? Was *Zeno* a Lawgiver to man-  
 “ kind? If not, what he or any other Phi-  
 “ losopher delivered was but a saying of  
 “ his. Mankind might hearken to it or re-  
 “ ject it, as they pleased; or, as it suited  
 “ their interest, passions, principles or hu-  
 “ mours. They were under no obligation:  
 “ The opinion of this or that Philosopher  
 “ was of no authority. And if it were,  
 “ you must take all he said under that cha-  
 “ racter. All his dictates must go for law,  
 “ certain and true; or none of them.  
 “ And then, if you will take any of the  
 “ moral sayings of *Epicurus* (many whereof  
 “ *Seneca* quotes with esteem and appro-  
 “ bation) for precepts of the law of nature,  
 “ you must take all the rest of his doctrine  
 “ for such too, or else his authority ceases:  
 “ And so no more is to be received from  
 “ him, or any of the sages of old, for parts  
 “ of the law of nature, as carrying with  
 “ it an obligation to be obeyed, but what  
 “ they prove to be so. But such a body  
 “ of Ethicks, proved to be the law of na-  
 “ ture, from principles of reason, and  
 reaching

“reaching all the duties of life, I think  
 “no body will say the world had before  
 “our Saviour’s time” §.

What have you to oppose to the reasoning of this Philosopher, as well as Christian? Does not his reasoning appear to be just and conclusive? The pride of the human heart does not easily stoop to acknowledge an error: It rather prompts to defend it, till it can contrive a decent retreat, or yield upon what it may think honourable terms.

I am aware therefore, that however satisfied you may be of the justness of the reasoning which has been used upon this subject, you will be apt to start many objections against the scheme it is designed to support, and thus endeavour to make the world believe that you consider your cause as still tenible.

§ Locke’s *Vindicat. of the Reasonableness of Christianity*.

But here, before you mention your objections, allow me to observe, that if the truth of a proposition be once evinced, our duty is to admit it, though it may perhaps be incumbered with difficulties, which we are incapable of resolving. Our views of almost any subject, it should be remembered, are but very imperfect: No wonder therefore, if a subtile disputant, by stretching his imagination for that purpose, should be able to suggest many plausible objections. But if these are allowed to unhinge belief, founded upon rational evidence, the consequence will be, that we must run into downright scepticism upon the plainest subjects; for there are no truths so plain (unless they be self evident) but some of a disputatious humour may be found who will controvert them, were it no more than from a vanity of displaying their parts. But imagine not that we make this observation, from an apprehension of any thing so formidable in what you can object, that it is necessary to shelter ourselves

ourselves

ourselves under it, and plead the force of it as an apology for declining an answer.

The cause we espouse is capable of defence upon the principles of reason—To this we appeal as well as you. Come then, let us hear what you have to offer against the admission of our reasoning, and the doctrine which it is adduced to support.

I know it is very common for the gentlemen of your principles, or those who affect to be thought such, to represent the doctrine we maintain as an imputation upon the wisdom and goodness of the Deity—upon the goodness of the Deity, in denying those privileges to some, which he has bestowed upon others; and upon his wisdom in disproportioning the means of moral improvement, to the degrees of it which are necessary to a complete happiness.

In all our enquiries into the divine administration, and the propriety and equity of the measures by which it is carried on,  
the

the greatest modesty becomes us. Now a thick cloud hangs upon the plan of Providence, and envelops it in darkness: Or at most, it is but a small part of it that we can at present see and comprehend; of consequence it is only, when unfolded, that we are qualified fully to judge of it. But though we are far from pretending to dive into all the designs of God, in the wonderful œconomy either of nature or grace (it would be most arrogant presumption, if not impiety, to pretend to it) yet, I humbly think he has discovered, and we may discern enough to justify his ways to man, and to silence the cavils that are commonly made against them by ignorance, wit, petulance or prejudice.

The objection you are pleased to urge against us for denying the sufficiency of reason in the case under consideration, consists of two parts. Let us consider them separately.



In that part, in which you alledge our opinion bears hard upon the goodness and equity of the Deity, you seem to go upon a supposition, that God is under an obligation to bestow equal religious advantages upon all. But upon what do you rest this opinion? We can have no rule, I imagine, but either a positive declaration from God, or the matter of fact, by which to judge of the proportion in which the divine goodness should bestow it's favours upon mankind. Where privileges of any kind are a pure gift, the will of the donor must determine the degree in which they are to be bestowed; and should determine our judgment with respect to the propriety of it. According to this rule we are, from the moral character of the Deity, led to conclude, that whatever he has done is in such a situation of things, upon the whole the best.

Let us consider the œcônomy of the divine Providence in the distribution of the blessings of nature and society, and this will probably

probably make us cease to wonder, at the variety observable in the distribution of those of a religious kind.

How various and different are the constitutions of body (from what causes this variety arises, no matter in the present case) which the Deity has given mankind? Are not some healthy, vigorous and robust; while others are puny, weak and sickly? And does not every one know how much the comfort and happiness of life are connected with the temperament of them? No less is the variety in our mental œconomy. How vast the difference in the intellectual powers of which mankind are possessed? While some rise above the common standard, and approach very near to a superior order of beings, are there not others, who sink as far below it, and seem to have little more than the shape to distinguish them from the brutes? May not the same observation be made with respect to the several lots and departments assigned to mankind in civil life? How widely dif-

ferent the circumstances of an inhabitant of Lapland, in point of climate and the accommodations of life, from those who live in the southern parts of France? How vastly preferable are the privileges of a British subject to those of the Turkish or Ottoman empire? How different the police and government of the one from that of the other? Nay, under the same government, and in the same country, how different are the situations of those who live in it? While some wanton life away in all the variety of luxury which plenty can afford, how many are there who drag life after them as a heavy burden, and are pining away in poverty and want? What shall we conclude from these and the like distinctions, which must strike every one who attentively observes the operations either of nature or of Providence? Shall we impeach the goodness or equity of the author of both? No—We can see in this manner of administration, a great depth of wisdom and extent of goodness displayed; a connexion betwixt the several parts of this system established, and the good of the whole

whole promoted by this variety, better than it could have been in any other way. And may we not observe that there is a wonderful analogy and correspondence betwixt the dispensations of Providence and those of Grace? We approve of the variety observable in the one; why should we censure it in the other? Does not candor rather require us to conclude, that a principle similar to what induced the Deity to make such a difference betwixt his creatures in the privileges of nature and situation, had also determined him to make the like difference in religious circumstances; and that were the reasons of this variety equally understood in the one case as in the other, they would appear equally good, and vindicate the ways of God to man?

The equity of this various œconomy of Providence will still further appear, from an attention to what we have the best ground to think will be the manner in which the Deity will finally treat the subjects of it. Were the advantages bestowed upon them

for attaining religious improvement very different, and yet the degrees of it he required in all the same here, there would be the most glaring iniquity. But the character of the Deity will not allow us to entertain a sentiment so dishonourable to him : In the judgment which he will pass upon the conduct of mankind, he will act with the most perfect justice to all, and render to every one according to his real character, and the part he has acted in the situation in which he was placed. “ As many as have sinned without the law, shall,” if they continue impenitent, “ perish without the law, &c. ||” Let me not offend you by this quotation. With you, who admit not the authority of the Book from which it is taken, I plead for no more to it than reason will allow ; and to deny it this much, would be an instance of injustice I am unwilling to suspect you capable of. The sentiment contained in it, is a dictate of reason, of sound and sober reason. Ac-

|| Rom. ii. 12.

according

according to this rule of judgment, none have cause to be afraid on account of their situation and circumstances, but their misimprovement of them. And therefore upon this principle, we are encouraged to entertain the most favourable hopes of those, who, under the disadvantages of heathen ignorance, were careful to act such a part as might be expected in their circumstances; even to hope that they shall (we take not upon us to say in what precise way, since God has not been pleased to inform us) be accepted of God, and admitted to a degree of happiness proportioned to their capacity and fitness for enjoying it.

“ This perhaps, you will tell me is all  
 “ you contend for. If salvation or happiness  
 “ be attainable without a Revelation,  
 “ where you may say is the need, the use  
 “ of one ? ”

You are welcome to the benefit of this concession. It makes nothing against the

position we maintain—This remains entirely unaffected by it. For though, from the divine character we have cause to hope well of many, whose happy privileges it was not to live under the dispensation of the Gospel, yet if we consider, that from the very constitution of human nature itself, the degree of happiness of which any is capable, must be in proportion to the improvements in virtue to which it is raised, who can be so blind as not to see the next to infinite advantages which the Christian may derive from the privileges he enjoys under the dispensation of the Gospel? And would it not be the height of folly in any to say, that because a heathen, who knew nothing of the Gospel, may through the abundant goodness of God, be in his measure happy in another world, therefore they may be excused from paying a regard to it in this? For must it not argue a meanness of spirit, of which all should be ashamed, to content ourselves with a low degree of happiness, when happiness, incomparably higher, is  
by

by the due improvement of our present advantages, within our reach? How many of the wild, roving Indians of America seem happy under all the disadvantages of their situation; without houses, without cloaths, without arts, without manufactures? But will any, on this account say, that the situation of the European nations, civilized and polished by religion and science, is not preferable?

But here perhaps you will ask me, “ If  
 “ Revelation be so necessary as we alledge,  
 “ for raising human nature to the highest  
 “ perfection in this, and happiness in the  
 “ next world, that it is capable of, how  
 “ comes it to be communicated to so few  
 “ nations of the world, and to these so late?  
 “ Do not these circumstances seem to re-  
 “ flect upon the wisdom as well as the  
 “ goodness of God?”

Here let me remind you of what I observed before; that the greatest modesty becomes us in our enquiries into, and our judgment of the divine administration.

When



When you alledge the lateness of the discoveries made by Revelation, and the narrowness of the bounds within which they have been confined, as an argument against the expediency of it, you seem to take for granted, what you ought to have proved, before you can urge any such consequence from the want of it; that if a Revelation was ever to have been made, it should have been made to the first race of mankind, and to them full and complete. Could you have made this appear, your objection against the reception of the Christian Revelation, would not only justify your own conduct with respect to it, but prove it all at once undeserving of the regard that is claimed to it by its friends. But if on the other hand, it can be evinced that such a conduct in the divine Providence as has obtained, is what in the present constitution of things might have been reasonably looked for, your objection all at once falls to the ground.

When

When arguing in support of the perfection of reason, nothing is more frequent than for it's advocates to betray the weakness of it. Of this observation, you will pardon me if I say, your present objection is a very striking proof. For if you will but attentively consider the various dispensations of God to mankind, you will find them admirably adapted to their nature and circumstances; the best calculated that could be, to recover them from that state of ignorance and vice into which they were early sunk, and gradually prepare them for the highest improvements in virtue and happiness of which they were capable. And thus, in the issue, you will be led to approve the very measures with which you at present find fault.

How it happened we need not enquire, but it cannot be denied, that very early a shameful ignorance of religion and corruption of manners did obtain and prevail in the world. In such a situation the question is—Whether, supposing a Revelation necessary

necessary for the recovery of mankind, a previous preparation was not necessary for the due reception and success of this Revelation among them ?

Among men nothing is more common than, when a scheme is laid, to hurry on the execution of it. And if success attend it, they are often partial enough to applaud the wisdom of the measures taken for this purpose, and pronounce them the best that could have been followed. What we are for doing in our own little schemes, we are sometimes rash enough to think, and say, God ought to do in the great plan of his Providence, that is, take the shortest possible course for accomplishing the designs of it. Think a little, and you cannot but perceive that the sentiment is not very respectful to the Deity. And if you will but attend to the manner which he observes in the administration of the natural world, or to the nature and constitution of man himself, you will be led  
into

into quite different sentiments on this subject.

In no case do we find the execution of his designs precipitated—It is led on from step to step, till they are accomplished. Thus, when the sun rises above the horizon, instead of all at once arriving at his meridian splendor, how does he advance to it by a slow and gradual progress? When our fields are sown, does not a considerable time pass, and the grain undergo a variety of changes, before it arrives at maturity and perfection? Nay, as to man himself, what different stages does he pass through? In place of arriving all at once (which some, who have not learned to resign their wisdom to the divine, might imagine best) at full perfection, either in body or mind; how slow are his advances to it? And in all these cases, and many more which I might mention, and every one may easily recollect, does not such gradual and progressive manner of promoting perfection, appear best suited to that constitution of things which  
the

the Deity has established? If the goodness of the one be admitted, the wisdom of the other must be admitted also.

The human mind is of that particular frame or make, that its faculties do not all at once arrive at perfection: Like a flower they are but gradually expanded. Here therefore it is evident, that the degrees of knowledge, religious as well as of any other kind, which are let into it, must be proportioned to the degrees in which it becomes opened and enlarged. Too much let into it at once, would have overpowered it.

Besides it ought to be considered, that not only the ignorance, but also the corruption of manners into which mankind were early sunk, while they made a revelation necessary for the cure of both, must, in the natural course of things, have retarded the full offers of it to the world, because they indisposed and rendered men unfit for the reception of it. An offer of it to them, before they were in some measure

sure prepared for it, could have scarce had any other effect than to make mankind spurn it from them with disdain, and so, if not entirely stop the spread of it's influence, make the progress of it, at least, very slow. Whereas, by waiting and embracing those seasons, which from the improvements of science, the more frequent intercourse established among mankind, and the enlargement of the human mind occasioned by both, seemed most opportune for propagating the knowledge of it; the delays in the promulgation of it to the world, will not only appear unblameable, but highly proper §.

