DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

By WILLIAM SAMUEL POWELL, D.D.

LATE ARCHDEACON OF COLCHESTER, AND MASTER OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE IN CAMBRIDGE.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Diſcourſes are not publiſhed for the credit of the Writer, but for the benefit of his Readers: eſpecially that claſs of Readers, for whom they were chiefly intended, the younger Students in Divinity. The Author's reputation ſtands on a much wider bottom: a whole life uniformly devoted to the intereſts of ſound Philoſophy and true Religion. The means he employed, for the ſervice of both, at different times and in different ſtations, may beſt be reported by thoſe who were the immediate objects of his care. Nothing ſhall be added here, but ſome Facts and Dates, for the ſatisfaction of his Friends.

WILLIAM SAMUEL POWELL was born at Colcheſter, Sept. 27, O. S. 1717. He was admitted at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1734: began to reſide there the year following: took the degree of B. A. in 1738-9: and was admitted Fellow March 25, 1740.

In the year 1741, he was taken into the family of the late Lord Viſcount Townſhend; as private tutor to his ſecond ſon, Charles Townſhend, afterwards Chancellor of the Exchequer. Towards the end of the year, he was ordained Deacon and Prieſt by Dr. Gooch, then Biſhop of Norwich; and inſtituted by him to the Rectory of Colkirk in Norfolk, on Lord Townſhend's preſentation.

He returned to College the year after; took the degree of M. A. and began to read Lectures, as aſſiſtant to Mr. Wrigley and Mr. Tunſtall. In the year 1744, he became Principal Tutor: and in 1749 took the degree of B. D.

In the year 1753, he reſigned the Rectory of Colkirk; that it might be conſolidated with Stibbard, another of Lord Townſhend's livings: and was again inſtituted the next day.

He was admitted to the degree of D. D. in 1756; and created at the following Commencement 1757.

In 1759, he came into poſſeſſion of an eſtate in Eſſex: which was deviſed to him by Mr. Reynolds, a relation of his Mother's *. In 1761, he left College, and took a houſe in London; but did not reſign his Fellowſhip till 1763.

In 1765, he was elected Maſter: ſoon after, he went to reſide in College; and was choſen Vice-Chancellor of the Univerſity in the November following.

The year after, he obtained the Archdeaconry of Colcheſter, which was in

* This Lady had two other children, who ſurvived her: the Rev. Mr Jolland by her firſt huſband, and Mrs. Suſan Powell by her ſecond.

his Majeſty's gift, for that turn, on the promotion of Dr. Moſs to the Biſhopric of St. Davids: and in 1768, he was inſtituted to the Rectory of Freſhwater in the Iſle of Wight.

He died Jan. 19, 1775.

It is ſcarce needful to mention, that the *Sermon on Subſcription* and the *Third Charge*, were publiſhed in the Author's Life-time.

If there ſhould be any impropriety in the Titles of theſe Diſcourſes, or any miſtakes in the Notes or References; the fault is to be imputed to the Editor, not the Author.

THOMAS BALGUY.

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DIS-

CHARGES

DISPUTATIO habita in SCHOLIS PUBLICIS, Anno 1756,
Pro gradu Doctoratûs in Sacrâ Theologiâ.

Eccleſiaſtici regiminis, in Angliâ & in Scotiâ conſtituti, neutra forma, aut juri hominum naturali, aut verbo Dei, repugnat.

DISCOURSE I.

Of the Vices incident to an Academical Life.

Hebrews, xii. part of ver. 1.

The Sin that doth ſo eaſily beſet us.

THERE are writers of ſome reputation in Phyſick, who have undertaken to explain, to what particular diſeaſes men are expoſed by each profeſſion and employment. Whatever their ſucceſs has been, the deſign was certainly good; and, if the attempt is not too difficult, it will be uſeful to purſue the ſame plan in our moral inquiries. We frequently exhort every man to obſerve with

care the complexion and temper of his ſoul; and to apply all ſuch remedies, as may either prevent or palliate thoſe diſorders, to which his natural conſtitution makes him ſubject. But every man is not able to judge of his own diſpoſitions; and what we call nature is more often habit. It would be well therefore if we could aſſiſt the diligent ſearcher of his heart, by ſhewing him, what vices uſually accompany his ſituation and circumſtances. He will more eaſily diſcover his own perſonal character, if he is acquainted with that of the rank or order to which he belongs.

Very little pains have been employed by any moral writers to this purpoſe. They have told us perhaps, what are the faults of youth, and of age; what the dangers of riches, and of poverty: but if any thing has been ſaid concerning the characters of particular profeſſions, it has been by the Satiriſts, not the ſerious Moraliſts. It will not, I hope, be thought, that I wander into their province; if I enter on that part of this ſubject, which moſt nearly concerns ourſelves, and inquire, what are the chief difficulties and dangers in the practice of virtue, to which men

men of retired and ſtudious lives, abſtracted in a great degree from the pleaſures, the buſineſs, and the converſation of the world, are expoſed.

And the fault that firſt offers itſelf, as moſt immediately connected with ſuch a ſituation, and from which almoſt all its other dangers ſpring, is an habit of *indolence*. Not labour only, but induſtry of every kind, is uſually attended with ſome portion of preſent uneaſineſs. But, this virtue being of much importance to the general welfare of mankind, a particular proviſion has been made for it in the conſtitution of the world. It is not left, like many other virtues, under the guardianſhip of reaſon and reflection; but its mother, neceſſity, is ever living and watchful to preſerve it. The greateſt part of mankind muſt labour or periſh. Many others are conſtantly engaged in providing for the eaſe and ſatisfaction of themſelves and their families. Even the votaries of pleaſure are obliged to attend it at fixt places and ſeaſons; and enjoy it under ſuch conditions, as change their amuſements into buſineſs. On thoſe only who are withdrawn from the

pleaſures and the pains of ſocial life, have the immediate motives to induſtry no influence. And, though they may eaſily diſcern, that, by the appointment of God, every thing good and valuable is the reward of our earneſt endeavours; that, without them, wealth and honour can ſeldom, learning and virtue can never, be acquired; yet are there not many men, in whom the ſtrength of reaſon, unaſſiſted by paſſion, is able to prevail againſt a preſent pain.

The paſſions are another excellent contrivance of the Author of Nature, to keep all the faculties of our ſouls active and vigorous. When the immediate occaſions of induſtry ceaſe, theſe often ſupply the want of them. And how nicely they are adjuſted to the general ſtate and condition of mankind, may be obſerved in this, as in innumerable other inſtances. Though we hear ſo many complaints of their mighty force; yet diminiſh it a little, and they are uſeleſs. Place a man in a ſituation, where they are not frequently exerciſed; and he is in danger of ſinking into an unfeeling lethargy. Such is the ſituation we are conſidering. For the exerciſe

exerciſe of the paſſions ariſes chiefly from the various turns and accidents in human affairs. What we experience at all times, will at no time affect us. If a man's life runs on in the ſame even tenor, yeſterday, and to-day, and to-morrow; all the events of it paſs by him unnoticed: there is nothing to awaken his attention, much leſs to move his paſſions: he becomes indifferent to every acquirement, fatigued with every purſuit.

It cannot be doubted but the mind may be employed in a cloſet, and as fully engaged in a ſearch after knowledge as in the more noiſy ſcenes of buſineſs or folly. And the force of an uncommon genius, the proſpect of reputation or advantage, or even a ſtrong habit of induſtry early acquired, may ſometimes prevent that ſatiety, which is apt to mix itſelf with all human conditions. But it will require more than an ordinary ſhare of reſolution, for one of only moderate abilities, who has no expectation of making any great diſcoveries, or of obtaining any conſiderable rewards by his progreſs in learning, to continue the purſuit of it during his whole life, unleſs he is often

relieved by other occupations or amuſements. The ſame taſk conſtantly repeated muſt at length prove irkſome. The moſt delicious repaſt, if ſet before us every day, would become inſipid or diſtaſteful.

We muſt therefore confeſs, that a ſtation, which removes the common *motives* to induſtry; which impairs the vigour of the *paſſions*, it's chief ſupports; and at the ſame time renders it more than uſually *burthenſome*; is likely to make men indolent.

Indolence, in a Being, whoſe faculties all depend, both for their preſervation and improvement, on continual exerciſe, is unqueſtionably a great fault. But it comes not without a long train of attendants. That we may view them diſtinctly, let us conſider the miſchievous effects of this habit, and of the retirement which produces it, on the *underſtanding* and the *affections*.

Any ſerious employment of the underſtanding is inconſiſtent with habitual indolence. Diſcuſſion and inquiry are always laborious. Time and patience and pains are neceſſary to ſeparate truth from falſehood; to collect and to compoſe the arguments on

each ſide. Prejudices ariſing from temper, from education, from intereſt, and from innumerable other cauſes, are not eaſily overcome. And when a ray of reaſon breaks through them, reſolution is wanted to follow ſteadily its guidance. And yet without this labour we forfeit all the uſe and benefit of our underſtanding. If we ſnatch the firſt appearances, and ſit down contented with them, to what purpoſe is it, that we are able to inveſtigate hidden truths? What avails our faculty of judging, if we ſuffer each thin pretence to conceal them from us?

It might be expected, that they, who entertain every wandering opinion without examination, ſhould diſmiſs it without regret on the arrival of a new gueſt. But the fact is otherwiſe. This kind of *levity* is attended with *obſtinacy*. The ſame diſpoſition which leads men into error, makes them unwilling to correct it. A ſtate of doubtfulneſs is a ſtate of uneaſineſs. The mind therefore haſtens to the end of its journey; but to trace its ſteps back again, and examine all the windings, by which the truth may have

eſcaped, is to the indolent an intolerable labour.