To have accelerated, according to the impatient wishes of some, the introduction of

§ The reader may please consult, The Bishop of Carlisle's Considerations on the Theory of Religion: Dr. Butler's Analogy, &c. Part. II. Chap. vi. and Dr. Alix's Reflections, &c.

In all of them, he will find many ingenious things on this subject to reward his labour.

this

this Revelation into the world in it's full perfection, would, as has already been hinted, have entirely defeated the design of it, by making mankind contemptuously reject it; or would have required, till they arrived at a certain degree of improvement, a constant series of miracles to engage their regard to and reception of it. And it deserves to be considered, that God never affects a vain parade or display of power: What can be brought about by that natural order and course which he has established, he never effects by miracles.

It is true, according to this scheme, all could not, in a long succession of ages, enjoy equal advantages. Those who lived in the more remote, rude and unpolished ages, would have less than those who were born in times of greater improvement; but it is evident that some must have occupied each of the intermediate periods. They were placed in those stations for reasons, not only respecting themselves, but others also; that, enjoying the benefit of the improvements

ments made by those who went before them, they might also pave the way for those which were to be made after them, and thus become the means of connecting the several parts of God's plan, and carrying into execution his design in the whole. In the body politic and religious, as well as natural, there is a great difference as to the excellence of the parts, but none which are essential to it can be called useless; they have all a mutual connexion and dependance, and all unite to promote the health, the good of the whole. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the hand to the feet, I have no need of you," &c. §.

I am aware that still another objection may be started against the divine administration, upon our scheme, which has not been obviated by any thing that has yet been offered on this subject. "Why it may be said, were not many of those who were born in the most rude ages and uncivilized countries of the world, distinguished

§ 1. Cor. xii. 21.



“ by the most noble intellectual powers; but  
 “ according to your hypothesis, how small  
 “ the progress either in the knowledge or  
 “ practice of virtue they were capable of ma-  
 “ king, notwithstanding their most sincere  
 “ and vigorous endeavours after the highest  
 “ improvements in both? Were such pow-  
 “ ers given them never to be exerted?  
 “ Such capacities never to be gratified?  
 “ Does God any thing in vain?” In vain!  
 No—Neither is there any thing in the  
 account we have given of the divine ad-  
 ministration to mankind, that would so  
 much as *seem* to give the least countenance  
 to such an imputation.

It is readily granted, that in the most  
 dark and uncultivated ages of the world,  
 there might have lived some, endued with  
 natural abilities, which would have enabled  
 them to make a distinguished figure in  
 better times. But shall we from thence  
 conclude, that those talents were given  
 them in vain? Besides that is was no more  
 than the natural and unavoidable consequence  
 of

of the present constitution of things, that this period should be occupied by some in order to carry on the succession of mankind and the improvements of science, what if I should alledge, that persons of such character were particularly fit for those times, fit for directing to the proper use of the discoveries which had already been made, and for making more, and transmitting them to posterity with the greatest advantage? Would not this, without any thing else, justify the rank and station assigned them in the household God? But if to this we add (what indeed we have the best ground to hope) that the disadvantages of their situation in this world, shall be compensated by the privileges to which they shall be raised in a better, where, after being transplanted from this unfriendly soil and inhospitable climate, they may, nourished by more benign influences, be reared up to, and flourish in all that perfection of which their natures were originally capable,

ble, the objection must be allowed to have no force remaining in it.

But I would not wish to weary you with the length of this address.—It is now time to remind you, that the controversy with you does not so much turn upon the sufficiency of reason, with respect to those who had nothing else to depend on, as with respect to the sufficiency of it to you, who live under the dispensation of the Gospel. You are not in the same predicament with them.—Your situations are widely different; and so will be the manner of the divine procedure towards you.

That degree of ignorance which may be admitted as an excuse for them, will be condemned in you, and become no small aggravation of your guilt. If, while the sun shines around you, you shut your eyes, and stumble at noon day, the darkness you make to yourselves will not save you against the imputation of folly, nor against the just consequences of it.

Here

Here perhaps you will stop me, by telling me, that I go upon the supposition that what is called the Christian Revelation is real, and of divine authority; but that this is the very point in dispute; and that, should you admit the expediency of a Revelation in general, you could never admit the truth of that which is offered to the world by Christians, because of the contradictions with which it abounds, to that very Reason, by which it's claim to a divine origin is to be examined. This is indeed a heavy charge—Could you properly support it, you would at one stroke destroy all the credit that is demanded to it, by it's most zealous friends—They could no more stand up for it. But let us see upon what ground you charge it with contradictions to *Reason*.

Some things we acknowledge there are in it, which Reason could not have discovered, but which, when discovered, appear perfectly agreeable to it. Nay, what is more, there are some things in it, we acknowledge, which reason cannot fully understand,

much less explain. But what then? Shall we therefore charge it with absurdity? Would it not be paying too high a compliment to the human understanding, to make *it* the measure by which to judge of all truth; or to pronounce a proposition false, merely because *it* cannot discern it to be true? Should a peasant argue in this manner with a Mathematician, concerning any of the Theorems of Euclid, how would he stare at him, and pity his weakness? Ay but say you, these are truths capable of *proof*, of *demonstration*. Very true—So they are. And can you take upon you to say, that what you now object to is not so likewise; at least capable of all that proof which the nature of the case will admit? At present, the hints given us of some truths are but dark: It was not intended they should be other. The obscurity that hangs upon them, may proceed either from the thickness of the medium, or the weakness of the faculty by which we behold them, or perhaps both. In a more improved state, where neither of these disadvantages shall obtain, it is highly

highly

highly probable that those truths, which are at present called mysterious, shall appear as clear and perspicuous as those we term primary and self evident. And in the mean time, so far as they can have any influence upon practice, we have ground sufficient to render our regard to them rational.

But why urge the mysteries (as you call them) to be found in Revelation, as an argument for rejecting it? In this, how partial is your conduct? What if it could be made appear, that there are mysteries in natural, as well as in revealed Religion? Must you not admit them in the one as well as in the other, or reject them in both? You believe there is a God. Very well: But how come you to believe that he is eternal, omniscient, omnipresent? Do you understand, or can you explain the nature of these perfections, which denominate him such? You do not;—you cannot. You believe them however upon a rational foundation, because you cannot deny them, without incurring consequences worse than

what arise from the admission of them. The case is the same as to the Christian, with respect to those doctrines, on account of whose mysteriousness you reject the whole of his Religion. He has the most abundant evidence of the authority of that Revelation, upon which he is required to believe them, and this is sufficient to engage him to do so. The fact with respect to the Revelation of them is all he is concerned with.—What remains a mystery is not properly the object of his faith. You may represent the faith of the Christian in such cases as unreasonable; but you do not consider that you every day act upon principles for which you have no better evidence. You believe the union of soul and body, and act upon the faith of it; and yet what can be a greater mystery than the manner of this union, or the bands by which it is maintained? You know that flowers of the most different hue and tint may be raised on the same plot of ground, and upon this principle you proceed in adorning your parterre; and yet who can  
 assign

assign the reason of this diversity of colours in the flowers, notwithstanding the similarity of circumstances in which they are placed? You believe these things upon evidence which abundantly satisfies you, though too weak to remove all the difficulties with which these subjects may be incumbered. The Christian does the same, and why should you find fault with his conduct? It would be partial to do it, when, in similar cases, you approve your own.

The Christian Revelation may be considered as a collection of facts, important and interesting in their consequences, if found to be properly supported; and therefore a collection of facts which challenge a candid enquiry before you reject them, or take upon you to pronounce them false. Till you have properly canvassed the evidence both for and against them, you cannot upon any solid ground say, but the book which contains the account of them may be a Revelation from God. And should this be found the case, it concerns you to  
think



think of the impiety of fighting against him.

The evidence for Christianity is very large and comprehensive. But consider, that the force of it consists in the union of the whole, rather than in any of the parts taken separately: And therefore, though any one of the evidences you pitch upon, may not appear to you absolutely to conclude in favour of this Revelation, do not allow yourselves, with a kind of triumph, to insinuate that the same would be the issue of an enquiry into the whole accumulated evidence. The conclusion would not be more rash, than it would be unfair.

To suppose a defect in the evidence of a Revelation from God, would be to offer an indignity to him; as if he had required us to receive it, and at the same time had not given us evidence sufficient to make our belief of it rational. This our notions of the divine character will never allow

low us so much as to suspect. It deserves to be observed, that in this Revelation damnation is made the punishment of unbelief; a hint not obscure, that the evidence for the truth of it is such, as must, if candidly considered, procure our dutiful regard to it; and consequently that unbelief must proceed, not from the want of evidence, so much as from the want of a heart disposed honestly to consider it, than which nothing can be more criminal in itself, or more justly expose to the divine displeasure.

The strength of the evidence for Christianity we are thus led to presume, from the threatened consequences of rejecting it. But if you do not chuse to admit the force of it from such reasoning as this, let us appeal to matter of fact.

Had it, in the course of many ages, satisfied only the weak, ignorant and illiterate, I would readily allow there might be  
some

some ground to suspect the importance of it. But has this been the case? Quite the reverse.—You know that in some of the first ages of Christianity, it triumphed over the passions, prejudices and vices of mankind, by the force of its evidence, and constrained some, equally eminent for their learning and their rank in life, to become its votaries, who had long been its most violent enemies ||.

Nor are there wanting instances of its triumphs, even in the most enlightened ages, and in some of the brightest ornaments of them. Witness a *Boyle*, a *Locke*, a *Newton*, an *Addison*, a *Littleton*, a *West*, &c.—What distinguished names are these! Can you hear of the honourable testimony they bore to the Religion of Jesus, without suspecting

§ See the conclusion of the Author's Dissertation on the Conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and the advice offered by Gamaliel, in the famous trial of the Apostles, Acts v. 17—41, considered as an argument for the Truth of Christianity.

yourself

yourselfes wrong in the opposition you give to it? Were they not all distinguished for their penetration, erudition, diligence and candor of enquiry, and an unfullied integrity of manners? And can you imagine they should all fall into the gross mistake with which you charge them? Have you not rather ground to suspect the mistake is on your own side? I mention these, not that I would have you found your belief upon such authorities, great as they are, but that you may be excited, after their example, with a candid attention, to canvass the exidence for that Religion which you contemn. Till you can say that you have thus examined it, you must give me leave to say, that your rejection of it is not only absurd in itself, but may in it's consequences be dangerous to yourselfes and hurtful to others. For should you find cause afterwards to suspect yourselfes in the wrong (and to say the least, this is not impossible) how would you tremble at the thought of the consequences? Tremble to think,  
that

that by an obstinate opposition to the Gospel, under all the advantages you had for understanding it, and notwithstanding all the evidence you had to satisfy you of the truth of it, you have not only contracted the most aggravated guilt, but exposed yourselves to the most terrible ruin. Tremble to think, that by your example, you corrupted many, and that your principles, continuing to operate after you have yourselves left the stage of life, may by their malignant influence, corrupt many more; so that is hard—impossible to say where the corruption shall cease—But I forbear to urge the horrors of so dismal a scene;—I can scarce bear to think of it. How much to be pitied are they who shall feel all the awful realities of it!

I cannot conclude this address in words more pertinent to the design of it, than those of the justly celebrated *Epictetus*, handed down to us by his disciple *Arrian*.

“ If

“ If any one oppose svery evident truths,  
 “ it is not easy to find a reason which may  
 “ persuade him to alter his opinion. This  
 “ arises neither from his own strength, nor  
 “ from the weakness of his teacher : But  
 “ when, after being driven from an absur-  
 “ dity, he becomes petrified, how shall we  
 “ deal with him any longer by reason.

“ Now there are two sorts of petrification.  
 “ The one a petrification of the understand-  
 “ ing : The other, of the sense of shame,  
 “ when a person hath obstinately set himself  
 “ not to assent to evident truths, nor to quit  
 “ the defence of contradictions. We all dread  
 “ a bodily mortification, and would make use  
 “ of every contrivance to avoid it : But none  
 “ of us is troubled about a mortification in  
 “ the soul. And yet indeed, even with regard  
 “ to the soul, when a person is so affected, as  
 “ not to apprehend or understand any thing,  
 “ we think him in a sad condition : But  
 “ where the sense of shame and modesty  
 “ is under an absolute mortification, we  
 “ go so far, as even to call *this* strength of  
 mind.

“ mind.—Shall I argue with this man any  
 “ longer? For what steel or what caustic  
 “ can I apply, to make him sensible of his  
 “ mortification? He is sensible of it: He  
 “ is sensible of it, and pretends not to be so.  
 “ He is even worse than dead. Doth he  
 “ not see the repugnancy of contradictory  
 “ propositions? He sees it, and is never the  
 “ better: He is neither moved, nor improves.  
 “ Nay, he is in yet a worse condition.—His  
 “ sense of shame and modesty is utterly ex-  
 “ tirpated. His reasoning faculty indeed is  
 “ not extirpated, but turned wild and savage.  
 “ Shall I call *this*, strength of mind? By no  
 “ means: Unless we allow it to be such in  
 “ the vilest debauchees, publickly to speak  
 “ and act whatever comes into their  
 “ heads §.”

§ Translat. Arrian. Epictet. Lib. I. cap. v.