But if this diſpoſition is the parent of obſtinacy, retirement is its nurſe. The retired man's thoughts are confined to few ſubjects, his converſation to few perſons. As theſe will uſually fall into the ſame habits of thinking, and be reſtrained within the ſame little compaſs, each will confirm himſelf, and each the others, in the ſentiments they have embraced: whilſt the mind, which ranges through the various fields of ſcience, will be leſs fond of each notion; and, when men of different characters and employments meet, oppoſite prejudices will check each other, and nature and reaſon, upon the whole, prevail. Even an unreſtrained converſation among our own countrymen is not uſually thought a ſufficient ſecurity againſt narrow and illiberal conceptions of perſons and things. Every nation has its peculiar character; and they, who would open and enlarge their underſtandings, viſit diſtant countries, and examine the principles, they have haſtily imbibed at home, by the manners and ſentiments of foreigners. But if a whole

whole people may obſtinately adhere to the ſame eſtabliſhed errors, there is much greater danger that this ſhould happen to ſmall ſocieties of men, educated by the ſame contracted plan, and ſtudying together the ſame favourite ſyſtems.

The faults already mentioned lead to another, *Self-conceit*. The ſluggard is wiſer in his own conceit, than ſeven men that can render a reaſon. He, who has no inclination to learn more, will be very apt to think that he knows enough. Nor is it wonderful that *he* ſhould pride himſelf in the abundance of his wiſdom, with whom every wavering thought, every half-formed imagination, paſſes for a fixed and ſubſtantial truth. Obſtinacy alſo, which makes him unable to diſcover his miſtakes, makes him believe himſelf unable to commit them.

Self-conceit, in return, promotes indolence and obſtinacy. For why ſhould *he* toil any longer in the mines of knowledge, who is already poſſeſſed of their moſt valuable treaſures? how can *he* ſubmit to try his opinions by the judgement of others, who is himſelf the fitteſt to decide?

This

This temper, when the mind is converſant with points of the higheſt nature, ſuch as relate to Religion and Government, will ſhew itſelf in violent *bigotry*. What indeed is this, but an obſtinate adherence to ill-grounded notions; with a conceit, that we only, and thoſe of our own ſect or party, are the favourites of God, and the friends of mankind, and that all who differ from us are weak or wicked? Want of induſtry to examine our own tenets, of candour to liſten to thoſe of others, and of modeſty in judging of both, lays a ſure foundation for this vice; which can never be removed, but by another thing equally wanted, an extenſive acquaintance with the world. This would certainly convince us, that among perſons of every denomination ſome may be found of excellent underſtandings, and diſtinguiſhed virtue.

There are no ſubjects, about which men are leſs apt to be diffident, than, thoſe where diffidence moſt becomes them, ſubjects of the greateſt importance and the greateſt difficulty. Such as call themſelves philoſophers and maſters of reaſon, ſeem afraid to uſe their

their reaſon in their moſt eſſential concerns. Whatever ſkill they employ, is employed in the defence of particular ſyſtems; and they reject with abhorrence all ſuſpicions of miſtake. But how free ſoever theſe doctrines may be from miſtake, yet the mind accuſtomed to determine peremptorily, and fondly to admire its own judgements, will get ſuch a wrong byas as all its philoſophy cannot overcome. And thus the nobleſt ſtudies, by imprudent management, are made to ſerve no other purpoſe, but to increaſe our obſtinacy and ſelf-opinion.

From underſtandings thus perverted what great improvements in ſcience can be expected? As great indeed as were ever produced in all the monaſteries in Chriſtendom. How many thouſands were, for many centuries, conſtantly ſet apart for the cultivation of divine and human learning! And yet how little did they contribute towards the revival of letters, or the reformation of religion! Their indolence prevented the one, their obſtinacy and bigotry the other. And if the ſame cauſes had not retained ſome influence, even in ſocieties, whoſe ſeparation

from

from the world is leſs rigid than that of the cloiſter; thoſe abſurd and ſlaviſh principles of government, which are now fled into everlaſting darkneſs, would not have left their laſt footſteps before the altars of God, and in the faireſt temples of literature. If juſt reaſoning and true philoſophy had not prevented their entrance, yet concern for the welfare of mankind, or zeal for the honour of religion, ſhould quickly have baniſhed them. But theſe motives muſt loſe their influence among men, whoſe retirement renders them languid in every *friendly affection*, unmoved with every ſentiment of *devotion*.

Indolence affects not the underſtanding only. It ſpreads a general numbneſs and inſenſibility over the whole ſoul; and makes it unable to feel the warmth of the benevolent affections. It cannot be imagined, that he, who is indifferent to his own concerns, will be ſollicitous for the happineſs of others; or that he will officiouſly engage in the labour of love, to whom every ſpecies of labour ſeems inſupportable. Generous and friendly diſpoſitions flouriſh only among vigorous and active faculties.

Nay, if indolence could be excluded, yet the ſhade of retirement is itſelf ſufficient to chill the friendly affections. Let the difference be obſerved between a man's compaſſion for a ſtranger in diſtreſs, and his anxiety, his tenderneſs, for a friend, a companion, a neighbour; and we ſhall eaſily be convinced, how much theſe affections are nurtured and cheriſhed by ſociety and converſation. Such is the conſtitution of human nature, that our inclinations, of every kind, ſtrengthen and decay with the powers and occaſions of exerting them. Now the perſons, whoſe happineſs or miſery depends upon us, being chiefly thoſe which come immediately under our notice and acquaintance, our benevolence is in a great meaſure confined to them; and will therefore retain the leſs force, the more theſe connections are contracted.

But this danger ariſes not wholly from the *nature* of a recluſe life. The *circumſtances* of it are often ſuch as have a ſtill greater tendency to weaken the *benevolent affections*. The ſtrongeſt of theſe affections are directed by nature towards particular objects; and when theſe objects are removed, their courſe, though

it may be ſtopped, cannot be diverted. Were men governed by reaſon only, their regard would conſtantly follow virtue; which they would reverence and love as much in a ſtranger as in their neareſt relation. But philoſophy is far leſs powerful than inſtinct. It is not able to exalt friendſhip into love. It cannot impreſs on *his* heart the joys and ſorrows of a parent, who has never felt thoſe tender cares. It cannot reſtore the affection of a ſon or a brother, when death or abſence has deſtroyed or impaired it.—Some perhaps may expect, that the fewer and weaker mens particular attachments are, the more extenſive and the ſtronger will be their general benevolence. But experience ſhews the contrary. Break off the neareſt ties of affection, and you weaken proportionably all that remain. The moſt violent of theſe paſſions are neceſſary to ſoften the mind, and render it ſenſible of the leſs vigorous impreſſions. They who are accuſtomed to conſider themſelves as intereſted in the happineſs and miſery of others, will gradually extend their regards, till they feel for all mankind. Whilſt the ſoul, on which natural

tural ſympathy has no influence, can never perceive the finer touches of friendſhip and humanity. As the heart hardens, it contracts its benevolence, till the whole centers in itſelf only.

That a man of this character can have nothing of the true ſpirit of *religion*, we are told by unerring authority. He that loves not his brother, how can he love God? He that feels no ſatisfaction from the happineſs which is ſpread through the creation, how can he have any gratitude to the Creator? How can *he* exalt his mind to a ſuitable reverence for the goodneſs of the ſupreme being, who has no eſteem of thoſe lower degrees of goodneſs, which are more open to his obſervation, and more adapted to his capacity? The ſame lethargic indolence which retards his ſteps on earth, muſt for ever ſtop him in his aſcent towards heaven.

But farther, religious ſentiments can only be impreſſed on the mind by repeated acts of devotion. Now though the external rites and ceremonies of devotion are more frequently performed, yet perhaps they are not more frequently accompanied with ſerioufneſs and fervour,

vour, in the cloiſter than in the city. Men cannot, at every inſtant, voluntarily raiſe in themſelves the warmth of adoration. Occaſions and accidents are wanted to excite it. The food which daily nouriſhes us, the light and air we continually enjoy, are ſome of the greateſt bleſſings of heaven. But who receives them with rapture? An unexpected advantage, one conveyed to us in an uncommon manner, a deliverance from an impending evil, will call forth warmer ſentiments of gratitude, than theſe univerſal and continual benefits. In like manner any extraordinary danger will remind men of their dependence on God's protection, and teach them to exerciſe that ſubmiſſion to his will which in the midſt of ſecurity they are apt to neglect. Thus the frequent changes of good and evil we experience, the hopes and fears which perpetually ſurround us, are ſo many guards to our piety: which is then in the greateſt danger, when we are moſt ſecure; when our condition in life is leaſt ſubject to any ſudden turns either to happineſs or miſery. How little therefore do *they* underſtand the true ſprings of devotion, who think that every

every ſtep, by which they retire from the world, is an approach to God!

As little perhaps do *they* know of human nature, who imagine a ſtrict union betwixt piety and *learning*. If the love of God is an affection, if the adoration of him ſhould be performed with ardor; then is conſtant ſtudy, eſpecially of the abſtruſe ſciences, unlikely to improve it. Attention of this kind uſually gives the underſtanding a calm and ſedate turn; which, how uſeful ſoever in the performance of other duties, will not contribute to the warmth of devotion.

Thus every circumſtance conſpires to deprive us of the moſt valuable affections: but there are ſtill greater dangers behind. The mind of man cannot remain long unoccupied. If its proper inhabitants deſert it, ſpectres and evil demons will take poſſeſſion of it. When ſolitude and indolence have driven away each pious and each benevolent affection, the mind will be left expoſed to the dull and phlegmatic paſſions.

This hideous troop is led by *melancholy*. In vain do we expect happineſs from quiet and repoſe. In vain do we think of retiring

into ourſelves, and feaſting on our own contemplations. The heart which loſes its regards to God and man, loſes alſo its reliſh for every enjoyment. The mind, unſupported by induſtry and good ſenſe, is in danger of ſinking almoſt into deſpair.