II. *To those who admit the peculiar Excellence of the Christian Religion, and profess a Regard for it, and yet seldom honour the public Institutions of it by an Attendance upon them.*

IT is impossible for any, who themselves wish well to Religion, to behold with indifference the little respect that is shewn to it by some, and the contempt with which it is treated by others. The obligations which mankind are under to esteem and regard it, are of such a nature, that, one would think, they could neither be denied nor evaded by any, who make the least pretensions to reason, gratitude, or ingenuity. But there is no arguing against matter of fact. That Religion, the ordinances of it, and the worship of God are slighted and contemned, would be vain to deny, when almost every corner of our country affords so many shameful, and I may add, melancholy instances and proofs of it. In such a situation what shall the



friends of Religion do? Shall they give up the cause as irretrievable, sit down and mourn over it? No, their duty, both from a regard to it and their fellow creatures, is to stand up as advocates for it, and bespeak their attention in the defence they offer of it; and thus endeavour to convince them of the error of their conduct, and the danger which must be the consequence of an indulgence in it.

That the avowed Deist should not attend the public institutions of the Religion of Jesus, carries no impropriety in it. His conduct in this is perfectly consistent with his principles. But that any of the professed votaries of Christianity should allow themselves in the habitual neglect of them, has something more unaccountable, as well as criminal in it.

How it happens I shall not enquire, but so it is, that a neglect of Religion, and the institutions of it, is, by a most absurd inversion of taste, by some accounted *polite*  
 • and

and *fashionable*; and this perhaps is the reason why it is so easily gone into by others. The last it may be, but it is quite the reverse of the former; for surely nothing deserves to be called *polite*, however practised by those who pique themselves upon their claim to it, which is either disrespectful to government, or offensive to those of esteemed character; and surely a studied neglect, much more contempt, of the institutions of Religion, is both the one and the other.

Some, I know, seem to look upon, or at least, affect to call the social exercises of Religion a mean service, fit only to be performed by the common herd of mankind, while those in the higher ranks in life are exempted from the obligations to them. Some bold adepts there may be in vice, who (notwithstanding they still wear the Christian name) employ their wit against Religion and the institutions of it, and who may, and often do call those persons *weak, ignorant and enthusiastic*, who shew a public regard for either. But if they have no better

reason than this for their opinion of them, I must be allowed to say they but expose their own weakness, as well as impiety, by avowing it. Names do not alter characters, and Religion is not the worse that it is hunted down by some, who cannot avow it's excellence, without condemning themselves for the neglect of it. A contempt of Religion they may glory in, as the evidence of a liberal turn of mind, unfettered by superstition or the prejudices of education : But, with their leave, I must be allowed to say, that such contempt of Religion is the evidence of a mind, if free from the prejudices of a virtuous, which they may perhaps call a superstitious education, yet under the influence of those which arise, either from the most shameful dissipation of thought, or corruption of manners, or perhaps both. Did they allow themselves but to think, they could not fail to see that no advantages of rank could exempt them from the service they owe to God ; nay, that their obligations to the latter, rise in proportion to the greatness of the former.

This

This has been acknowledged by those of the first eminence for rank and character in the different ages and nations of the world, and particularly by some of our own country, whose names can never be thought on, but with the highest esteem and respect. Nay, as a still higher recommendation of the institutions of Religion, I cannot omit mentioning the example of our Lord, who never failed to countenance them with his presence during his residence among us; thus to give, if possible, an additional honour and dignity to them, and expose the folly of those who seem to think the service of Religion, which is the service of God, a mean one.

What would these modern fine gentlemen think of those, who being their inferiors in birth and station, who though their vassals and dependants, nay, under all the obligations to them that can arise from the greatest kindness, should refuse to join with their other servants in paying the acts of homage and obeisance, which they required,

and had an unquestionable title to expect? Would they not think their honor affronted, injured by such treatment? Would they not call them undutiful, ungrateful, foolish, who could dare to be guilty of it, and punish them accordingly? The application is easy.

But as the conduct we have been just now considering, must appear extraordinary to all but those who indulge in it, and to them too, if they would but allow themselves to think, it may not be improper to enter a little into a detail of the excuses which are commonly pleaded in defence of it. They are urged with at least a seeming seriousness, and deserve an answer, if for no other reason, to prevent those who make them, from imagining that there is more force in them than there really is.

Some, I know, are apt to shelter themselves in the neglect of the public institutions of Religion, and the instructions offered

ferred from them under this pretence,— That what is of importance to their most valuable interests, is abundantly plain in the sacred oracles, and needs no commentary; and that, as for the rest, they may without any loss let it alone.

It is readily granted, that the great and essential articles of our holy faith and Religion are, to a candid enquirer after the knowledge of them, with due pains, attainable. But why neglect the rest? Though the knowledge of them may not be of equal importance, it may be highly useful, stand connected with those which are esteemed necessary, and therefore ought not to be despised or slighted.

In the science of Theology, let none from the perspicuity of it, pretend the inexpediency of offering any public instructions from it, or of attending the opportunities of receiving them.—This excuse deserves not the name.—It proceeds, not from a conviction of any force in it, but an incli-

nation to sloth, or something worse, in those who make it ; perhaps to make that conduct appear less criminal to others, which it is very probable they secretly reproach themselves for indulging, or which, in their sober moments, they at least cannot approve.

In a world such as this, where the necessary cares of it must engross so much of the time and thought of it's inhabitants, the institution of a certain order of men, to attend to the great concerns of Religion, and to teach and inculcate the great truths of it, has it's foundation in reason, abstracting from the positive appointment of God. And so much does this appear to be the general sense of mankind, that to this day there has scarce been found a nation, without some established order of Priests, or religious Teachers.

The great articles of faith and practice are, as has been already observed, pretty clear and perspicuous ; but to place the important

portant truths of Religion in an advantageous point of light, and thereby to dispose the mind to receive them, and act under the influence of them, many things are necessary. Must not he who would attempt this with the hope of success, be well acquainted with the languages in which the sacred oracles were originally written, with the geography, customs, manners, and religious usages of those countries, which were the scene of the public ministrations of the Prophets, our Lord and his Apostles, and to which there are allusions in almost every page of the sacred Record? And is it not reasonable to expect that those who devote their time to these studies, should be best qualified to teach the knowledge of the divine oracles, which in a great measure depends upon them; better qualified at least than those who have had neither their advantages nor opportunities?

But should it be granted that some, from the education they have received, and the improvement they have made of it, might  
be



be able to understand the sublime and important truths of Religion, as well as those whose business it is to explain them; they cannot be ignorant how apt they are, when engaged in the busy scenes of life, to forget or become inattentive to them, and by these very means to lose, in some measure, the benefit of them. Hence therefore must appear the propriety of these religious instructions even to such persons.—Considered as remembrancers to them of the truths they know already, they serve to revive the influence of them, which without such help, would be apt to become too languid and feeble for any valuable purpose in life.

I would not wish to affront the understanding of the more knowing and intelligent; but without any hazard of doing so, may I not take the liberty to say, that the public instructions offered from the pulpit, might not only serve to call to their remembrance what they already knew, but also increase their knowledge, by the variety  
of

of lights in which they placed the objects of it.

The same object, viewed in different attitudes, and by different persons, would not appear the same to them all.—What therefore if it should be allowed, that the profound researches of the Divine could discover no object of knowledge from the sacred oracles, which his more intelligent hearers were not, in some measure, before acquainted with? Would it not be paying too great a compliment to their understanding, to alledge that there is no possible point of light in which they had not viewed it, and that therefore they could receive no additional knowledge or improvement from the discoveries of others? Nay, is it not probable, that those who turn the bent of their studies this way, would for the honour of their profession, and their own credit, as well as the advantage of such as are placed under their religious inspection, endeavour to carry their enquiries deeper than others who are under

no such obligations, and of consequence, that something useful might be expected from them?

It deserves likewise to be taken notice of, that a disuse of the public means of instruction, may not only bring after it the loss of all the advantages which we have already supposed to arise from an attendance upon them ; but would also wear off, by neglecting to have them often renewed, the good impressions which mankind may have received from an early, and perhaps religious education. And should this be the case, the consequence is equally obvious and dreadful. The transition from the neglect of Religion, to the practice of all manner of vice, to which appetite, inclination, or mistaken interest may lead, is not only easy, but often becomes headlong and precipitate. An observation this, too sadly confirmed in the daily and unhappy experience of many.

Hitherto

Hitherto I have argued the propriety and importance of Preaching, as a mean that may be made happily useful for the improvement, even of the more knowing and intelligent, in the love and practice of virtue ; and if the considerations adduced to enforce a regard to religious instruction be allowed to have any weight, when addressed to those who are most distinguished for their rank, knowledge and abilities ; I need scarce observe that they ought to have still greater force with those whose situation in life deprives them of almost every other mean of religious improvement. And this suggests the hint of another consideration, which ought to recommend an attendance on religious instructions to those in the higher spheres of life ; — It is,

The influence which their example might have upon those, who for want of their advantages, stand in the greatest need of such instructions.

We

We ought to consider ourselves, not merely as individuals, but also as members of one great body, the health of which, as in the natural, does not consist in the soundness of any one of the parts taken separately, but in that of the whole. Must they not therefore want that generosity of spirit, which is one of the brightest ornaments of a high station, who can shew an indifference to any mean, that tends so much to the welfare of others ; when, by their countenance to the one, they have it so much in their power to promote the other ?

Nor are they in this so little interested as perhaps they imagine. They are generally the first and loudest in the cry against the vices of the people, when they come themselves to be any way affected by them ; and against the clergy, for not being at more pains, as they would represent the matter, to guard them against such vices. But they do not consider (at least they are not willing to allow) that they themselves are  
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in a great measure the cause of that corruption of manners they complain of in the lower classes ; and that their neglect, not to say contempt, of Religion, must have more influence in debauching their morals, than the instructions of the most able, pious and assiduous Teachers can have, in preserving them untainted, or reforming them when they are vitiated, because the bias unhappily lies stronger to a vicious than a virtuous practice, especially when it is kept in countenance by the example of those in rank and power. Do they wish to find their children, servants, and all others they are connected with, in the commerce and several departments of life, more attentive to, and more faithful in the discharge of the duties they respectively owe them ; they must not themselves discover the least disregard for Religion, else what can they expect, but that it should lose it's influence among those with whom they wish it to be preserved ?

When

When the arguments thrown out against the expediency of preaching are found to be untenable, the next excuse pleaded for the neglect of an attendance upon it, is the want of entertainment from those discourses, by which the preacher would convey his instructions. “To sit and hear him  
 “draw out a jejune and tedious lecture upon  
 “some point of morality, or Religion,  
 “with which they are already well enough  
 “acquainted, is,” (say the fashionable contempters of this mean of instruction) “a  
 “mortification, which, though from complaisance to the established custom of their  
 “country, they may sometimes submit to,  
 “they do not chuse should often return.”  
 That their entertainment is sometimes but poorly promoted by such exercises, may perhaps be granted, and where this is the case it is no wonder that the audience should be listless and averse to return to them. But to what is the want of this pleasure owing? Sometimes no doubt to the fault of the preacher, but very often, it is equally certain, to the indisposition of the hearers.

hearers. For however important the truths may be—however proper the manner in which they are treated—however well calculated either or both may be, to inform the understanding, to entertain the imagination, to engage the heart, and interest the passions—if the hearer has no relish for them, he can find but little, if any entertainment from them; and in such a case, it is evident, the reformation must begin at home. Let the hearers first conquer their aversion to devotion, to a habit of serious attention, and the reasonable restraints which Religion lays upon their passions and appetites, and then many of the complaints against preaching, of dullness, insipidity, &c. which we now hear of, as an apology for not attending on it, will cease of course. For could mankind but bring themselves, from a habit of dissipation, to find pleasure in employments of a serious nature, it is next to impossible but the objects and truths which Religion presents to them, would, in place of that dislike which they now excite, produce admiration, and



afford delight.—If beauty the most perfect can produce these effects, Religion cannot fail to do it, when exhibited in its native simplicity, which is its greatest charm, and beheld with an unprejudiced eye.

But though I must load the hearers with a part of the blame, in the disappointment they sometimes meet with, or the want of that entertainment which they think they had a right to expect, it is not reasonable they should bear the whole. Often, too often, no doubt, the Preacher deserves his large share of it. For indeed it must be owned, that some of the discourses prepared for, or rather dully delivered without any preparation, to a numerous audience, seem calculated, instead of keeping them awake by entertaining them, like a sleepy song to lull them into an agreeable slumber. The instances of this kind, it is to be hoped, are but rare. As often as they do occur, we acknowledge them to be justly deserving of blame and censure.

I know

I know it will be said, in defence of a loose and indigested method of preaching, by those who indulge in it, that without bestowing all that polish upon their discourses which some insist on, they can render them equally subservient to the improvement of their hearers as if they did, and that therefore they may be excused, if they should spare themselves the labour. It is readily owned, that religion stands in no need of a gaudy finery of dress to set off her beauty; but an elegant neatness she should never want; less than this affronts her: And therefore, as there is nothing to hinder a discourse trimmed up by the hand of elegance, and under the direction of a good taste, from being as edifying, as well as incomparably more agreeable, than that which is huddled up in a slovenly manner, the Preacher should be ashamed of consulting his own ease, at the expence of attiring Religion in a way so unjust to her charms; a way which can only please the ignorant, but must ever offend the intelligent friends of Religion, while it serves to strengthen those

prejudices of her enemies against her, which a decent and comely representation might have overcome.