He who is thus unhappy in himſelf, will be apt to be *diſpleaſed* with every object and every perſon around him. And this diſpleaſure will be the greater, if ſelf-conceit makes him imagine, that the world is unjuſt to him, that his merits might fairly claim better fortune. Such a ſour and fretful diſpoſition as is impious towards God, and inhuman towards man, is the natural conſequence of pride and melancholy. And this again cannot fail to increaſe the uneaſineſs from whence it ariſes, by enlarging every trifling diſappointment, till it becomes a grievous torment.

Nor is it only the ſenſe of preſent and real misfortunes, which afflicts perſons of this temper. They often ſuffer as much from the apprehenſions of *future* or *imaginary* evils. When they are dejected without calamities, and angry without injuries; they feign

feign to themſelves dangers, where all is ſafety, and ſuſpect deſigns againſt their peace, which are formed only in their own fanciful brain. You will never convince them by a thouſand arguments, that they are diſturbed or frightened without reaſon. There is no remedy for uneaſineſs about trifles, but to employ our thoughts with matters of importance. And the courage of a man of buſineſs, like that of a ſoldier, can be acquired only by meeting danger. He that paſſes his life in the greateſt ſafety, uſually paſſes it in the greateſt fear.

Theſe wicked paſſions can ſcarce meet in any mind, without introducing one more wicked than themſelves. The man that is frequently *offended*, and continually *afraid*, will certainly, as far as his power extends, be *cruel*. Bigotry alſo often promotes this temper, concealing, under the appearance of zeal for religion, or the public good, a vice the moſt oppoſite to them both.

Hear then the character of an idle monk, collected from all that has been obſerved. He is weak, obſtinate, conceited, bigoted, unfriendly to man, ungrateful to God,

melancholic, fretful, timid, cruel. It concerns us all to be very cautious, that no part of this character belong to *us*. And this caution is the more neceſſary, becauſe when any evil paſſion gets hold of us, it uſually ſeizes the whole ſoul. A variety of employments and amuſements will give riſe to various and even oppoſite inclinations. And the mind, continually agitated by them, will not remain long fixed to one purſuit. Whereas, in a ſtate of indolence and ſolitude, the ſame train of thinking runs on without interruption, and the prevailing paſſion, whatever it is, carries all before it.

Ought we not therefore, it may be aſked, to fly from a ſtation, where our virtue and our happineſs are expoſed to ſo many dangers? Alas! whither ſhall we fly? What place, what ſcene of human life, can promiſe us ſecurity? Each condition is ſurrounded with, different indeed but, almoſt equal difficulties. Each too has its peculiar advantages to compenſate theſe difficulties, and poſſibly none may have greater than our own. Nor are the foregoing obſervations to be underſtood ſo ſtrictly, as if they never failed in

in any inſtance. Let it not be imagined that the faults incident to an order muſt neceſſarily adhere to all the individuals which compoſe it. Few are ſo unfortunate, as to be hit by every weapon, which the enemy aims againſt them. And ſome, perhaps, either by the natural activity and vigour of their minds may avoid, or with the ſhield of reaſon and religion may repel, them all. If this were impoſſible, the inquiry in which we have been engaged, would be uſeleſs. Theſe reflexions can ſerve no other purpoſe, but that, knowing to what vices our ſituation inclines us, we may, by continual efforts and firm reſolutions, bend all our faculties towards the oppoſite virtues; and, having extricated ourſelves from the ſins which moſt eaſily beſet us, may run with patience the race that is ſet before us.

DISCOURSE II.

A DEFENCE of the SUBSCRIPTIONS required in the CHURCH of ENGLAND.

1 COR. i. 10.

Now I beſeech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no diviſions among you.

IT may be doubted, whether among the parties, into which the chriſtians at Corinth were divided, and which the apoſtle with ſo much earneſtneſs endeavours to re-unite, there was any diſtinction, but of names. For though one ſaid, I am of Paul; and another, I of

I of Apollos; or, I of Cephas; we hear of no difference in the inſtruction, they had received from their different maſters. The ſame doctrine, which Paul had planted, Apollos watered. And yet it was not unworthy the wiſdom of the apoſtle, to guard his converts againſt thoſe miſchiefs, which frequently ariſe from frivolous and unmeaning diviſions. It is uſually of more importance to the peace and happineſs of a community, that its members ſhould ſpeak, than think, alike. For they, who have learned to confeſs their faith in the ſame form, will conſider each other as friends even though they ſhould diſagree, not a little, in their explanations of it; while ſuch as have been accuſtomed to different expreſſions can ſeldom be convinced, that their opinions are the ſame.

For theſe reaſons, the wiſeſt and beſt friends of our religious eſtabliſhment have long wiſhed, that all the Proteſtants in this kingdom could be united by a conſent to the ſame liturgy, and the ſame articles of faith; not a conſent forced, or feigned; but given freely, and ſincerely; notwithſtanding ſome ſmall difference of ſentiments, about

points of ſpeculation or ceremonies. To promote this union, much has been already done by thoſe who have explained, with moderation and clearneſs, the ſeveral parts of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution. But ſomething may remain to be done hereafter. In the mean time ſome difficulties may perhaps be removed, which have ariſen from too rigid an interpretation of our ſubſcriptions and declarations of conformity. They have been interpreted too rigidly by zealots on both ſides, with different deſigns: by ſome among our friends, leſt they ſhould be thought luke-warm in defence of the church: by many among our enemies, that the compliance required of them might appear the leſs reaſonable.

But while both parties have perſiſted in this rigour, both have ſuffered by it. The Diſſenters have been rendered obſtinate, in matters perfectly inſignificant. They continue to debaſe religion with thoſe frivolous diſputes; which had been long ago forgot, if it had not been ſuppoſed neceſſary for every man to determine them, before he could aſſent to our liturgy. Among us ſome few

few examples have been known of honeſt, but miſtaken, men, who, though educated for the miniſtry, have refuſed to comply with the terms of admiſſion into it. Others perhaps there are, not leſs unhappy, who, having neither underſtanding to clear their doubts, nor courage to own them, are prevailed on by worldly motives to aſſent without conviction. It may enable us to remove ſome of their ſcruples, and vindicate our church, which has impoſed, and ourſelves, who have ſubmitted to, theſe conditions; if we obſerve carefully their nature and extent, and examine how far our opinions are reſtrained by them. Such an inquiry, when confined to a diſcourſe of this kind, muſt be very general. But a very general inquiry will be ſufficient to ſhew, that great liberty is left for a difference of judgments, in matters either not plain, or not important; ſo great indeed, that one might reaſonably hope it would extend to every man, whoſe principles are not deſtructive of our church or nation.

I will not enter here into any debate with thoſe, who, calling themſelves ſervants of Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt, and members of the Catholic church, aſſert their freedom from all human impoſitions, and will not ſubmit to any terms of communion; like him, who refuſed to be made a citizen of Athens, becauſe he was already a citizen of the world. Should a man adhere to this principle, he could never join in any public worſhip. Not only the times, and places, and ceremonies of it, but the words alſo, muſt either be appointed by common conſent, or choſen by him who preſides in each congregation. And that conſcience muſt be ſtrangely perverſe, which can ſubmit to the directions of a ſingle perſon, and not to the authority of the public. I ſhall therefore preſume, that a liturgy may be preſcribed. And if it is preſcribed, it is plainly neceſſary, that ſuch as are appointed to officiate publicly, ſhould conform to it. And he, who can honeſtly conform, may honeſtly declare his reſolution to do ſo. Thus the inquiry, which a man is obliged to make, before he can aſſent to the uſe of our liturgy, and promiſe to officiate himſelf according to it, is reduced to narrow limits. If it requires him to profeſs doctrines which he does not believe; or if he judges either the

the whole, or its principal parts to be vain, trifling, or ſuperſtitious; his aſſent will be ſinful. But unleſs ſincerity forbids the uſe of this ſervice, or the main purpoſes of religion demand another, whatever difficulties may be propoſed, they ſhould have little influence on his determination.

To the former part of this inquiry ſome obſervations may be applied, which ſhall be made preſently on our articles of faith. Let us only remark here, that it is confined almoſt entirely to the Creeds; that it has no concern in the iſſue of any diſputes, which have been raiſed about the truth of various minute particulars, aſſerted, or ſuppoſed, in the ſervice, or rubrics. If, for inſtance, the inquirer doubts, whether Luke the phyſician, was alſo the evangeliſt; or knows, that, after all the corrections of the ableſt aſtronomers, the rules for finding Eaſter are not perfectly conſiſtent; theſe will be no reaſons againſt his conformity. To give a title to a ſaint, or a king, which perhaps might not properly belong to him; or to celebrate a feſtival rather according to the decree of a pope, than a council; will hardly diſguſt

diſguſt a man of the niceſt conſcience: unleſs it is ſuppoſed to contain a declaration of his judgment. But his aſſent is to be given to the uſe, not the truth, of the liturgy; and cannot be underſtood to extend farther, than to an approbation of the doctrines, which it openly profeſſes, or with which it has an evident and neceſſary connexion. Thus the law, which requires his aſſent, explains it; thus common ſenſe requires it to be explained. Nobody ever aſks concerning a petition, or a rule, whether it be true; but whether it be decent, proper, reaſonable, uſeful. If ſuch be our public ſervice, we may do more than aſſent to it; we may heartily and thoroughly approve it.

But even this part of its character has been ſometimes examined too ſcrupulouſly. We meet with demands on one ſide, and boaſts on the other, of ſuch perfection, as never was found, nor probably ever will be, in any human compoſition. And whence have theſe demands, and theſe boaſts, ariſen? From a notion many have entertained, that they muſt allow of nothing, in the worſhip of God, which is not perfect: a notion connected

nected indeed with an important truth, that our public adorations ſhould be performed with all the purity and ſolemnity, which the wiſeſt can deviſe; but ſtrained to a pernicious error, that every defect, which the weakeſt may imagine, will juſtify a refuſal to join in them. Nothing was ever written on any ſubject, nothing certainly on ſo difficult a ſubject as religion, which, after time and attention, was not found capable of improvement: and yet there are many religious books, which the moſt cautious might venture to recommend. Even in the holy Scripture itſelf, ſome portions have been thought leſs proper to be publicly read; and yet no chriſtian will ſcruple to declare, that it is profitable for reproof, for exhortation, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs. Why then is the liturgy to be rejected, for want of that imaginary perfection, which no book, not even the book of God, has ever obtained?

But it may perhaps be replied, that the difficulties ariſe not from the want of ſome ſuppoſed excellency, but from real blemiſhes; from blemiſhes, which have been obſerved long ago, and their remedies propoſed. Be

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it that you are thus convinced. But is there in our liturgy any abſurdity ſo glaring, as to be viſible to every eye? Is there any impiety ſo monſtrous, as to ſhock every devout worſhiper? Our moſt ſcrupulous adverſaries never pretended it. Their complaints relate chiefly to thoſe appointments, in which there was the greateſt room for a difference in mens judgement or fancy. Of what length the public ſervice ſhould be, into how many parts it may conveniently be divided, what paſſages of the Scriptures ought to be intermixed with it, how often ſome of our moſt important petitions may be repeated, either in the ſame, or a different form; theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the matters in controverſy: matters of ſo uncertain a nature, that it might be difficult to find two thinking men, if even thinking men were not guided by faſhion, who would determine them exactly alike. It muſt therefore often happen, that they, who will not withdraw themſelves from all religious aſſemblies, will be obliged to comply with forms, which they do not wholly approve. The ſame anſwer may be given in all diſputes concerning the ceremonies

ceremonies obſerved in public worſhip. Whether it be more decent, on one occaſion, for the miniſter to kneel, on another, for the people to ſit, can never be determined by any principles of reaſon. The greateſt part of mankind always think that ceremony right, to which they have been accuſtomed. Nor are they much miſtaken. For in matters of this ſort nothing is plainly wrong, but change. But whether the point in diſpute be of greater or of leſs importance, capable of being exactly defined or not; yet he, who, without public authority, aſſumes to himſelf the determination of it, aſſumes a power, which every man might claim with equal reaſon, and which if every man ſhould exerciſe, all united worſhip muſt totally ceaſe.

In other caſes, ſimilar to this, which we are conſidering, men do not perplex themſelves with the ſame difficulties. It was never agreed, what is the moſt convenient form of civil government. Yet, except ſome few, whoſe enthuſiaſm has approached to madneſs, all have, without ſcruple, ſubmitted to every form; while it anſwered in any degree the prin-

principal purpoſes of its inſtitution. The laws of particular countries or ſocieties oblige us in many inſtances, where the law of nature has left us at liberty; nay, they often oppoſe the law of nature, where its commands are either obſcure or not important. Yet theſe things offend no man's conſcience. We not only conſent to be governed by imperfect or unreaſonable laws, without fear of diſpleaſing God; but are ready to declare that conſent, whenever it is demanded. Nor let it be pretended, that the affairs of civil life are more indifferent, or more ſubject to human prudence, than thoſe of religion. The virtue and knowledge and happineſs of a people certainly depend as much on the form of their government, and the nature of their laws, as on the ceremonies of their public worſhip. Let the deciſion therefore in both caſes proceed on the ſame principles; and then every man, who thinks our liturgy a pious and uſeful, though not a faultleſs, ſervice, will think himſelf obliged to conform to it.

It will eaſily be underſtood, with what view theſe reaſons are offered: not to in-

timate, that of all the difficulties, which our adverſaries have heaped together, any part remains unremoved; but to convince them, that the removal was more than they could reaſonably demand: it not being a condition of union in our church, that even its miniſters ſhould acknowledge every thing in the public ſervice, to be exactly what is beſt and fitteſt. Nothing more is required of them, but to profeſs by words, what they profeſs in the ſtrongeſt manner by their entrance into the miniſtry; that in their minds they aſſent to, and will follow in their practice, the preſcribed forms of prayer. So that the true meaning of this declaration muſt have been miſtaken, if it has ever driven one man from our communion.

But our other ſubſcription is to be underſtood in a different manner. Our articles of religion are not merely articles of peace. They are deſigned alſo as a teſt of our opinions. For ſince it cannot be imagined, that men ſhould explain with clearneſs, or enforce with earneſtneſs, or defend with accuracy of judgement, ſuch doctrines as they do not believe; the church requires of thoſe, who are ap-

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pointed to teach religion, a ſolemn declaration of their faith. Nor is it more unreaſonable to exclude a man from this office, who, through error, unavoidable, ſuppoſe, and innocent error, is unfit to execute it; than to deny him a civil employment, for which he is accidentally diſqualified.

He therefore, who aſſents to our articles, muſt have examined them, and be convinced of their truth. But their truth perhaps might have been obſcured with fewer doubts and difficulties, had men attended to the proper method of interpreting them. It cannot appear ſtrange, that there ſhould be rules of interpretation peculiar to theſe writings, when the deſign of interpreting them is peculiar. We are not here concerned to diſcover, what was meant by the writers, but what will be underſtood by the readers. For every ſincere man, who makes a public declaration, will conſider it as meaning, what it is uſually conceived to mean. I will not add, by thoſe, who require this declaration: not by the governors of the church, becauſe they cannot properly be ſaid to require that, which they have no authority to diſpenſe with or alter; not

not by the legiſlature, becauſe their ſenſe we ſhall never be able to determine, but by the general voice of learned men through the nation.

But if our articles are to be thus explained, will they not be rendered uncertain and uſeleſs by a variety of inconſiſtent ſenſes? Where ſhall we fix the ſtandard of public opinion? Will not every whimſical interpreter find ſome followers, whom he may call the learned of the nation; and give the colour of public authority to his own inventions? Without doubt, the method propoſed admits ſome variety of interpretations. And what other does not? The larger its compaſs is, the more honeſt men will it comprehend; and perhaps there is no danger, even in times of the greateſt freedom and candour, that it ſhould become too wide. But what its limits ought to be, is no part of our inquiry. It is ſufficient if we can determine what they are; what difference of judgements is allowed among thoſe, who may nevertheleſs agree without ſcruples in the ſame confeſſion of their faith.

And wherever an article is expreſſed in ſuch general terms, as will fairly contain ſeveral particular opinions; there certainly it is ſufficient for him who ſubſcribes, to be convinced that ſome one of theſe opinions is true. To confirm this, if it be not too evident to receive any confirmation, it has been ſaid, that this latitude of expreſſion was choſen, on purpoſe to admit, within the pale of the church, men of various and even oppoſite principles. And the clergy have been exhorted, by the royal authority, to ſhut up all diſputes, in the general meaning of the articles; that meaning, which, in ſome curious points of controverſy, perſons of every denomination have ſuppoſed to be on their ſide.

But they are not only general words, which are capable of different interpretations. Such as were originally determinate, by length of time and change of circumſtances, may become ambiguous. Cuſtom can take away the force of expreſſions, or give them a new meaning. And where the original ſenſe is one, the received another, the ſubſcriber is at liberty to uſe them in either. That he may underſtand them in their moſt obvious and

primitive ſignification, will ſcarce be doubted. And yet, if there is any place for doubt, it can be only here. That he may underſtand them as they are uſually underſtood, cannot be denied; unleſs we alſo deny the meaning of words to be arbitrary and changeable. The payment is honeſtly made, which is reckoned according to the value the money now bears, however it may have varied ſince its firſt coinage. And truth is then fairly ſpoken, when each expreſſion has the full weight for which it generally paſſes. Nor are theſe changes of the ſenſe unuſual, even in our moſt ſolemn forms. The paſſages of the Pſalms or other Scriptures, which make a part of our daily devotions, cannot always be applied by every chriſtian, as they were by the writers. And yet nothing could be more contemptible, than to object to them on this account. How unjuſt then is the charge brought againſt the Engliſh clergy that, having departed from the meaning of their articles, they all continue to ſubſcribe what none believes! The accuſation is not only falſe, but the crime impoſſible. That cannot be the ſenſe of the declaration, which no one imagines to be the ſenſe;

nor can that interpretation be erroneous, which all have received. With whatever violence it was at firſt introduced, yet poſſeſſion is always a ſufficient title; and a long and quiet poſſeſſion renders that title indiſputable.

This, indeed, is more than it is neceſſary to claim. Doubtful pretenſions in theſe diſputes are equivalent to the cleareſt. It is ſufficient to juſtify the uſe of any explanation, that it has been openly declared, and not generally condemned. And therefore, when an article has been underſtood, by good and learned interpreters, in a ſenſe, neither the moſt obvious, nor the moſt uſual; he, who aſſents to it, is at liberty to follow their guidance, or to join himſelf to the multitude. When the expreſſions he muſt uſe are ambiguous (and they are made ambiguous by different explanations of them) what he affirms is in part unknown; and, ſo far as it is unknown, cannot be falſe. They, who believe him to have departed from the truth, may blame his want of judgement, not his want of ſincerity.

Another uſe may be made of this variety of interpretations. It may help to explain the nature and force of that aſſent, which is given

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to the articles; to ſhew that it was never conceived to have ſo much rigour, as would exclude all improvements from theology. For as new diſcoveries have ſprung up, new explanations have been gradually framed and adapted to them; and almoſt every commentator has added ſomething to the common ſtock. And if, among this great variety, a free inquirer ſhould not find all his own opinions, the ſame liberty of adding to it ſtill remains. It muſt be uſed indeed with caution. But every minute difference will not oblige him to diſſent; becauſe for the ſame reaſon every interpreter of our articles, and perhaps every thinking man, muſt have diſſented alſo.