Did the hurt done to Religion by this manner of representing her, appear in the same point of light to those who indulge in it, that it does to others, no doubt their regard for her honour and interest (which is not to be suspected) would guard them against it, and prompt and engage them to pursue that method which should seem best calculated to promote both.

But in the mean time it deserves to be considered, if those who make the complaint of a manner of preaching among the clergy, slovenly, inelegant and unenterprising, do not in some measure occasion it, and if they have it not in their power to remedy it. Yes, let them not be offended if I say they deserve no small share of blame in the case complained of; an alteration however in their own conduct, will bring about the alteration they profess so much to wish for in the manner of preaching.

Ambition

Ambition is a principle implanted in our nature by the wise Author of it, for the most valuable purposes; properly directed, and under due regulation, it may be of the most powerful and happy influence in the clerical, as well as every other department of life. While the young preacher stands candidate for a settlement in the church, the influence of it upon his mind shews itself in all his performances for the public; they are formed at once to instruct and to please. Whence comes it, that it's influence after his settlement, so quickly dwindles, and at last becomes so weak? Why, from the want of that encouragement which is necessary to preserve it's force and vigour. It is acknowledged, that Religion is not wanting in presenting to the ambition of the Preacher, prospects admirably calculated to work upon it. The success which they are encouraged to hope will attend their pious labours, in the growing virtue of their hearers; and that glory with which they shall in due time be honoured in a better world as their reward, must by an in-

genuous mind be considered as the strongest incentives to its ambition : And it is hoped, there are none of the ministers of Religion who do not feel their happy influence. Than these objects, which the faith of the Preacher presents to his view, there can be none of a higher value. But in a world such as this, there are some of a secondary nature, which cannot fail to have a very powerful influence upon him.

A superiority to this world, such as the Apostles shewed, is not to be looked for in those who succeed them in the office of the Ministry. The same reasons do not now subsist, that then did, to make it necessary. From their connexion with the present scene, it can scarce be expected that they, more than others, should be unaffected with the views which open to them in their passage through it.

The Clergyman is justly to be despised, who aims at no more in the public duties of his function, than fame and reputation  
to

to himself: but he is also justly to blame, who dead to these, can indulge himself in a degree of sloth and indolence, which may make him neglect the pains necessary to raise his discourses above what is mean and groveling, and make the dress in which they appear decent and agreeable. However, though upon this principle, were there no other to influence him, every Preacher who has the least degree of taste is bound to shew a proper regard to it, in the manner in which he illustrates the nature, and recommends the practice of virtue; yet it must, at the same time be owned, that when he finds his public performances, which are the result of the united energy of his taste and literary accomplishments, are neglected, and unrewarded by those who are the best judges of both, nothing can be more natural, than for the future to trouble himself less with the polish of them, contented if he can convey instruction to those, who from a desire of it, attend to receive it, but who regardless of the elegancies of composition, are indifferent about the manner

in which it is held forth to them. Is it not therefore ungenerous, if not unfair, in those of better rank, by their habitual absence from the institutions of Religion, and the little encouragement they give to the Ministers of it, first to occasion, and then to complain of the ungainly manner which some of them follow in the exercises of Religion? Let them be more careful to wait on it's ordinances, and then they will probably find those who preside in the administration of them, more assiduous to deserve their attendance. Let them make private and obscure places, the nurseries in which those are to be trained up, who are afterwards to fill the more respectable and important stations in the church. Let them make merit, not political interest or connexions, the path that leads to them; and then shall they find that laudable ambition, for the honour of being esteemed good Preachers, prevail among the clergy, which for want of such encouragement, is apt to droop and languish, and hang down its despairing head.

But,

But to draw to a conclusion of this address, which those for whom it was intended, may perhaps think is spun out too long already, while we lament the too frequent neglect of the institutions of Religion, it becomes us, with gratitude to God, and the greatest pleasure, to observe, that there are not wanting some in our country, who as they are distinguished by their high rank in life, are distinguished also by their devout attendance upon these, and who amidst the sneers of a sceptical and licentious age, are not ashamed to be called religious; nay, account this their most illustrious honour. May the number of such fast increase, and all happily feel and yield to the force of their example, who are within the sphere of its influence. Then will Religion, in place of its faded appearance, re-assume its native looks, and appear in blooming charms.



III. *To those who are engaged in the Office of the Ministry, or are Candidates for it.*

TO recover Religion from the contempt into which it is so unjustly fallen with some, and procure it that esteem which it deserves from all, requires every fair art of address which it's friends are capable of using.

The Ministers of Religion are, in a particular manner, called on to stand up and plead its cause, and that not only by a proper attention to the manner of their life, but of their preaching also.

To you, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, permit me, with the greatest deference and respect, to address myself. To you, the public offices of Religion are assigned—To you, the honour of it is, in a certain sense, committed—You are constituted the guardians of it, and have accepted the trust—Upon you, the eyes of the world are turned; all are looking on  
with

with critical attention, but with very different views: The good, willing to promote; the bad, equally assiduous to obstruct the success of your pious endeavours. Nay, Religion herself, neglected, affronted and injured, turns to you—With weeping eyes she complains of the bad usage she has met with, and solicits your friendly aid in her support—You have solemnly promised to give, and she has a just title to expect it. Disappoint not her hopes. You consult your own honour by vindicating her's. You have much in your power—By a proper exertion of yourselves, and a fair representation of Religion, you may bless the present and succeeding generations; the one, by recovering to it that relish for Religion, which it has in a great measure lost; the other, by transmitting a happy taste for it. How glorious and noble the undertaking in which you are engaged! The design of it is to promote the cause of Religion, of God, of your country, of mankind. Is it not the most noble that can be conceived, or proposed to human ambition

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tion? How ought you to rouse yourselves at these hints? Who would not wish for the honour of promoting so good a cause, and willingly lend a helping hand? Shall the men of this world shew so much zeal and activity in supporting the little interests of a faction and party? Shall their whole souls appear engaged in the pursuit of their interested designs? And can you shew less concern, when the cause which demands your service is deserving of incomparably greater? I am unwilling to suspect any, who have undertaken to support the cause of Religion, of a defect of regard for it; but it is not enough that their regard for it be sincere, it must exert itself in a proper attention to every mean that is most likely to diffuse this regard among others: And for this purpose it behoves them to attend to the manner, as well as the subject of their public instructions; for however proper the one may be, if the other is not so too, their success will be the less.

In

In the execution of the public offices of teaching or instruction, it might be of importance to remember, that they address themselves to an audience of very mixed characters, and that a proper regard must be had to these in the manner in which they are conducted. And as they must observe, and cannot but regret, that so many continue to neglect the institutions of Religion, and to shelter themselves under the pretence of the offence they have taken at the ungainly representation which is often exhibited of it by its Ministers, should not their care be, to remove this ground of complaint, by never exhibiting any but a true picture of it, and always studying that the dress shall be such as may best suit the dignity of her character ; equally avoiding what may be called gaudy or slovenly, because neither can with any propriety correspond with it.

Every age, as well as country, has something characteristic and peculiar to itself. And I cannot help thinking that he is but  
little

little acquainted with human nature, who shall attempt to reform it by an affected singularity ; or a stiff and rigid adherence to the phrases, modes of expression, or manner of sermonizing which obtained in former times ; as if these became venerable in proportion to their age. These are no longer to be followed, than they are found to be useful ; whenever they cease to be so, they should be exchanged for what promises to answer better : And if the author mistakes not, that manner of communicating religious instruction, which he has taken the liberty to recommend with so much warmth, promises as fair for this purpose, as any which has hitherto been practised. .

What the author has ventured to advance in this part of the address, he hopes will be taken in good part by those to whom it is made. If a zeal for the honour of the sacred character, and the success of Religion, which is connected with the manner of recommending it, has carried him further than some of them may think he should  
 have

have gone, the motives from which he acted must be his apology; and from their candor he hopes for pardon.

The interests of Religion are not only closely connected with the labours of those who are already engaged in her service, but likewise with the education of those who are to devote themselves to it.

Such I heartily congratulate, and my country too, upon the many advantages they have, superior to most in former times, for having their studies conducted upon a plan the most promising of success, if they be not wanting to themselves, in what falls to their own share in the execution of it

I mean not to reflect on the memory of those, who in several successions, presided in our Theological schools. It would be ungenerous—It would be unjust to do it. Many of them filled their station with true dignity; and what was improper in the plan of education, or the manner of conducting it,

it, was rather the fault of the times, than of the men. But surely, without detracting from them, or falling under the suspicion of flattering those who have succeeded them, we may venture to affirm, that educated themselves upon a more liberal plan than many of their predecessors, and profiting themselves of the improvements in science and taste, which have been carried to a height unknown in former times, they must have peculiar advantages for directing the education of those who study under them. Inexcusable therefore must the pupils of such masters be, if in attentive to the instructions they receive from them for enriching their minds, forming their taste, and impressing their hearts with a just sense of the importance and obligations of the sacred character, and the proper manner of honourably supporting it, they are not careful, in the future scenes of life, to act under the influence of them.

We who are already engaged in the sacred service of Religion, cannot be indifferent  
to

to the character of those who are to succeed us in it, and shall be employed to nourish and rear up those seeds of virtue, which we are at pains to sow. Were the soil more friendly than it is, their progress to perfection or maturity, we are sensible, must be slow, and in a great measure depend upon the culture they shall receive, and upon the skill, as well as assiduity, of those who give it. Upon you therefore, my *Young Friends*, we cast our eyes, as those who are soon to fill the stations which we now occupy—From you, Religion and your country expect a great deal, and they have a title to do so—Nay, upon the part you shall act in the character you are soon to assume, the honour, the interests of both must very much depend. And conscious of this, it is hoped you will not neglect that course of education which you are now passing through, to qualify you for acting in it with propriety and usefulness.

He must be ignorant of the nature and importance of the Preacher's talk, who does



not see, that he who would execute it with credit to himself, honour to Religion, or success with his hearers, must be possessed of an extensive and various knowledge, and the happy art of applying and communicating it. Is it an easy matter to instruct mankind in the knowledge, and engage them to the practice of their duty, in all the variety of situations in which they may be placed? Is it an easy matter to lay open the human heart; to trace it's various windings; to unfold and ascertain the springs of conduct; to wash off that false colouring with which it is often varnished over; and in short, to discover the man to himself? Is it an easy matter for the preacher suitably to address his hearers according to their various and respective characters; so to address their hopes and fears, and other passions, as to give each it's proper influence upon them, and to make them all concur, like the different parts of a well regulated machinery, to promote the several movements of the Christian and Divine Life?

For

For these purposes, is it not necessary that the Christian Divine should be well acquainted with the sacred oracles, those pure and untainted fountains of divine wisdom—with human nature in general, and with the taste and manners of that age and country in particular, in which he lives ; nay, and that he should know how to avail himself of his acquaintance with all these ? He must have a very imperfect notion of the Preacher's business, who can imagine it easy, if he would discharge it in a manner becoming it's nature, dignity, and importance.

The author will reckon himself happy if the strictures he has ventured (Part II.) to make upon the several modes of preaching, which at different times obtained in this country, shall serve to assist the young candidate for the ministry, in the judgment he is to form of them, and to guard him against what is culpable in them.

Compared with these, the superior excellence of that practised by the sacred writers, and of which we have exhibited some specimens, Part III. Sect. I. will, it is hoped, appear in a very advantageous light. The propriety of other modes of instruction, must be determined by the prevailing taste of the age and country in which they are practised, and a variety of other circumstances. This rests upon a much firmer basis—It is founded in human nature itself, and of consequence can never fail, if properly executed, to be both agreeable and instructive.

It is the honour of this age, that it stands distinguished for improvements in science and taste, far beyond any which preceded it. The consideration of this should have no small influence upon the preacher in those performances of his which are calculated for the public. A manner, which in no distant period, would have highly pleased, would now be held slovenly and gothick, and could not fail to excite disgust.

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The taste of the present age is too much improved, too refined and delicate, to be pleased with the coarse and homely strain in which the discourses of some in a former age run. It is therefore the duty of the preachers of Religion to consult it's gratification, by studying a manner that may be more agreeable to it; especially as there is nothing to hinder their discourses from having at once a neatness and uncti<sup>o</sup>n in them, and thus becoming agreeable and interesting.

It is true, it requires no mean talents, a considerable share of erudition, a more than ordinary knowledge of mankind, and a well cultivated taste, to do justice to the preaching art, upon the plan we have recommended. But what then? Shall these considerations discourage the young preacher from attempting it? They ought to have the contrary effect—The very attempt would be laudable, and greatly contribute to his own improvement, while it tended to qualify him the better for promoting the improvement of others.

In fine, permit me to conclude this address in the nervous language of the sacred writers to those, who, in their day, had but lately entered into the office of the ministry, and which, with a little variation, may be equally applicable to you who are candidates for it.—Neglect not the gifts, whether of nature or of grace, that may be in you.—That you may properly cultivate and improve them, give attendanc to reading, meditate on those things with which the sacred oracles abound, for your instruction; give yourselves wholly to them, that your profiting may appear to all.—In a word, in all things shew yourselves patterns of good works, being examples to believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity : In doctrine shew uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned : and thus taking heed unto yourselves and unto your doctrine, and continuing in them, you shall, in so doing, both save yourselves and them who hear you.