The liberty here mentioned is ſuch as cannot be preciſely marked out, and is therefore liable to abuſe. But ſo are many moral rules, which are nevertheleſs both reaſonable and uſeful: ſo are all the rules of civil liberty, which are yet of the greateſt importance to the happineſs of mankind. And I ſhall venture to add another obſervation on this ſubject, though it may be attended with the ſame difficulty. Not only the propoſitions,

to which we aſſent, but the aſſent itſelf, may be differently underſtood. The circumſtances of the perſons, who give it, create this difference. It muſt be conceived to be given with more ſolemnity and more exactneſs by him, who profeſſes to ſtudy every branch of religious knowledge, than by one engaged chiefly in other purſuits; by a man of mature judgement, than by a youth juſt beginning to exerciſe his reaſon. It is not neceſſary that theſe diſtinctions ſhould be made by public authority. The common ſenſe of mankind will introduce them. But many of thoſe, who are called upon to ſubſcribe, it is urged, have neither the age nor the learning neceſſary to make them competent judges of ſuch abſtruſe points; their weakneſs is impoſed upon; they aſſent before they have examined. And without queſtion theſe nice caſuiſts could as eaſily have ſhewn the impiety of teaching children the creed. A public confeſſion of our faith, they might ſay, is a ſolemn thing; ſome parts of it they will not underſtand till after many years, ſome perhaps never. All this would be very true, but very trifling. Every one perceives that

that a creed in the mouths of children is not a teſtimony of their aſſent. On ſuch ſubjects they are unable to ſpeak either truth or falſehood: But from thoſe who have advanced a little farther into life, a little more may be expected. They may acknowledge themſelves members of the church of *England*; and declare, that they have no objection to her articles, but a belief of them grounded on the authority of others. And nothing farther, I ſuppoſe, does any man conceive to be meant by their ſubſcriptions.

Upon the whole it appears, that, in the approbation we give of the eſtabliſhed doctrines, there is much reaſonable liberty: That we may underſtand them in any of thoſe ſenſes, which the general words comprehend, or to which the received interpretation of theſe doctrines, or the judgements of able interpreters, have extended them: That we are not confined ſtrictly even to this compaſs; but may allow ourſelves, if it ſeems neceſſary, to differ as much from former interpreters, as they have frequently done from each other: And laſtly, that there is room for various degrees of aſſent according

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ing to the various ages and abilities of the ſubſcribers. Well then may we be ſurprized, when any who call themſelves our friends, and the friends of freedom, propoſe to alter the liturgy and articles, and accommodate them to the prejudices of Diſſenters. Such a compliance, once made, would give occaſion to perpetual changes; and every change to freſh diſputes. For who ſhall faſhion our new ſyſtems? Where are the men, who have no favourite notions to inculcate, no hated hereſy to condemn? Or, were men found more learned than our firſt reformers, and equally moderate, yet would not a conſtitution newly framed be for that reaſon leſs flexible? Time itſelf ſeems to have procured for us much of that eaſe we enjoy. Let us therefore, as far as belongs to us, endeavour to maintain our religious eſtabliſhment; and let us interpret the conditions of it with that candor, which will allow the greateſt room for improvements in ſacred knowledge, and unite with us the greateſt number of ſincere proteſtants.

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DISCOURSE III.

On the ANNIVERSARY of the MARTYRDOM of CHARLES I.

Lament. of JEREMIAH, iv. 13.

For the ſins of her Prophets, and the iniquities of her Prieſts, they have ſhed the blood of the juſt in the midſt of her.

WE have been confeſſing before God, that the crying ſins of this nation brought down upon it his heavy judgments; thoſe judgements which for more than a century we have annually deplored. The miſeries of the nation were the effects, and are therefore

therefore rightly conſidered as the puniſhments, of its ſins. That the leaders of the ſeveral parties were in their turns highly blameable, cannot be queſtioned. But without great faults likewiſe among all ranks, the war either could not have begun, or muſt ſoon have ended. In what manner men of each profeſſion, divines, lawyers, courtiers, ſoldiers, contributed to the miſeries of the nation, might be a ſubject of curious inquiry to the hiſtorian and the moraliſt. The part of it, which moſt concerns *us*, is to examine how far the *teachers of religion* ſhared the guilt.

The controverſies with the Papiſts, which the Reformation had produced, and thoſe, which afterwards ſprung up among the Reformed themſelves, had turned men's attention to religious inquiries. There is nothing ſo trifling, which is not purſued with ardor, if it becomes the ſubject of a public diſpute, and the diſtinction of parties. But they, who apply pains and diligence in the ſearch of religious truths, are practiſing a real and important duty; are engaged in the nobleſt contemplations, which the human mind can

can reach; are qualifying themſelves for the moſt uſeful and moſt honourable employment, that of inſtructing and improving mankind. What wonder then, that many ſhould engage eagerly in thoſe inquiries, where a ſpirit of emulation, a deſire of knowledge, a ſenſe of duty, and a love of mankind, were united with all the motives of paſſion and intereſt, which uſually mix themſelves in every public contention! Hiſtory juſtifies this reaſoning. A zeal for religion, or rather for certain controverted points of religion, was the characteriſtic of the age. In ſuch times the Clergy muſt have had great influence. They who were ſuppoſed able to lead men in their favourite purſuit, to gratify their ruling paſſion, would naturally be choſen as the guides of all their ſteps, and might certainly have conducted them thither, whither the purſuit itſelf tended, to virtue and to happineſs. But, when, from this zealous attachment to things ſacred, one might have expected to ſee the genuine produce of religion, in every act of their lives, in every ſentiment of their hearts: inſtead of a full harveſt of virtue, we gather nothing but poiſons;

poiſons; the fruits of corrupt morals, of perverted or exceſſive paſſions.—Muſt we then imagine, that all this concern for religion was fictitious, all this zeal hypocriſy? The ſuppoſition is not neceſſary. Improvements in religious knowledge are not always followed by a like progreſs in manners. The allurements of ſenſe, the ſtrength of the paſſions, will ſometimes ſubvert the government of the mind, though fortified by a real regard to God's ſervice, though environed by the ſtrong wall of ſincerity. We find from St. Paul's reproofs of the Corinthians, that even the ſupernatural illuminations of the Spirit were not always productive of true virtue. And from the diſorderly proceedings of ſome among them, who were enriched with the beſt gifts both of wiſdom and of faith, we may learn to be leſs ſurprized, though not leſs offended, at thoſe, who abuſe more ordinary acquirements, and act not up to the dictates of a leſs illuſtrious knowledge.—Or, on the other hand, if we are convinced, that there may be faith without virtue, piety without probity; muſt we alſo admit the concluſions drawn from hence, by men of looſe prin-

principles, to countenance their neglect of religion? By no means. The obſervation affords not any real objection to the purſuit of religious knowledge, or the value of ſuch attainments. None of the bleſſings of providence fall always into the beſt hands. We may lament that men ſo often miſuſe what might have been the inſtruments of happineſs to themſelves or others; but ſtill thoſe bleſſings attract our deſires and endeavours not the leſs forcibly or juſtly.—The truth is, that religion, as received among men, can neither do every thing, that might be wiſhed or expected from it, nor nothing. The vices of men neither prove them to be infidels, nor their religion uſeleſs. A force not ſufficient to ſtem the enraged ocean, may check its riſing waves; and that which cannot oppoſe the madneſs of the people, may moderate or direct their paſſions.

But we will not impute to the public inſtructors the miſeries of this kingdom, upon this foundation, that the age was very religious and yet very wicked; unleſs we find, that the wickedneſs and the miſeries aroſe from corrupt inſtruction. Religion once perverted

will more fatally deceive us than the influence of the blindeſt paſſions. He, who wanders without any guide as whim or accident may lead him, can ſcarce go exactly right. But he who is deceived by the guide, in whom he truſts, will infallibly loſe his way. When the light, which ſhould direct us, is darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs! If they, who at firſt engaged in the ſupport of deſpotiſm, ſupported it, becauſe they had been taught, that deſpotiſm is the inſtitution of God, that a monarch is *his* vicegerent, appointed by *his* word, exerciſing *his* authority: If they, who to the laſt could not be reconciled to our antient conſtitution, were averſe to it, becauſe they believed that kings were given by God in his anger, to ſcourge the folly of the people, who deſired them; and that the only lawful government is a free and perfect democracy: If ſome, from a falſe notion of Chriſtian liberty would ſubmit to no earthly power, to no dominion but that of Jeſus-Chriſt: If others, from a falſe notion of the unity of the Church, would allow no toleration to the Puritans; who in their turn inſiſted, that it was the duty of the king

to

to puniſh the idolatry of the Papiſts with death, and that, on his neglect, it was the duty of his ſubjects to compel him: If theſe and various other doctrines, favourable to tyranny, or anarchy, or perſecution, either produced or prolonged the public calamities: then the teachers of religion cannot be acquitted of being acceſſories to the general guilt. Should we confine our attention to the eſtabliſhed teachers in this and the neighbouring kingdom, they would appear not more innocent, though leſs abſurd, than the enthuſiaſts, who, in the times of confuſion, aſſumed their office, without any authority, but the eagerneſs with which the vulgar liſtened to their paradoxes.

It is remarkable, that, during theſe conteſts, the diviſions of religion did not in any degree prevent its corruptions. There was often a general conſent to ſome fundamental error, from which concluſions were derived widely different, but equally falſe. This will fully appear, whilſt we enumerate the chief and moſt pernicious of thoſe miſtakes, which commonly prevailed among the contending parties.

And in this enumeration, it is proper to begin, where all the miſeries of the nation began, with the opinion, that a particular form of civil government is appointed by God. During the reigns of the king, whoſe death we commemorate, and his father, this had been the doctrine of the Engliſh clergy. Moſt of them believed the appointed form to be an abſolute, hereditary, monarchy; and ſome of them admitted all its horrid conſequences: that every limitation either of the ſucceſſion or power of the crown is ſeditious and impious; that the laws are only declarations of the king's will, revocable at his pleaſure; and that his ſubjects have no rights, no properties, which they may juſtly defend againſt him. Before the troubles began, the moſt ſtrenuous aſſertors of theſe doctrines were moſt encouraged by the court. And this encouragement may ſeem perhaps a juſter cauſe of the war, than any particular inſtances of oppreſſion. The injuries, it may be thought, were either not grievous, or extended not to many. The claims were univerſal; and threatened the entire deſtruction of public liberty. Whatever grievances had been

been complained of, the king ſeemed willing to redreſs: But to what purpoſe was it to redreſs grievances, when the right of repeating them was declared to be unlimited and unalienable? So might the patriots argue. On the other hand, the king, perceiving that the moſt learned, and, as he would ſuppoſe, the wiſeſt of his ſubjects, acknowledged his authority to be without controul, and founded their opinion on the Scriptures, would eaſily be convinced, that all who attempted to reſtrain his power, were rebels againſt God. Thus a conteſt, which the pen had raiſed, the ſword only could decide.

We may perhaps wonder how theſe doctrines ſhould be derived from the Scriptures: in which we can diſcover only general exhortations to ſubmit to government, to honour magiſtrates, to obey laws; but no deſcription of a particular form of government, no notices of the ſeveral orders of magiſtrates, no declarations by whoſe conſent or authority the laws ſhall be made or executed. But it is equally wonderful, that the original error, which was firſt propagated by the flatterers of regal pride, ſhould afterwards

be adopted by its moſt violent oppoſers. *They* alſo alledged, that only one form of government was agreeable to the will of God, and, what form he had choſen, appeared, they ſaid, from the ſignal ſucceſs, with which he had bleſſed their arms: forgetting that many free ſtates had been ſubverted by tyrants; and that it is often conſiſtent with the extenſive views of the Divine Mind, and ſubſervient to the great ends of his Providence, to permit the proſperity of the wicked, to ſuffer good fortune to attend the undertakings of men, whoſe characters and deſigns will not allow us even to imagine, that they can be the proper objects of heavenly favour.

Similar miſtakes concerning eccleſiaſtical policy and the external forms of religion produced ſtill more obſtinate contentions. The Engliſh clergy had reaſon to boaſt that their liturgy was admirably compoſed, that their canons were uſeful and not burthenſome, that their government was adapted to the model of ſome of the moſt antient churches, as much as the difference of times and ſituations would admit. But they went farther.

farther. They maintained theſe, as eſſential parts of Chriſtianity; at leaſt they maintained, that, their forms being the beſt that ever were invented, it was the duty of the prince, to compel all his ſubjects to receive them: not conſidering, that God himſelf, even in the ſubſtance of religion, has thought it better to leave men a liberty of chooſing, than to compel them ro receive the beſt. This doctrine, and the influence of the ruling clergy, engaged the king in that dangerous enterprize of introducing the Engliſh liturgy and canons, and of ſupporting the epiſcopal order, among his northern ſubjects: an enterprize which proved as deſtructive to his authority in one kingdom, as his claim of abſolute power in the other.

But the king's enemies did not ſuffer him to enjoy alone theſe miſtakes. As they robbed him of his power, they took with it his ideas of religion. They were not content to have vindicated their own liberty, but would now in their turns reſtrain others. They now imitated their ſovereign; required an uniformity of worſhip and policy, and propagated by violence their favourite forms.

Another prevailing and pernicious doctrine denied the force of human laws, in all matters related to religion. Of this the examples are frequent. It may ſuffice to mention one. When the king publicly claimed an unlimited power and full ſupremacy over the church of Scotland, he cited, in ſupport of this claim, not the known and eſtabliſhed laws; not any antient uſage; not the examples of any of his predeceſſors: but the pattern of the kings of Iſrael. And a body of his clergy publiſhed a declaration of their opinions, which aſſerted, that the king would ſin highly againſt God, if he ſhould not aſſume the ſupremacy to himſelf; and that the churches within his dominions would ſin equally, if they ſhould refuſe to yield it unto him, even though the ſtatutes of the kingdom ſhould deny it. And thoſe in either kingdom, who rejected theſe pretenſions, rejected them, not as interfering with any human ordinances, but as an uſurpation of the dominion of Chriſt, and blaſphemy againſt God. To both parties it would have appeared inconceivable, that on this ſide of the Tweed, the King ſhould be Head

Head and Supreme Governor of the Church; and have no authority over it on the other. And yet, for the deciſion of this queſtion, we have no command of our Saviour, no apoſtolical practice, no example of the primitive Chriſtians in a ſimilar ſituation: the matter muſt neceſſarily be determined by the laws of our country; and the advantages of one conſtitution above the other are neither ſo evident, nor ſo important, as to juſtify men in overturning ſettlements, or ſeparating themſelves from eſtabliſhed order. Theſe remarks might eaſily have been applied to other diſputes in thoſe times, if the diſputants could have allowed, that any thing in religious ceremonies is undecided, any thing, of its own nature, indifferent.

But where both parties denied the obligation of laws, there, with a ſtrange inconſiſtency, they both maintained the neceſſity of puniſhments. It is the duty, they ſaid, of princes and magiſtrates to enforce true religion. For, each conceiving, that his own was unqueſtionably the true, this doctrine ſuited his prejudices, and the intereſts of his party, no leſs than the other.

And thus all became by turns diſobedient to reaſonable and uſeful laws, promoters of laws tyrannical and abſurd.

Such were the dangerous errors maintained by men of abilities and character. But they were carried to extremes, immediately ſubverſive of all peace and order, by the vulgar and illiterate enthuſiaſts. The former aſſerted, that God had once appointed the preciſe forms of civil and eccleſiaſtical government. The latter, that he continually appoints not the forms only, but the miniſters of his government; that, by the ſenſible operations of his Spirit, he conducts his elect to their deſtined offices, and inſtructs them by what courſes they may fulfil his will. The learned caſuiſt had taught, that human ordinances are not obligatory in matters of religion. The vulgar enthuſiaſt went a ſtep farther; he affirmed, that they cannot, in any caſe, bind the ſaints, and ſo diſcharged himſelf and his aſſociates from any attention to the beggarly elements of law and juſtice. Some thinking men had inſtructed magiſtrates, that it is their duty to puniſh ſuch as depart from the true church. The vulgar concluded,

concluded, that *they* likewiſe might *compel* men to *come in*; and, when the confuſion of the times gave them power, from a principle of conſcience, as they pretended, they pillaged and murdered the worſhippers of Baal.

So difficult is it to limit errors! ſo hazardous is the attempt to make the word of God ſubſervient to the purpoſes of men! Such miſeries ariſe, either in the natural courſe of events, or by the juſt judgements of God, from the corruptions of religion! And, if any ſins are the objects of God's ſignal indignation, and demand immediate puniſhments, none ſeems to challenge them more boldly, than the perverting of religion to the encouragement of ambition and tyranny: both from the heinous nature of the ſin itſelf, and the terrible miſchiefs it produces. It is a direct affront to the righteous Governor of the world, to cite his commands in ſupport of injuſtice and oppreſſion. It is a daring profanation of the religion of the meek and lowly Jeſus, to employ it as the engine of ambition or wicked policy. In thoſe, who are commiſſioned to explain and

inculcate this religion, every corruption of it is a breach of the moſt ſacred and moſt important truſt. Bad men alſo, as they proceed in their crimes, find leſs remorſe within, and fewer reſtraints without, when they can perſuade themſelves, or others, that religion is on their ſide. They then imagine that the ſacredneſs of the end will juſtify the means; and their ſentiments of piety (for even the worſt of mankind ſometimes feel ſuch ſentiments) confirm them in their wickedneſs: or they conceal their practices under the robes of ſanctity, and deceive the unwary by that awful appearance. But, if to affront God, to profane religion, to break a ſacred truſt, to give encouragement and power to wicked men, be ſeverally great offences; how malignant muſt be the united guilt of them all! Such and ſo complicated was the guilt of thoſe clergymen, who miſreported the doctrines of the Goſpel, either to flatter the monarch's lofty notions of his own authority, and perſuade his ſubjects to ſurrender to him their liberties; or to advance the projects of violent and ambitious

traitors,

traitors, and prevent the reſtoration of peace and order.

Senſible how heinous theſe crimes are, let us avoid all approaches to them; and let us be thankful to God, who has given us hearts to diſcern the errors of our forefathers, a conſtitution formed on the oppoſite principles, five ſucceſſive monarchs, who have uſually governed according to that conſtitution, and ſtateſmen who uſe not religion as the engine of tyranny.

DIS-

DISCOURSE IV.

The AUTHENTICITY of the BOOKS of the NEW TESTAMENT.

Preached on WHITSUNDAY.

JOHN xv. 26.

When the Comforter is come, whom I will ſend unto you from the Father, even the ſpirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he ſhall teſtify of me.