IV. *To Christians in general.*

MANY, my fellow Christians, and valuable are the privileges, which you in this happy isle enjoy, by the Revelation or Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let a proper sense of them be ever impressed upon your minds, and it will not, cannot fail to have an influence upon you equally powerful and happy. It will naturally dispose you,

To cherish sentiments of the warmest gratitude to God for them. This is one part of that return which he expects from you, and which, you must own, you are under the most sacred obligations to render to him. To fan the fire of gratitude into a pure and holy flame, you need only review the accounts given of the state of Religion in the heathen world, and with it compare the superior advantages you enjoy for attaining perfection both in the knowledge and practice of it. Upon the most cursory view, the advantages of your situation will appear highly distinguished.

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Without

Without troubling yourselves with the perusal of the many volumes which might cast light upon this subject, you may, without danger of mistake, judge of the state of Religion in the heathen world, from the account which the apostle of the Gentiles gives of it in his day. Does he not tell us that the Gentiles were filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, deceit; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:—That they changed the truth of God into a lie, and the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible Man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things, and worshiped the creature more than the Creator ||. What a shocking picture is this? The more shocking that it is a true one,

|| Rom i. 23, 25, 29, 32.

drawn

drawn from the life, and without any unfair colouring. Perhaps you imagine they were some rude, barbarous and uncivilized tribes, of whom he thus speaks. You greatly mistake the matter — They were nations, the most celebrated at that time in the world, for the advances they had made in literature and politeness. And are you not surprized when I tell you they were the ancient Greeks and Romans, of whom he gives this character—Still more surprized when you hear, that this character he formed of them, not from uncertain report or information, but from a thorough acquaintance with them?

But small as the progress was, which these nations we have just now mentioned had made in religious knowledge, there have never since been discovered any who could equal them in it, who had not greater advantages than they, or were not obliged to Revelation. Read the accounts that are given us by Voyagers and Travellers of the best credit, of the manners of some of the  
wild



wild and savage nations they have visited ; and must you not be equally surprized, as shocked, to think that any who have been honoured with human nature, should be capable of so far degrading and disgracing it, as many of them have done ? Nay, to inflame your gratitude to God for the happiness of your situation, consult the annals of your own country ; and before the introduction of Christianity into it, how little, if any better were your ancestors (humbling indeed to hear !) than those whom in your pride, you now call Barbarians § ? It is true, the hints we have of the state of our country, before this happy æra, are but few ; but few as they are, sufficient to confirm the truth of this melancholy observation. And even not many centuries ago, before this Revelation began to be tolerably understood, what a sad scene was

§ See the account given of the state of Religion in Britian, before the introduction of Christianity into it, in Dr. Henry's History of Britain, Vol. I. Ch. ii. § I. Cæsar de Bel. Gal. Lib. vi. pass.

our country of ignorance, tumult, distraction, bloodshed, and the roughest manners? Thus compared with the situation of other nations, nay with that of our ancestors in our own, how happy must we acknowledge ours to be? And can we think of it, without feeling those emotions of gratitude springing up in our breasts, which we owe to that God from whom we derive our superior advantages? Who would not be ashamed to be so much as suspected of such baseness? Would it not be a reproach to us as men, not to say as Christians? I hope better things of you, and that you will never coolly indulge yourselves in a course of conduct, which, upon reflection, you must yourselves condemn.

While the consideration of your own happy state fills your soul with gratitude to God, should it not, at the same time, excite your compassion for these numerous tribes of mankind, upon whom the sun of righteousness has never yet lifted his enlightening rays, and who are therefore still sitting  
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In darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death? Consider they are your brethren; allied to you by the common tie of humanity; derived from the same common stock; for of one blood hath God made all the nations of men, who dwell on the face of the earth:—And will you have no compassion upon their unhappy circumstances? Must he not be void of humanity, a stranger to all the tender feelings of the heart, as well as to the spirit of Christianity, who does not wish for the speedy approach of that happy time, when the kingdom of God shall come universally over the earth; and when those who partake with us in the privileges of human nature, shall partake with us also in the privileges of his Grace and Gospel? Surely you could not bear the thought (were it even in your power) of monopolizing the privileges you enjoy. Envy may grudge a communication of the blessings which one possesses, but real goodness will delight in diffusing them, and make him esteem his own happiness increased, in the same proportion in which he has it in his power

power to increase the happiness of others. Do you not wish, like that God whom you profess to serve, that all should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth? And would it not give you the greatest pleasure to contribute your best endeavours to this valuable end, that so they might join with you, and in an agreeable symphony of praise, hail the riches of that Grace, by which you are called to the hopes of the heavenly kingdom and glory?

Gratitude for the privileges you enjoy, and a hearty wish for the communication of them to those who are yet strangers to them, is not all that is incumbent upon you.

If your gratitude be sincere, it will engage you to express it in a proper manner; and particularly in the cultivation of the virtues of a holy life, proportioned to the advantages with which you have been distinguished. Never allow yourselves to lose sight of the original design for which the  
Gospel

Gospel was given you. Remember that it's great aim is, to teach us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world—to make us virtuous, that it might make us happy. Attend to the import of the character with which you are distinguished, and you must at once see how much it concerns you to evince your title to it, by a corresponding practice. Remember that the true character of a Christian, does not consist in any outward distinction of name or profession, but in such a happy conformity of heart and life to the doctrine, laws and example of his divine Master, as the imperfection of the present state will admit.

The character of the Christian is a very honourable and respectable one, and it concerns you who now wear it, if you would be found to deserve it, to pay a sacred attention to it. It is, like beauty itself, easily stained and sullied. In characters, as in faces, the least spot is soonest discerned  
in

in those which are reckoned the finest. The reason is obvious—They are the objects of general observation—Many are continually gazing upon them—Some from an admiration, others from an envy of their beauty: And therefore it can scarce be expected that the least speck should pass unnoticed, either by the one or the other, or both. Your Lord compared his apostles (and what he observed of them does, in a certain sense, hold true of his Disciples in general) to a city built upon a hill, which could not be hid—The eminence of their station rendered them the objects of general notice. You may depend on it, the wicked are not inattentive to your conduct—They pry into it with critical attention, that, from every inconsistency they can discover in it, they may have an opportunity to expose it: And if you give them any such opportunities, be assured they will not let them slip; nay, they will take a cruel pleasure in holding up your conduct to public view, and thus triumphing over you, by exposing it to public

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lic scorn. Keep therefore the dignity and importance of your character ever in view, and study to act up to it, by adorning it with every virtue that can add new grace or lustre to it : And if your profession and practice go thus hand in hand, it is impossible but such a behaviour, all along supported with becoming dignity, must force admiration from all, and praise from most.

Such a dignity of conduct is not only what you owe to the honour of character, but also to the honour of Religion, with which the interests of it are closely connected. From whom, pray, is it that your master, and the world in general, would expect a favourable representation of religion, if not from you who profess yourselves the friends and votaries of it ? You must forget the obligations that are upon you, before you can indulge in any piece of conduct contrary to your profession. The indignity would not terminate on yourselves—It would!

would rebound upon your Lord and his Religion, and though most unjustly, affect the honour of both, by strengthening the prejudices of their adversaries against them. Religion has always had it's enemies: These will not take the trouble to examine into the nature of it, from the character given of it in the sacred oracles, or the picture exhibited of it in the life of the divine Jesus. Such examination would be attended with some trouble. They commonly take that course in judging of it, that is attended with the least; and though nothing can be more unfair than such manner of judging, they form their sentiments of it from the lives of those, who have no other argument to support their claim to the character of it's votaries, but their profession of it. Knowing this, should you not carefully study, if you would approve yourselves the sincere friends of Religion, to add to the other evidences of it's excellence, that which may be derived from the happy influence it has upon your heart and practice? Few are proper judges of the na-



ture of evidence or of good reasoning ; but all feel the force of good example :—It has something admirably eloquent in it, and should be always exerted by the votaries of Religion, as a most powerful recommendation of it. By these means you would adorn the Gospel of Christ, add to it's laurels by making it triumph over the passions, prejudices and vices of mankind, silence the cavils of it's adversaries, and comfort the hearts of it's friends.

That you may the more successfully promote these valuable ends, it will be necessary that you have your faith in this divine Revelation, fortified against every attempt that may be made to shake it : And you will be more lucky than most who have gone before you in the profession of Christianity, if you do not meet with some of these. There are few principles in themselves so plain and rational, but some will be found, who have effrontery enough to impugn them. It concerns you therefore to be so satisfied of the reasonableness of those

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those you adopt, that it may not be in the power of designing men, by all their artifice and chicanery, to unhinge your faith in them. For this purpose it would be highly useful, if your education and circumstances in life would admit, to make yourselves acquainted with the nature and force of that evidence by which Christianity is supported, and with the quibbles and sophistry by which its adversaries frequently misrepresent and endeavour to weaken it. The better you become acquainted with both, the more firmly your faith will be established in that religion which you profess. Imposture only can lose, truth must always gain, by a critical examination of it.

The arts, by which the enemies of Religion endeavour to shake the profession of its votaries, and to bend them to a mean compliance with the opinions and manners of a licentious age, are various. If they cannot succeed in the way of argument, they never fail to try what banter and ridicule can do ; and alas ! they are often but

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too

too successful. If you do not readily fall in with their system of faith and practice, they will employ all their wit to make you lose conceit of Religion, by endeavouring to turn your adherence to it into ridicule. With this view they will, upon all occasions, represent you as men of mean education, narrow and confined principles, a groveling turn of mind, and low breeding; and tell the world that your faith is but credulity, your hope but delusion, your devotion but enthusiasm, your Lord but an impostor, his disciples but fools, and your profession of Religion but hypocrisy and grimace. Be not surprized at such treatment; it is no more than your Lord warn- ed you to look for, from an unkind and un hospitable world: He found it such, and why should you flatter yourselves with the hopes of a more favourable reception from it? The servant is not greater than his Lord. Let the enemies of Religion throw out what reproaches they will against it, they cannot alter the nature of it; and till they can, they should as little shake

shake

shake your adherence to it. Convinced of the truth and excellence of your Religion, resolve that your faith in, and your profession of it, shall be steadfast and unmoveable, like a rock in the midst of a boisterous sea, on which the billows may dash and spend their strength, but which, with all their fury, they cannot shake or remove. That Religion, for which you may suffer the frowns of an illnatured world, furnishes you with more than an abundant consolation under them: Nay, in the hopes of that glory which shall be the reward of your persevering fidelity and constancy, affords what may not only render you superior to them in the issue, but make you even triumph in the midst of them. Frequently entertain your souls with those glorious prospects which are opened to the view of your faith beyond the grave; and how should the joyful expectation of being one day admitted to the fruition of your hopes, fortify your good resolutions, give a greatness to all your designs, and a happy direction

and dignity to the whole of your conduct through life.

To conclude: When all the motives that can arise from a regard to the honour of God and Religion, your own interest and that of others, conspire to recommend a life of purity and virtue to you, I hope their influence upon you will be proportioned to their strength and importance, and that, ever mindful of the dignity of your character and the greatness of your hopes, you will never allow yourselves in any thing, by which you may either fully the one, or forfeit the other.

THE END.

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APPENDIX.

## A P P E N D I X.

## N U M B E R I.

*An Examination of the Sentiments of David Hume, Esq; with respect to the Origin of Priests.*

VERY different from the account given p. 19, is that which David Hume, Esq; makes of the rise and institution of the Priesthood, in his Essay on Superstition and Enthusiasm. There he observes that, “ as  
 “ superstition is founded on fear, sorrow  
 “ and a depression of spirits, it represents  
 “ the man to himself in such despicable co-  
 “ lours, that he appears unworthy in his  
 “ own eyes of approaching the divine pre-  
 “ sence, and naturally has recourse to any  
 “ other person, whose sanctity of life, or  
 “ perhaps impudence and cunning, have

“ made him to be supposed more favoured  
 “ by the divinity. To him the supersti-  
 “ tious entrust their devotions ; to his care  
 “ they recommend their prayers, petitions  
 “ and sacrifices ; and by his means they  
 “ hope to render their addresses acceptable  
 “ to their incensed Deity. Hence *the origin*  
 “ *of Priests*, who may be justly regarded as  
 “ one of the grossest inventions of a timo-  
 “ rous and abject superstition, &c ”.

This account of the origin of the Priest-  
 hood must not pass without examination,  
 as every thing which comes from this au-  
 thor against Religion, or the ministers of it,  
 is received with but too partial a regard by  
 the *many*, who are no friends to either.  
 Should these sheets fall into the hands of  
 any such, they must excuse me, if, in vin-  
 dication of the truth, as well as the honour  
 of this character, I should endeavour to  
 expose the fallacy of his reasoning upon  
 this subject.

No man, it is readily acknowledged, is more master of the art of good reasoning than he is, when he chuses to apply it: Neither is there any who knows better how to make the worst reasoning subservient to his cause, by an artificial varnish given to it. This last is indeed a heavy charge.—In support of it I might adduce a great deal from several parts of his own writings, but shall confine myself at present to the Essay under consideration; upon which, in so far as it seems to stand in opposition to the opinion I have given of the origin of the Priesthood, I beg leave to offer a few strictures.

Mr. Hume cannot be ignorant, that in most of the antient states, the Regal and Sacerdotal characters were, for a considerable time, united in the same person. Whether in the account he gives of the institution of the Priesthood, he refers to that early period of society, when it was vested in the person of the prince; or to latter times, when it became an office quite distinct by itself, and those who held it were considered  
as



as an order different from the laity, he does not express himself with precision sufficient, positively to determine. In the present case however, the obscurity does not matter much, because neither upon the one supposition nor the other, will the account he gives of the origin of it be found to be just.

If we consider it in the first of these views, we shall find that it was not so much superstition in the people, as ambition and policy in the prince, which gave rise to the institution of the sacerdotal order. He could not but observe the strong attachment which mankind had to Religion, and the powerful influence it had upon them; and therefore, either from a principle of ambition, for the honour that attended the supreme direction of the *Sacra*, or from policy, that he might make it a state engine for promoting the purposes of government, he might endeavour to work himself into this office: And for any thing that appears to the contrary, it was rather the good  
opinion

opinion the people had of him, and the confidence they put in him, than superstition, which seems to have engaged them to vest him with it.

It could not be long before mankind would find themselves under a necessity of incorporating into society. As early as this, it is highly probable that their notions of God and Religion would, from the traces of Revelation made to their ancestors, and still preserved among them, be tolerably pure and just. A considerable time must have elapsed, before they could become greatly corrupted. Then it was that their Princes, who were also their Priests, taking advantage of the ignorance of the people, and the undue confidence they placed in them, broached and propagated all the superstitious stories which disgrace the Theology of antient times. Neither is this mere conjecture, it seems to be a fact supported by undoubted authority. Thus says Strabo, “ It is impossible to govern women and the com-  
 “ mon

“ mon people, and to keep them pious, holy  
 “ and virtuous, by the precepts of Philoso-  
 “ phy. This can be only done by super-  
 “ stition, which is raised and supported by  
 “ antient fictions and modern prodigies.  
 “ Therefore the Fables of the Thunder of  
 “ Jupiter, the *Ægis* of Minerva, the Tri-  
 “ dent of Neptune, the Thyrsus of Bac-  
 “ chus, and the Snakes and Torches of the  
 “ Furies, with all the other apparatus of  
 “ antient Theology, were the engines  
 “ which the *Legislator* employed, as bug-  
 “ bears, to strike a terror in the childish im-  
 “ aginations of the multitude”. To the  
 same purpose another writer of distinguished  
 character, Polybius, observes, “ That the  
 “ superior excellence of the Roman policy  
 “ above others, manifests itself chiefly in  
 “ the religious notions the Romans had con-  
 “ cerning the Gods. That thing, which  
 “ in other places is turned to abuse, being  
 “ the very support of the Roman affairs,  
 “ i. e. superstition, which is come to such a  
 “ height both in it’s influence on particulars  
 “ and on the public, that nothing can ex-  
 “ ceed

“ceed it. This, which many may think  
 “extraordinary, to me (says he) seems plain-  
 “ly to have been contrived for the sake  
 “of the community. If indeed one was  
 “to frame a civil policy only for wise  
 “men, it is possible this kind of institution  
 “might not be necessary, but since the  
 “multitude is ever fickle and capricious,  
 “full of irregular passions and irrational  
 “and violent resentments, there is no way  
 “left to keep them in order but by the  
 “terrors of future punishment, and the  
 “pompous circumstances that belong to  
 “such kind of fictions\*.” These quo-  
 tations I pass over with one observation  
 (because my design in referring to them,  
 does not require I should make more) viz.  
 That the Priesthood, in place of taking it’s  
 rise from superstition, was, in early times,  
 the source from which, in a great measure,

\* See Warbut. Div. Legat. &c. V. III. B. I. §. I.  
 from which I have taken the translation of the above pas-  
 sages, as my situation does not allow me immediate access  
 to the originals.

it flowed; and that, from the connexion then established betwixt the Priestly and Regal power, most of the instances of superstition, the accounts of which have come down to us, deserve to be considered as the effect rather of Lay, than of Priest Craft.

But let us suppose (which seems to have been the fact) that Mr. Hume asserts that the institution of Priests, considered as an order of men distinct from the Laity, took its rise from superstition, and we shall find that there is no just ground for such a position.

It must be acknowledged that the chief business of the sacerdotal order, especially in antient times, was to preside in the social and public offices of Religion. What then became of the exercises of Religion which were of a private nature, and incumbent upon mankind considered as individuals? According to Mr. Hume's scheme these must have stopt altogether, or at least  
could

could be practised with no propriety.—The reason must be obvious to all.—If a sense of unworthiness, and a fear of offending the Deity on the account of it, made the institution of Priests necessary, and engaged the worshippers to have recourse to them in all their public devotions, in hopes, that being presented to the incensed Divinity through their mediation, they would be rendered thereby acceptable to him; must not the same considerations have deterred them from all religious exercises of a private nature, where the good offices of the Priest could not be obtained, nor of consequence his sanctity avail to recommend them? Yes, Upon every principle of reason and religion they ought, because whatever could render their approach to God, without the mediation of the Priest, unsafe in their public and social devotions, must have rendered it equally so in those of a private or more retired nature. And yet we know, upon the best authority, that in most nations, every family had their Dii Lares, and Penates; that acts of private devotion were performed

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to these at their domestic altars, in which the master of the family presided, and all this long after the institution of the Priesthood ; a plain evidence that the principle alledged by Mr. Hume was not that which led to it.

At the first institution of the sacerdotal office, it is highly probable those would be pitched upon to perform it, who were most distinguished for the appearance of piety. And in such a choice, was there not an evident propriety ? For though the worshippers should lay no stress upon the sanctity or merit of those who presided in the services of Religion (and so early as the period we speak of, it does not appear that they did) was it not highly decent and becoming, that those should be esteemed virtuous and holy who were to be employed in ministering to a Being such as they conceived God to be ? It is true, the people might mistake the real character of those to whom they gave the direction of the public offices of Religion : They might be esteemed holy without being really so, and owe their ve-

nerable

nerable character (as Mr. Hume would insinuate they did) to their impudence and cunning. But what then? Where it to be allowed, that in some cases this was the matter of fact, it will by no means fix the imputation of folly or superstition upon their choice; for surely nothing could be more rational than to be determined, in the nomination they were to make to this sacred office, by the character of those who might be candidates for it.—Prudence would recommend a strict enquiry into their character before any election was made; but Candor at the same time required, that if upon a critical examination, appearances were found favourable they should think well of them, because they could have no other rule or standard by which to estimate their worth, or form their own judgment with respect to them.

I am unwilling to do Mr. Hume injustice by any construction I put upon his



words, and if in this case I have done it, I shall most readily beg his pardon, when he says so, though the ambiguity with which he has expressed himself is that which has led me to it, but I must own that the manner in which he attempts to account for the institution of the Priesthood, seems to me not only to contain a reflection against the wisdom of the people in the first choice of their Priests, but also an innuendo against the character of Priests or Clergy in general, as if they owed the opinion which many have of their sanctity, more to their *impudence and cunning*, in the pretensions they make to it, than to the actual possession of it,—or at least, as if there were ground always to suspect so. Whether Mr. Hume had any such intention, cannot with certainty be inferred from his mode of writing: It must however be owned that it is such as creates a just suspicion against him, especially when to what he has said here, we add the consideration of what he has advanced against the clergy, in his *Essay on National Characters*. That there

have

have occurred no instances, in which the clergy were supposed to possess a high degree of sanctity, while they were destitute of it,—or in which the opinion the world formed with respect to their sanctity was not derived from their impudence and cunning; or in other words, from the high pretensions they made to it, I will not take upon me to say: But because this may sometimes have been the case, is it not uncandid and illiberal to throw out a general insinuation against the order, as if these vices, more than sanctity, were characteristic of it, when he may and ought to know, that the nature and tendency of that Religion, which they are to teach others, is to guard themselves against such vices and engage them to cultivate the opposite virtues. †

† See this observation admirably well proved and illustrated in Dr. Gerard's Synod Sermon, entitled, *The Influence of the Pastoral Office on the Character examined.*

Upon the whole, I hope the candid Reader will be of opinion that our account of the origin of the Priesthood remains unaffected by that which Mr. Hume gives of it.

As he makes the superstition of the people, or the fear of approaching the Deity themselves, and the dependance they had upon the sanctity of their Priests for his acceptance of their services, that which gave rise to the institution of their order, he ought to have adduced a proof of this, and not rested it, as he has done, upon his mere *ipse dixit*, which, though it may be oracular with some, will not be so with all his Readers : And till he had evinced the truth of his position beyond all dispute, he must excuse me if I say, he should have spared the triumph with which he pronounces the institution of the Priesthood, *one of the grossest inventions of a timorous and abject superstition*, and thus endeavours to lessen it's usefulness, by making mankind ashamed of themselves in continuing an order, whose first  
insti-

institution, he would fain persuade them, could only have it's rise from their weakness.

Not content with dropping insinuations against the origin and character of Priests, Mr. Hume, in the course of this Essay, throws out some against Religion, in almost all the modes in which it has appeared, alledging that superstition is a considerable ingredient in most of them. He particularises Judaism and Popery, which he calls the most absurd and unphilosophical superstitions that have yet been known in the world.

As to Popery, or those peculiarities of it, by which it is distinguished from that platform of Religion which is delineated in the Christian Institutes, we leave it's votaries to defend it the best they can:—But as to the other, we own ourselves called on to offer a vindication of it against this charge, because of it's connexion with that system of Religion which we profess to be the rule both of our faith and manners.

All general reflections, unsupported by proof, whether thrown out against nations, characters or religions, have ever, and most justly, been reckoned an unfair and cowardly method of attack : It looks as if one declined a fair and open combat, and meanly satisfied himself with assaulting from some ambush, where he might be secure, because concealed.

If Judaism (by which he must mean that institution of Religion under which the Jews lived) were really that absurd and unphilosophical superstition Mr. Hume would represent it, why did he not endeavour to undeceive the *many* who think otherwise of it ?—As a fair writer and good member of society, he ought to have made good the charge he brings against it ; the discovery of the absurdities he ascribes to it, would have done service to the world, and honour to himself. But this he wisely declined attempting, both from a regard to his own character, and to the cause of scepticism, of which he is allowed the honour (if he be ambitious of it) of being one  
of

of the most zealous and able patrons. He is too quick-fighted not to see that any account he could offer of Judaism, to prove it absurd and unphilosophical, would itself more justly fall under this imputation, and therefore it was wise not to enter into the detail, and by an induction of particulars to attempt a proof.

The thrust here given against Christianity (if it was intended as such) is very artfully managed, and comes indirectly, but with equal, if not more danger to it's interests, than if it had been avowed to glance upon it. For could mankind be once brought to look upon Judaism, as an absurd and unphilosophical superstition, what regard would remain due to Christianity, of whose strongest evidences some are derived from thence? Nay, how hard would it bear upon the character of it's illustrious Author, to find him frequently appealing to the writings in which the Jewish Religion was contained, if at the same time, it was no

other than a piece of superstition, and that the most absurd and unphilosophical that has ever appeared in the world, or, “*a corruption of true Religion,*” and “*a species of false Religion,*” for thus does he describe superstition in the beginning of his Essay?

It does not fall in with my present design, to enter into a minute examination of the nature and constitution of the Jewish Religion, else I humbly think it might be easy to prove, that in place of being absurd in any part of it, it was through the whole, admirably suited to that period of the world at which it first appeared, and through which it afterwards continued in force; as also to the genius and circumstances of the people who had an immediate concern with it; while, at the same time, making a part of the plan of Providence, it was admirably calculated to prepare the world for, and usher in that dispensation of Religion which was to succeed it.

it.—I shall content myself with adducing the opinion of the celebrated Baron de Montesquieu upon a point of that Religion, which Mr. Hume condemns as absurd and unphilosophical in the gross. His merit as a man of great erudition, and thoroughly acquainted with the subjects upon which he writes, will not be disputed by any,—not by Mr. Hume himself. His words deserve to be quoted. Speaking of temples, and the application of them as asylums and sanctuaries, and the abuse which was made of them, in this respect, both among the Greeks and Romans, he adds,—“ The laws of Moses were perfectly wise.—The man who involuntarily killed another, was innocent, but he was obliged to be taken away from before the eyes of the relations of the deceased: Moses, therefore, appointed an asylum for such unfortunate people. Great criminals deserved not a place of safety, and they had none. The Jews had only a portable Tabernacle, which continually changed  
“ it's



“ it’s place: This excluded the idea of a  
 “ Sanctuary. It is true, they had after-  
 “ wards a Temple, but the criminals, who  
 “ would resort thither from all parts,  
 “ might disturb the divine service. If the  
 “ persons who had committed manslaughter,  
 “ had been driven out of the country, as  
 “ was customary among the Greeks, they  
 “ had reason to fear that they would worship  
 “ strange Gods. All these considerations  
 “ made them establish cities of refuge,  
 “ where they might stay till the death of  
 “ the High Priest.” \* This may serve as  
 a specimen of that propriety, which a can-  
 did and attentive enquirer into the consti-  
 tution of the Jewish Religion, would pro-  
 bably discover in the several branches of it,  
 and therefore gives reason to suspect that  
 the imputation of *absurd* and *unphilosophical*,  
 thrown upon it by Mr. Hume, can only  
 proceed from the strongest prejudices enter-  
 tained against it. For what reason they

\* Spirit of Laws, B. xxv. Ch. 3.

are entertained, he knows, and others will conjecture.—They are unworthy (shall I say of a Christian?) I say of a Philosopher, the object of whose enquiry should be the discovery of truth.—The veil is too thin, under which he attempts to hide his design, —His very anxiety to conceal, betrays it.