BEFORE the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, we find the Apoſtles ignorant of the nature of the Chriſtian Redemption. Notwithſtanding the lowly appearance of our Saviour, his quiet and unaſpiring temper and

and demeanour, they could not depart from their original Jewiſh prejudices, but expected a temporal deliverance. *Lord, when wilt thou reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael? Lord, grant that my two ſons may ſit, one on thy right-hand, the other on thy left, in thy kingdom.* Such, during the life of Jeſus, were the expectations of his diſciples. And when his death had blaſted their ambitious hopes, they ſeemed to deſpond, and almoſt to doubt whether God had not forſaken them. But, ſoon after, their falſe notions were corrected, their fears diſſipated; their views were enlarged from the ſingle people of the Jews to all the nations upon earth, and raiſed alſo from earth to heaven. Thus the promiſe of our Saviour, expreſſed in my text, was fulfilled. *The Spirit, whom he ſent from the Father, teſtified of him:* not only by enabling his diſciples, a company of unlettered fiſhermen, to ſpeak without practice or ſtudy, to the Parthian and the Libyan, the Arabian and the Roman, nations the moſt diſtant in their ſituation, the moſt diſſonant in their languages; but alſo

but alſo by bearing witneſs even to the witneſſes themſelves, by opening gradually to their minds the whole œconomy of the Chriſtian diſpenſation. Of this they had learned but little from the mouth of their maſter: the hour was not yet come for their full inſtruction. They were to receive it immediately from heaven. And, having received, they committed it to writing, for the benefit of Chriſtians in all ages. And this, I conceive, is what we are to underſtand, when it is ſaid, that the Holy Scriptures are of *divine authority*, or were given by the *inſpiration of God*. He, who acquires knowledge not by the uſe of any natural faculty, neither by immediate perception, nor by reaſoning, nor by inſtruction, but in ſome inexplicable, miraculous manner, is *inſpired*. He, who ſets down in writing the knowledge ſo obtained, compoſes an *inſpired work* *. There appears to be no intelligible diſtinction between original revelation

* See the ſame ſubject further purſued in Diſcourſe XV.

lation and inſpiration. And yet men ſeem to have entertained an obſcure notion of ſomething more, otherwiſe they could not have been perplexed with ſo many difficulties concerning the accuracy and perfection of the Scriptures. They contain ſome few paſſages, which appear to have no relation to religion, and many facts, which the writers certainly knew in the ordinary way. Nor does there ſeem any reaſon to expect marks of the interpoſition of heaven in ſuch matters. The great truths impreſſed upon their minds neither obliterated their former knowledge, nor made it perfect. When they ſpeak, for inſtance, of a Roman cuſtom, or a Jewiſh tradition, we are not to imagine that theſe things were revealed from above, nor to require greater accuracy in their accounts of them, than in other writers, who treat of the affairs of their own age and their own country. When they relate the wonderful events which they had ſeen and heard, it will be no objection to their credit as human witneſſes, that we find in their ſeveral hiſtories of the ſame fact,

fact, ſuch a variety of circumſtances, or of method, as always occurs in other the moſt exact narrations. Difficulties of this kind could never have ariſen, or muſt have been eaſily removed, had either the impugners or defenders of the ſacred writings formed preciſe ideas of the nature of inſpiration, and attended to its uſe. This was not to teach men hiſtory or philoſophy, not to inſtruct them in the arts of compoſition, or the ornaments of human learning: but to make them underſtand and believe the religion of Jeſus.

Intending to lay before you, as occaſion ſhall ſerve, the principal evidences of Chriſtianity, I judged it not improper (and the preſent ſolemnity ſuggeſted it) to inquire what we are to underſtand by *Inſpiration*, before we attempt to prove that the Books of the New Teſtament are the genuine works of *inſpired writers*.

To this proof we will now proceed: and begin with ſuch parts of it as are the leaſt diſputable.

Firſt then, we may obſerve, that the Books of the New Teſtament have not been forged

forged in modern times*, but have been known and received among Chriſtians for many ages. We have not only editions of them from the very birth of the art of printing, but many MSS. much older. Some of them, as is probable, have been preſerved more than one thouſand years; and all theſe, though from every part of the Chriſtian world, agree ſo nearly in repreſenting the ſame text, that, by the various readings collected from them, not a feature of Chriſtianity can be diſguiſed. The very worſt MS. extant, as an able critic aſſures us, would not pervert one article of faith, or deſtroy one moral precept.—Beſides theſe copies in the original language, we have alſo many antient verſions; ſome of them in languages, which are not now, and for ſeveral centuries have not been, ſpoken in any corner of the globe. And their agreement with each other, and with the preſent text, is a full proof, that the Scriptures, we now read, are the ſame which were received by the Chriſtian church in the ſeveral ages

* See Chapman's Euſebius, p. 332. and the Remarks on Free-thinking, p. 76, 2d Edit.

when theſe verſions were made.—We may next examine the comments which have deſcended to us from the Latin and Greek Fathers on moſt of the Books, and their frequent citations of them all. And theſe will carry us up to the fourth century, and ſatisfy us, that no great alterations have happened ſince that period. We find too that they were then conſidered as old books, and when we ſtep farther back to the earlier Chriſtian writers, we meet with innumerable quotations and references to them; more beyond compariſon than can be produced from any other antient writer. For the credit of a whole claſſic volume often reſts on a few, ſometimes on a ſingle ſmall quotation by a writer nearly contemporary. Whereas the paſſages of the New Teſtament occur ſo frequently, that, if any remarkable verſe has not been cited in the early ages, the omiſſion is always eſteemed among the learned a conſiderable difficulty, and brings the authority of the text into queſtion. Thus may we riſe through more than ſixteen centuries, and collect ſuch evidence, as will admit no contradiction, that the Sacred Volume

Volume is now the ſame, which was publiſhed ſoon after the appearance of our religion, and compoſed by ſome of its firſt diſciples. And on this immoveable foundation we might build our proof of Chriſtianity, though we were ignorant of the particular writer to whom each book belongs.

But there is no ſuch defect in our evidence. We can ſhew who the writers were, and how they became acquainted with the facts they relate.—And in vindicating the claim of the apoſtles and evangeliſts to the works which bear their names, it cannot be improper, though it may not be neceſſary, to mention an argument, which is allowed to have great force in all ſimilar inquiries, namely, their poſſeſſion. Few very antient authors can produce any better title: And when the poſſeſſion has been for many ages undiſturbed; when thoſe who were moſt able and moſt intereſted to examine the title, allowed it; when even their enemies for a time did not call it in queſtion; it may ſeem, that a better can ſcarce be deſired. The primitive Chriſtians were certainly much concerned not to be impoſed on by ſpurious

books, and their adverſaries would not have failed to object to them, had there been any ſuſpicions of ſuch miſtakes. But Celſus*, who wrote againſt Chriſtianity in the ſecond century, and aſſumed by turns the characters of a Jew and a Heathen, quoted† abundance of paſſages from theſe Books, and conſtantly attributed them to the diſciples of Jeſus. Porphyry and Hierocles argued upon the ſame principles in the two next centuries. And even Julian, who did every thing which ſagacious malice could ſuggeſt, or the power of the Roman empire ſupport, to leſſen the credit of the Chriſtian doctrines, never once diſputed the genuineneſs of any part of the New Teſtament. It muſt be owned, that an account of their conceſſions is taken from the anſwers to them; their own books againſt Chriſtianity having been totally diſregarded, and long ſince loſt. But this circumſtance ſeems to affect the proof but little, when the inquiry is not with what force

* See Chapman, p. 363.

† See theſe quotations collected by Lardner, in his Ancient Teſtimonies, ch. xviii. ſect. 3.

they objected, but whether they objected at all. And, if men of all parties, who lived neareſt to the time when theſe Books were publiſhed, and were beſt able to judge of their authenticity, admitted it unanimouſly; with what colour of reaſon could it be now diſputed, even though we had no direct teſtimonies concerning it?—But theſe are neither few nor uncertain.

Clemens the Roman*, who is mentioned by St. Paul† among his fellow-labourers, has left us a ſhort piece, in which he has expreſsly cited St. Paul's firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, and ſuch diſcourſes of our Saviour as are recorded by three of the evangeliſts‡. St. John's goſpel probably was not publiſhed when Clemens wrote. He ſeems alſo to allude to ſeveral paſſages in other Books of the New Teſtament‖.

Ignatius converſed familiarly with ſome of the apoſtles; and was a martyr for our holy

* See Ep. Clement. ad Corinthios, c. 47.

† See Philipp. iv. 3.

‡ Clem. Epiſt. c. 13. & 46.

‖ See the paſſages cited by Lardner, in his Credibility of the Goſpel Hiſtory, Part II. Book i. ch. 2.

religion. Learned men have been divided in their opinions about ſome of the epiſtles aſcribed to him. But, in thoſe which all allow to be genuine, the epiſtle to the Epheſians is declared to be St. Paul's *, and expreſſions are borrowed from ten at leaſt of the other Books †.

Polycarp, another martyr, was inſtructed by the apoſtles, and knew many who had ſeen the Lord. In one ſhort letter, the whole which we have of his writing, he cites, or plainly alludes to, more than half the different pieces contained in the New Teſtament ‡.

All theſe are clear witneſſes, who not only lived at the ſame time, but were acquainted with the perſons of whoſe books they ſpeak. We need not inſiſt on any other writers of that age. As Chriſtianity ſpread itſelf, the books written by its profeſſors increaſed; and there is not one among them, which does not bear ſome teſtimony to the genuineneſs and authority of the Scriptures;

* See Ign. 1 Ep. ad Epheſ. i. 12.
† See Lardner, as before, ch. 5.
‡ See Lardner, ch. 6.

tures; till we come to the time when the fathers of the church met in councils, and put together that code, which has been ever ſince generally received through the Chriſtian world. Out of the great number of atteſtations tranſmitted to us from the ſecond century, I ſhall ſelect two, which ſeem the moſt conſiderable, thoſe of Juſtin the martyr and Irenæus. Juſtin, in his firſt Apology for the Chriſtians, which he preſented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, mentions the cuſtom of reading in their ſolemn aſſemblies, the Memoirs written by the apoſtles, and their companions *: and that, by theſe memoirs, he means the four Goſpels, of Matthew and John, the *apoſtles*, and of Mark and Luke, the *companions* of apoſtles, is evident, becauſe in other places he has quoted them all †. And this is the teſtimony not of a private man, but of the whole church, at a time when many among them had converſed with thoſe who received the Sacred Books immediately from their authors. In Irenæus we have long and numerous

* See Juſt. Apol. I. ſect. 87.
† See Lardner, ch. 10.

merous paſſages from almoſt all parts of the New Teſtament*; ſo numerous, that his having cited nothing from the epiſtles of St. James and St. Jude, is conſidered as a proof, that he was not acquainted with them. For thoſe and two or three other of the ſhorteſt epiſtles, and for that written to the Hebrews, the evidence, though more than ſufficient to convince a fair inquirer, is not exactly the ſame as for the other Scriptures†. But the chief arguments for the truth of our religion are not connected with the determination of theſe nicer queſtions; the hiſtory of Chriſt and his apoſtles, and the proofs of their divine authority, being contained in Books which were never controverted.