Upon the whole, who but must regret that one whose talents are so excellent, and under proper direction, might be of such eminent service to the interests of learning, society and religion, should, through that pride which a consciousness of them seem to inspire, so often hurt them all, by the indulgence of a sceptical turn, which seems to despise thinking as the rest of mankind, upon almost the plainest subjects, and always affects the vain honour of originality of sentiment, without sometimes allowing him to consider how far it is just?

## N U M B E R II.

*An Examination of the Account given by David Hume Esq; of the Rise of Idolatry, in his Essay, entitled, The Natural History of Religion.*

VARIOUS have been the conjectures of the learned about the origin of Polytheism and Idolatry. Thus, it is well known, the Egyptian Mythologists, at a loss how to account for the introduction of animal worship, devised a reason for it as absurd as the practice itself, and gave out to their ignorant admirers, that the Gods, in a war with men, were so closely pursued by them, that to escape their rage, they were obliged to take shelter in the bodies of certain animals, and that these were ever after esteemed sacred.\* Some supposed that the use of hieroglyphic figures

\* Plut. de Isid. & Osirid.

of animals (which at first, for want of other characters, were sometimes introduced into their sacred writings) might have given rise to that worship which was afterwards paid to them.—And that the ignorant and superstitious people, mistaking the original design, with which these were painted or engraved in their temples (which was to be no more than a record and vehicle of religious doctrines) might come at length to imagine they had an immediate reference to the animals they represented, and so be led, by an easy process, to the adoration of them.—Others were of opinion, that mankind from their strong passion for some visible object of worship, did deify plants and animals, rather than want such.—Besides these conjectures I have mentioned above, I might take notice of many more.\* But of all the accounts that have been given of

\* See a large enumeration of causes that have been assigned for Idolatry, in Chamberlain's dictionary of Arts and Sciences, under the article *Idolatry*.

this

this matter, the most laboured is that given by Mr. Hume, at least it is very much so.

I have considered his opinion on this subject with the utmost candor and attention ; and as after all, I cannot fall in with it, I beg leave to lay my reasons before the Reader, and let him judge of the force of them.

His opinion is to be found in a Dissertation entitled, “ The Natural History of Religion”. A title that *naturally* attracts attention, and which (let me say so without offence) it is probable was given as much for this reason, as for any propriety there is in it.

The Epithet of *Natural History*, when applied to the account given of the natural productions of a country, by way of contradistinction to that which might be called *Civil, Political* or *Commercial*, we can easily see, and must at first admit the propriety  
of,

of, but when applied to Religion, we must be excused, if we say it is not so apparent.

Very possibly the author meant, by the title prefixed to his Dissertation, a *probable, likely* account of the progress of Religion, and the several alterations there may have been made in the faith and profession of it's articles, and if this be what he intended, another title might have been found more expressive of his meaning. But this only by the by. The title would give little offence, or rather none at all, if the contents of it were unexceptionable.

It must be owned that it contains an ingenious and curious theory—It shews indeed the workings of an inventive fancy, and what fine castles in the air may be formed by it ; but these, however agreeable they may appear at first sight to the beholder, quickly disappear, being built but upon a flimsy<sup>d</sup> foundation unable to support them.

He

He makes Polytheism or Idolatry (of which he often speaks in this Essay as if they were the same, though they are widely different) to be *the first and most ancient Religion of mankind*, and endeavours to account for the manner in which this took place of a Theism. Let us attend to what he offers on both these topicks. The first he endeavours to evince by an appeal to the testimony of the earliest antiquity, to the principles and practice of all barbarous nations, and to the natural progress of the human mind. “Behold (says he) “the clear testimony of history. The “farther we mount up into antiquity, the “more do we find mankind plunged into “idolatry. No marks, no symptoms of “any more perfect Religion. The most an- “cient records of the human race still pre- “sent us with Polytheism as the popular “and established system.—The North, the “South, the East, the West, give their “unanimous testimony to the same fact. “What can be opposed to so full an evi- “dence?—The savage tribes of America,  
Africa

“ Africa and Asia are all Idolaters. - Not a  
 “ single exception to this rule”.—It seems  
 “ certain, that according to the natural  
 “ progress of human thought, the ignorant  
 “ multitude must first entertain some  
 “ grovelling and familiar notion of superior  
 “ powers, before they stretch their con-  
 “ ception to that perfect Being, who be-  
 “ stowed order on the whole frame of na-  
 “ ture”.—That to suppose the contrary,  
 would be as absurd as to imagine that  
 men “ should inhabit palaces before huts  
 “ and cottages, or study Geometry before  
 “ Agriculture.—That the causes of such  
 “ objects as are quite familiar to us never  
 “ strike our attention or curiosity.—That  
 “ a barbarous, necessitous animal (such as  
 “ man is on the first origin of society)  
 “ pressed by such numerous wants and  
 “ passions, has no leisure to admire the re-  
 “ gular face of nature, or make enquiries  
 “ concerning the cause of objects, to which  
 “ from his infancy, he has been gradually  
 “ accustomed §.—Whereas, on the other

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hand,



“ hand, if leaving the works of nature, we  
 “ trace the footsteps of invisible power in  
 “ the various and contrary events of human  
 “ life, we are necessarily led into poly-  
 “ theism, and to the acknowledgment of  
 “ several limited and imperfect deities ||.”

This is the substance of what he observes on this subject, so far as it is necessary at present to take notice of it.

I acknowledge there is something very plausible in this theory. Upon a superficial view, it pleases very well; but a more narrow examination must discover many flaws in it.

It is granted that polytheism did obtain in the world, prior to the earliest prophane writings that have come down to us; and that it does still obtain in those barbarous nations which we have any account of.

|| Sect. II.

But

But what then?—How does this support the conclusion he would draw from it?—Is it not well enough known, that the most antient histories we have, one only excepted, do not lead us very far back?—They can therefore authorize no conclusion with respect to the state of Religion in earlier times; and the ignorance and corruption of manners which prevailed in the times of which these histories write, will account well enough for the prevalence of polytheism then, without supposing it to have been, as Mr. Hume alledges, next to coeval with mankind.

He himself seems to have been aware of this objection, and therefore he endeavours to destroy it's influence, not by argument, but by a rhetorical flourish and an ironical sneer, alledging that to assert mankind had  
 “ in more antient times, before the know-  
 “ ledge of letters, or the discovery of any  
 “ art or science, entertained the principles  
 “ of pure Theism,” would be much the same as to maintain, that “ while they  
 T 2 were

“ were ignorant and barbarous, they discovered truth, but fell into error as soon as they acquired learning and politeness §.”

Mr. Hume suggests the hint of a proper answer to what he throws out here, by a concession which he makes in the very next page.

He allows that “ Adam, rising at once in paradise, and in the full perfection of his faculties, would naturally be astonished at the glorious appearances of nature, the heavens, the air, the earth, and his own organs and members, and would be led to ask, whence this wonderful scene arose|| ;” and from such a contemplation of the works of nature would (as he acknowledges all must) have been induced to “ entertain a conception of no more than one single Being, who had bestowed existence and order on this vast

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“ machine.”

“ machine”||. Here his reasoning is most just, and Theism is acknowledged to have been the Religion of the Progenitor of the human race. This granted, (and it is no more than is reasonable should be granted) why should it appear absurd, that in antient times, before the knowledge of letters, or the discovery of any art or science, men should entertain the principles of pure Theism?—By the manner in which Mr. Hume introduces this observation concerning Adam, he would seem to insinuate, that the *full* perfection of his faculties at his creation, was one of the chief causes that enabled him to derive his notions of the Creator of all things, and particularly to infer his unity, from the contemplation of his works. From thence may it not be asked, why might not the rest of mankind, when they arrive at the full exercise of their faculties, have done the same?

Whatever others may alledge, Mr. Hume surely will not, that Adam, by a greater strength of intellect, was capable of mak-

|| Sect. II.

ing larger discoveries than his offspring, with respect to the being and nature of the Deity.—In this respect I imagine he will maintain, that if there be any difference betwixt them, it is but very inconsiderable. Whence then so vast a difference in their sentiments of Deity? O! says Mr. Hume, Adam, from the surprize with which he would be naturally struck at the first view of the glorious scene around him, would from a principle of curiosity, if from nothing else, be led to enquire into the cause of it, and so by an easy process of reasoning, be led to conclude that but one single Being could have bestowed existence and order upon it; but as to his offspring, they so gradually arrive at the full perfection of their faculties, that the objects of nature around them become quite familiarized to them, before they are capable of reasoning about them; and so, wanting that curiosity which is necessary to excite inquiry, they never trouble their heads about the cause of them. A very fine Theory this indeed! In place of shew-  
ing

ing that mankind were at first Polytheists, one would be apt to imagine that the design of it was to persuade us, that for some time at least, they remained mere Atheists : For if the regular face of nature, which from their infancy they were accustomed to behold, had nothing striking enough in it to excite their enquiries concerning the Author of it, whence (surely he does not suppose there was any external revelation given them) could they have had their notions of him? Or rather, must they not according to this hypothesis, have been entirely ignorant of him, and consequently without all Religion? No. Mr. Hume tells us, that, “ if leaving the  
 “ works of nature, they traced the foot-  
 “ steps of invisible power in the various and  
 “ contrary events of human life” (which he seems to think a curiosity, excited by these events, would prompt them to do)  
 “ they would be necessarily led into polythe-  
 “ ism, and to the acknowledgment of sever-  
 “ ral limited and imperfect deities : Storms  
 “ and tempests (says he )ruin what is nou-

“ rished by the sun. The sun destroys what  
 “ is fostered by the dews and rains. War  
 “ may be favourable to a nation, whom the  
 “ inclemency of the seasons afflicts with  
 “ famine. Sicknefs and pestilence may  
 “ depopulate a kingdom, amidst the most  
 “ profuse plenty. The same nation is not,  
 “ at the same time, equally successful by  
 “ sea and land. And a nation which now  
 “ triumphs over it’s enemies, may anon  
 “ submit to their more prosperous arms.  
 “ In short (says he) the conduct of events,  
 “ or what we call the plan of a particular  
 “ providence, is so full of variety and un-  
 “ certainty, that, if we suppose it immedi-  
 “ ately ordered by any intelligent beings,  
 “ we must acknowledge a contrariety in  
 “ their designs and intentions, a constant  
 “ combat of opposite powers, and a re-  
 “ pentance or change of intention in the  
 “ same power, from impotence or levity.  
 “ Each nation has it’s tutelar deity. Each  
 “ element is subjected to it’s invisible  
 “ power or agent. The province of each  
 “ god is inseperate from that of another §.”

§ Sect. II.

The

The account he here gives of the rise and introduction of Polytheism into the world, does not much mend the matter.—Still, if I mistake not, his reasoning, and the illustration of it, suppose a considerable time to have elapsed before these observations could be made upon *the various and contrary events of human life*, which, according to him, gave rise to Polytheism, and all this while what became of Religion?—Before nations and kingdoms could be formed, separate interests established, commerce set up, navigation improved, the military art learned, and wars carried on both by sea and land, we must suppose mankind to have arrived at some considerable degree of civilization; and yet, if the variety of events which they observed to take place in all these and the like, were the causes of Polytheism, they must before this time have wanted Religion altogether, or had some other mode of it; or some other cause more probable than this, must have given rise to Polytheism. It is true,  
each



each nation had very early it's tutelary deity—and the province of each God was separate from that of another. But what is this to his purpose? This observation could only be of service, by shewing that such as this was the popular creed, as early as Religion was professed in the world.—But this he does not so much as attempt,

At what precise time Polytheism began to gain footing, it must be difficult, if at all possible to determine, for want of antient historical records; but there are many reasons which must incline us to fix it to, or about that period which we have assigned, p. 20, and Herodotus seems to favour this conjecture by telling us, that till a little before his time,† it was utterly unknown in Greece what original was to be assigned to each of the Gods, whether they always were, or of what form,—and that he was of opinion, that Hesiod and Homer, who

† Herodotus was born at Halicarnassus in Caria,  
An. ante Christ. 484.

lived

lived not above four hundred years before him, were the persons who introduced the genealogy of the Gods among the Grecians, imposed names upon each, and assigned their functions and honours. †

The above strictures upon Mr. Hume's theory of Polytheism, evidently shew that it is incumbered with many difficulties, and is far from ascertaining to it that high origin which he ascribes to it.

What he throws out against the doctrine of an early Theism, seems to have as little weight in it.—He alledges that “ a barbarous and necessitous animal (such as man is on the first origin of society) pressed by such numerous wants and passions, would have no leisure to admire the regular face of nature, or to make enquiries concerning the cause of objects, to which, from his infancy, he had been gradually accustomed.”—And that, when

† Herodot. Lib. II.

he began to think upon the subjects con-  
 nected with Religion, “ he must first, ac-  
 “ cording to the natural progress of human  
 “ thought, entertain some grovelling and  
 “ familiar notion of superior powers, before  
 “ he could stretch his conception to that per-  
 “ fect Being, who bestowed order on the whole  
 “ frame of nature,—that we may as reason-  
 “ ably imagine that men inhabited palaces  
 “ before huts and cottages, or studied Geo-  
 “ metry before Agriculture, as assert that  
 “ the Deity appeared to them a pure spirit,  
 “ omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent,  
 “ before he was apprehended to be a power-  
 “ ful, though limited Being, with human  
 “ passions and appetites, limbs and or-  
 “ gans, &c.” †

“ There is an universal tendency among  
 “ mankind to conceive all beings like  
 “ themselves, and to transfer to every ob-  
 “ ject, those qualities with which they  
 “ are familiarly acquainted, and of which

† Sect. I.

“ they

“ they are intimately conscious.—Hence  
 “ we find human faces in the moon, ar-  
 “ mies in the clouds, &c.—The absurdity  
 “ is not less, while transferring, as is too  
 “ usual, human passions and infirmities to  
 “ the Deity, we represent him as jealous  
 “ and revengeful, capricious and partial,  
 “ and in short, a wicked and foolish man  
 “ in every respect, but his superior power  
 “ and authority, &c.\*”

After all Mr. Hume has said, it is still a  
 doubt with me how far the observations  
 contained in the above passages are just, or  
 rather, to me they appear the reverse.—  
 However, let us examine them a little.

We shall for argument's sake allow,  
 that the regular face of nature had not in-  
 fluence enough to set mankind, to whom  
 it was familiar, upon scrutinizing it. Yet  
 might they not, from some other princi-  
 ple, be engaged to do so? And if they

\* Sect. III.

were,

were, Mr. Hume himself acknowledges, that a discovery of the unity of the Deity would be the natural consequence of such examination. What then if I should say, that the feelings which would naturally arise in the human breast, from a sense of derived existence and conscious dependance, was this principle? Perhaps I should not greatly err.

To me I own it sounds strange, to say that man, from the familiar face of nature around him, should be hindered from all enquiries concerning the Author of it, though, by that reason with which he is distinguished, he is made capable of admiring the beauties of the one, and of forming from thence some notions of the other.

It is very true, in a country where the science of Theology has been carried to a considerable degree of perfection, and is in some measure taught to all, the scene around them is seldom contemplated with a spirit of investigation.—A few of a speculative

culative turn of mind excepted, scarce any think of tracing God in these his works, or of forming to themselves any character of him from thence.—And the reason may be, that every one is, by the instituted means of Religion, in some measure instructed in the great truths relating to the Deity, and is therefore content to form his religious faith in this point, upon that foundation which will cost him least trouble. But the case, I apprehend, must have been very different in the early and rude ages of the world.

Man, in my humble opinion, is so framed, that we can scarce imagine him arrived at the perfection of reason, and yet without Religion.

How soon he was grown up to a state of manhood, he could not but be sensible that he was not the cause of his own existence.—He must have concluded that it was derived from, and dependent upon some other being.—Mr. Hume does not reason,  
but

but paint things in a ridiculous light, when he says he would content himself with being able to trace his connexion with his immediate parents, or at least, that a few removes beyond this he would never enquire.—So far from this, it is natural to think, that his mind once set a thinking, would not stop till it had arrived at something like satisfaction in this point. In this musing mood, a variety of thoughts, suggested from the consideration of his own frame, and that of nature around him, would come across his mind; but after involving him in perplexity for a while, would probably, at last, lead them into a tract that would issue in the desired success, viz. a discovery in some measure of the character of the Author of nature, as well as of his being.

By the time he was fairly engaged in the important enquiry, the scene around him would appear too grand and noble, not to excite admiration and command attention.

—He

—He could not with-hold either.—In this stage of his progress, he would not be far from the so much wished for discovery.—As he advanced, the light would brighten upon him, and thus encouraged, he would naturally hold on.—One discovery enlivening his soul with the hopes of more, would make him push on his enquiry, till at last, from the strictures of wisdom, power and design, harmony and uniformity, which he beheld every where around him, he would be led, not only to infer the existence, but also the unity of the Deity, i. e. of a Being far superior to any he was acquainted with, and the cause of them all. I know Mr. Hume supposes, that an observation of the contrary events of life, and the seeming jar in what he calls the plan of a particular providence, would have led mankind to a quite different conclusion,—the belief of the existence of several independent deities. But if this conclusion was ever drawn from the variety observable in the events of life (as he alledges) it was not drawn very early, —not till pride, ambition, superstition, or



craft had learned how to turn it to their respective advantage. The first notions of Deity would probably be derived from a contemplation of his works of Creation: —These would strike man all at once.--- Any knowledge of the Deity that could be acquired from an acquaintance with the plan of Providence, must have been more slow, because it must have been the result of long and various observation, and therefore it is from thence probable (supposing the observation of the contrary events of life to have been what first introduced Polytheism into the world) not only that it was not the first mode of Religion, but also that it could not have very early obtained.

The same train of thought which first led man to infer the existence of a Deity, and of but one Deity, would also in my humble opinion, lead him into sentiments of him quite the reverse of what Mr. Hume supposes: Sentiments which in place of being (as he expresses it) according to the natural progress of human thought, grovel-  
ing

ing and familiar, would have been, if not altogether just, far more so than he imagines. His first sentiments of the Deity he would naturally form, as we already observed, from the view of his works around; and where every thing must appear truly grand and noble, what could inspire a low and mean opinion of him?---To say that his passion for himself would make the man conceive the Deity to be such another Being (which would indeed be entertaining a very mean opinion of him) is a shift to relieve his scheme of a difficulty that presses hard upon it, which has not so much as the air of probability in it. Man could not but observe a gradation in the scale of Being,---one order of creatures rising above another, and himself placed at the head of them, but in place of concluding that because he was the noblest of all the Beings he had ever seen, the Deity must be like to him, would he not rather, from analogy, from the gradation in Being he had observed, be led to conclude that he was one of a nature far exalted above him; and

would he not be confirmed in his opinion, when he considered how disproportioned any, the most extraordinary work he was capable of, was to what God had performed?

I take not upon me to say how far the first race of men, by their own unassisted powers, could have reasoned out the character of the Deity from his works. Their improvements in the knowledge of his nature and perfections must have been the work of time, and have depended upon the successive discoveries of those who applied themselves to the study of it.

But still I am of opinion, that a proper application to this subject (which, from the reasons already mentioned, it is probable they would bestow) would lead them into conclusions concerning the Deity, that must have exalted him very high in their esteem, and determined them to express it by suitable acts of religious homage. Nay I cannot help saying, that it is doing  
little

little honour to the Deity, so much as to insinuate, that though he had formed man for Religion, he had at the same time formed him so, that the very first sentiments he is supposed to entertain of him, should be highly dishonouring to him, and such as had a tendency to mislead man himself in that service which it was his duty to pay to the Deity.

In the examination of Mr. Hume's Theory I find I have been insensibly led into Theory too. I am far from affirming that what I have offered, does in all the parts of it exactly correspond with the first and most early sentiments of the human mind upon the subject of Religion. All I contend for is, that it is at least fully more probable than the other, without containing any thing disrespectful either to the Deity or to man.

But leaving Theory, let us have recourse to History, and see what evidence may be derived from thence in favour of early

Theism. What is commonly called profane history, it has been acknowledged already, is on Mr. Hume's side, so far at least as this, that polytheism did pretty early prevail in the world in one mode or another, but for the reasons above mentioned, he can gain little from this concession. There is one history (and but one)—that written by Moses, which gives a short account of Religion, through several ages, down from the very first. Let us appeal to it, and the question must be determined all at once.

Mr. Hume, who is so well acquainted with other Histories, could be no stranger to this. By telling us that “the farther  
 “we mount up into antiquity, the more do  
 “we find mankind plunged into Idolatry—  
 “That there are no marks, no symptoms  
 “of any more perfect religion;—and that  
 “the most ancient records of human race  
 “present us with polytheism as the popular  
 “and established system ||.”—he would

|| Sect. I.

feem

seem to decline an appeal to the Mosaic History, and to reject it's testimony. But before he did so, he should have told us why it did not deserve to be credited. There is, even from profane history, the strongest evidence both of it's antiquity and authenticity, and considered merely as an Historian (and we at present insist on no more) there surely can be no good reason assigned, why Moses should be denied any degree of credit that is allowed to others.

From his history of Religion then, (fully as natural as Mr. Hume's) nothing can be more evident than that Adam was a Theist.—Mr. Hume himself admits this.—So far he and Moses agree. And might we not, upon this concession, ask Mr. Hume, if it be not natural to expect that Adam would instill his own notions of the Deity into the minds of his Children, and they into theirs, as they grew up and were capable of being taught them, and that thus, at least for some time, the doctrine of Theism would not only be the first

which was entertained, but universally prevail? What was natural to expect on this head, we find from the history of Moses (a presumption of the truth of it's account) was the matter of fact, and that several ages had passed before there was the least appearance of Polytheism, or Idolatry in the world. Nothing can be more decisive in the point under consideration, than the testimony of this history, and till it's authority be disproved, upon it our faith should rest.—What can Mr. Hume object to this? Why, unwilling to give up his favourite Theory, and unable to reconcile it to the account which Moses gives of this matter, he will beg leave still to entertain a doubt of it, and tell us; “ that  
 “ if men were, at first, led into the belief  
 “ of one supreme Being, by reasoning from  
 “ the scene of nature, they could never  
 “ possibly leave that belief, in order to embrace  
 “ Idolatry; but the same principles  
 “ of reasoning, which at first produced  
 “ and diffused over mankind, so magnificent  
 “ an opinion, must be able, with  
 “ greater

“ greater facility, to preserve it. The first  
 “ invention and proof of any doctrine is  
 “ infinitely more difficult than the support-  
 “ ing and retaining it §.”

But to what purpose argue against matter of fact? Mr. Hume himself admits that Adam, from the surprize with which he would be struck, upon his creation, in beholding the wonderful scene around him, would be naturally led to inquire into the cause of it, and he seems to allow that the issue of such enquiry must be the belief of one single Being, who bestowed existence and order on this vast machine—And yet, notwithstanding all this, and that it is probable that Adam would communicate his notions of Deity to his Offspring, Idolatry did in some ages after prevail: A proof that what Mr. Hume so positively pronounces impossible, is not so.

Abstracting from the sacred history, it must ever remain uncertain in what way

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men formed their first notions of Deity. From what I have observed above, I think it must appear highly probable that they would acquire them from a contemplation of his works, and the legitimate deductions of reason from thence: And if I should say that they might be assisted in forming their conceptions of him, by his vouchsafing an actual interview in some visible form, there would upon the principles of reason, be nothing absurd in the supposition unworthy of the Deity, or incongruous to the occasion upon which we suppose it to be granted. But supposing the belief of the being, and the knowledge of the character of the Deity, to be acquired in either of these ways, they would afterwards be handed down, in that early period, by oral tradition—And upon this principle the corruption of Theism may be easily accounted for. Nay,

Mr. Hume admits that “ an historical  
 “ fact, while it passes by oral tradition from  
 “ eye-witnesses and contemporaries, is dis-  
 guised

“guised in every successive narration, and  
 “may at last retain but very small, if any  
 “resemblance of the original truth, on  
 “which it was founded: The frail me-  
 “mories of men, their love of exaggera-  
 “tion, their supine carelessness; these  
 “principles, if not corrected by books and  
 “writing, soon pervert the account of his-  
 “torical events, where argument or reason-  
 “ing has little or no place ||.” But the  
 belief of the unity of of the Deity is, in-  
 stead of an historical fact, a speculative  
 opinion. And “with regard to specula-  
 “tive opinions, the case is far otherwise”.  
 True, it is a speculative opinion, and  
 could at first have been adopted only from  
 the rational evidence which appeared in  
 support of it: But when speculative opi-  
 nions are once admitted and gain credit,  
 who does not know that they are afterwards  
 conveyed down from one generation to  
 another, like historical facts, more by the  
 authority of tradition, than the evidence of

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argument,

argument, and so, in place of retaining their original purity, are in danger of being corrupted. While the opinions themselves continue to prevail, the arguments which first produced the conviction may be forgotten.

When men, indulging the pride of understanding, began to speculate about Religion, it is no wonder they fell into error. In their disquisitions on this subject, they were more inclined to gratify their own fancies, and excite the admiration of others, than to follow the simple dictates of reason, and thus, affecting to be wise, they became fools.

Do we not find, that in ages incomparably later than those to which the origin of Idolatry must be referred, a remarkable corruption of speculative opinions has prevailed, and what reason can be assigned why it might not have taken place in these early ones? Were not Egypt, and some adjacent countries, which are now involved  
in

in the grossest ignorance, once the famed seats of knowledge and learning?—After that blaze of light, which overspread the East, what a cloud of darkness hung upon it as well as the Western world, for many successive ages? And might not causes similar to what produced these effects with respect to the arts and sciences, account for the changes in the popular creed of early times? Does not history inform us (profane as well as sacred) of the success of the Christian Religion in the lesser Asia, and the firm footing it had gained in many places of it? and yet, however rational its doctrines were, how are they exchanged for others the most absurd? And if such a revolution happened under a concurrence of disadvantageous circumstances, in the religious sentiments of a people once Christian, is it at all to be wondered at, that in process of time, the simplicity of the popular faith with respect to the Deity, should through supine negligence in some, through political craft, superstition, and a thousand different causes in others, be disguised, altered, corrupted?—In this, I dare  
say

say that to most there appears nothing *improbable*, so far is it from appearing “*impossible* (as Mr. Hume alledges) that  
 “ Theism could, from reasoning, have been  
 “ the primary religion of the human race,  
 “ and have afterwards, by it’s corruption,  
 “ given birth to Idolatry, and to all the  
 “ various superstitions of the heathen  
 “ world §.”

To the above strictures upon the account given by Mr. Hume of the origin of Idolatry and Polytheism, a great many more might be added ; but these may suffice, as I hope they shew that the history he gives of Religion is not quite so natural as he imagines, and that the account made of the rise and progress of Idolatry, Part I. Sect II, remains unaffected by it.

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