And, if credit is to be given to any writings which are to be produced as antient; if the manuſcripts, verſions, quotations, in every language, and diſperſed through every country, are not all counterfeit; if the teſtimonies not only of contemporaries, but of thoſe who knew the writers, who converſed

* See Lardner, ch. 17.
† See Chapman, p. 371.

with

with them, who were inſtructed by them in the ſubjects of theſe Books, teſtimonies given in public, uncontradicted, received with an univerſal concurrence by friends and enemies, by thoſe who were moſt concerned to know the truth, and thoſe who were moſt inclined to diſpute it; if all this accumulated evidence does not deceive us; then were the hiſtorical works of the New Teſtament written by the perſons to whom they are aſcribed; and in them *does the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, ſtill teſtify of* CHRIST.

DIS-

DISCOURSE V.

The CREDIT due to the SACRED HISTORIANS.

JOHN xxi. 24.

This is the diſciple, which teſtifieth of theſe things, and wrote theſe things; and we know, that his teſtimony is true.

MY laſt diſcourſe proved to you, that the books of the New Teſtament are the genuine works of the Authors, to whom they are aſcribed. The regular order of the argument for the truth of Chriſtianity, leads me now to ſhew, that theſe Authors are credible

dible witneſſes of the facts they relate. It will be convenient to divide theſe facts; and to conſider the events, which are within the common courſe of nature, and the miracle ſeparately. Whilſt we are examining the former, ſome things will offer themſelves to our notice, which have not been commonly attended to, and yet perhaps may help to ſtrengthen the authority not only of the Evangeliſts, but of other Hiſtorians.

I. It ſeems, that the human genius does not reach ſo far as to invent any long and particular narration, which ſhall have the appearance of truth; to fill up all the circumſtances and make them conſiſtent. The meaneſt critic can diſtinguiſh between a hiſtory and a romance. And there is no more danger of miſtaking the one for the other, than of not diſcerning dreams from real life. In both caſes we judge upon the ſame principle. The ſeries of events, which paſſes before us, or which is related by the ſober hiſtorian, is continued and uniform. Whereas dreams or fictions, when extended to any conſiderable length, are always unconnected and inconſiſtent. It muſt not indeed be aſ-

ſerted,

ſerted, that there is no mixture of fable or error in ancient ſtory. Certainly there is much. But falſhood can never ſtand alone. It can only be ſupported by the real facts to which it is joined. Vain would be the attempt to deceive mankind by any long narrative of remarkable events, put together merely by the force of the imagination. Its miſshapen and unnatural productions will not paſs for the genuine offspring of truth and nature.—Or if an attempt of this kind can be made with any hopes of ſucceſs, it muſt be in the tranſactions of a dark age or an unknown country. As the ſcene draws nearer to our view, it becomes impoſſible wholly to feign the ſtory, difficult even to miſrepreſent it. The tragic poet, who forms his fable upon ſome hiſtorical report, but follows it not preciſely, though his deſign be only to lay hold of the fancy, not to miſlead the judgment, and his tale be to paſs but for an hour among a willing audience; yet finds it neceſſary to place them at Thebes or Athens, or convey them back to diſtant ages, that his departure from truth may not be too apparent. Should he falſify the

the public tranſactions of the preſent times, the deceit could not be endured. So obſtinate are facts, ſo hardly are they drawn aſide even for a ſhort amuſement. With reaſon therefore do we give full credit to thoſe accounts which have been written and publiſhed in the times and places they deſcribe. The contemporary hiſtorian was not only more able to inform us rightly; but his miſreports, if he had made any, either through ignorance or deſign, muſt have been preſently diſcovered, and his work have fallen into contempt and oblivion.—Again, the teſtimony of an Author carries ſtill greater force, when he has himſelf born a part in the tranſactions he relates. All ſuſpicion, that he might be deceived, is here taken away; and ſuch a writer uſually deſcribes things more particularly, and enables us more frequently to compare his reports with other reports of the ſame events, or of other events in the ſame age and country. When we have ſeveral hiſtorians perfectly agreeing in their narratives, no other doubt of their fidelity can remain, but this; whether they have not copied one from another, or

or all from the ſame original. For it is clearly impoſſible, that they ſhould wander without a guide in the infinite labyrinth of error, and yet all take at every turn the ſame direction.—Or if the hiſtory we examine be ſingle and detached, yet other contemporary writings, which exhibit the manners of the age, the characters of the perſons, the laws of the country, the ſituation of public affairs, the ſtate of arts and ſciences, and numberleſs other particulars, will all contribute either to eſtabliſh or deſtroy its pretenſions.

It will not be difficult to apply theſe obſervations to the hiſtorical parts of the New Teſtament. If no writer was ever able to give to any long fictions the appearance of truth, or to unite them into a regular and conſiſtent ſtory; then is there nor oom to ſuſpect, that clear, determinate narratives of plain facts, told with all their circumſtances, and, as it ſeems, without diſguiſe, and without reſerve, can be, either in the whole or in part, the works of invention. If theſe be forgeries, then is all criticiſm vain and uſeleſs. The writers of the New Teſtament lived in the times and places

of

of which they ſpeak, and then and there the accounts were publiſhed. Had they been falſe, nothing would have been ſo eaſy as to confute them. Had they been falſe, they would have confuted each other. For we have ſeveral relations of the ſame facts. But they are wholly uncontradicted, perfectly conſiſtent. I ſpeak only of the principal events, not of any minute variations, which may be found or imagined in the different Goſpels. But if Jeſus Chriſt did not live in Judea, if he did not declare himſelf to be commiſſioned by God, and there teach a new religion, if he did not ſuffer death, and if, after his death, his diſciples did not ſtill adhere to him, and affirm that he was reſtored to life, then is all hiſtorical evidence falſe and deceitful.—But our evidence is greater than what we uſually conſider as hiſtorical. We have the letters of the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity to the Churches they had planted. Theſe letters, without aſſerting, plainly ſuppoſe, many of the principal facts. And the proof, as being indirect, is the more convincing. From that time to the preſent we have a continued ſeries of Chriſtian writers, and conti-

nued

nued notice of the Chriſtians and of their religion in writers not favorable to them of every country and in every language. If theſe things do not convince us, that Chriſtianity was taught at the time, and by the perſons, mentioned in the New Teſtament, that it was preſently ſpread over the Roman empire, and received, as a divine meſſage, by great numbers in all places, who embraced it with conſtancy themſelves, and tranſmitted it carefully to their children; then may we with equal reaſon reject all antient books as forged, all written teſtimony as utterly incredible.—But we will produce one degree of evidence farther. Many facts recorded in the New Teſtament have a plain reference to the laws and cuſtoms of the Jews and Romans; and could not have been deſcribed, much leſs invented, with ſuch an exact correſpondence to theſe laws and cuſtoms, but by thoſe who lived under them. The ſame laws, the ſame ceremonies, are ſtill obſerved by the Jews in every country. And the laws of Rome, though no where maintained entire, have been the grounds of the municipal laws in ſome of the greateſt and moſt

moſt poliſhed ſtates of Europe, and conſiderable parts of them are now in force in theſe kingdoms. But, if it be impoſſible to perſuade whole nations, civilized and learned nations, or a numerous people diſperſed through every region of the earth, to receive, as rules and practices derived from their anceſtors, what had never before been heard of among them: then have we ſuch a confirmation of the Goſpel hiſtory, as ſhews, among what people, and under what government, many of the facts related there muſt have happened; not taken from the records of former times, but from a view of the preſent, not from the private tradition of ſingle witneſſes, but from the unqueſtionable teſtimony of public tranſactions. There remain other memorials of the age and countries in which Chriſtianity was firſt preached, which might ſupply other proofs of many parts of its hiſtory; and theſe proofs well deſerve our attention, though the facts, to which they relate, have ſeldom been diſputed by the adverſaries of Chriſtianity. For the certainty of many things, mentioned in the Goſpels, will give a credit to the reſt.

It will produce a reaſonable prejudice againſt any objections that may be offered to the *miracles* there recorded.

II. In ſupport of theſe miracles the Defenders * of our religion have fully ſhewn, that we have not the leaſt reaſon to ſuſpect the relators of them, either to have been deceived themſelves, or wilfully to have deceived others: that the wonderful works reported by them are uſually the plain objects of men's ſenſes, in which it was not poſſible for thoſe to be miſtaken, who affirmed that they ſaw or heard them; that the Evangeliſts were either themſelves preſent at theſe great events, or received the accounts immediately from thoſe who were; that their integrity appears both from their writings and their conduct; from their *writings*, becauſe they relate openly, what inſincere and artful men would have endeavoured to conceal, the poor and mean condition of their Maſter, the contempt with which he was treated, the ignominious death he ſuffered, their own low employments, their ignorance,

* See particularly Bp. Blackall's 5th Sermon, preached at Boyle's Lecture.

miſtakes,

miſtakes, fooliſh contentions and cowardice; from their *conduct*, becauſe with no other view but that of inſtructing mankind in virtue and religion, they expoſed themſelves to perils and hardſhips of every kind, and neither ſtripes, nor impriſonments, nor the apprehenſions of inſtant death, could prevail on them to depart from their teſtimony.

Theſe arguments, as they are common, ſo are they both juſt and important. But they do not repreſent *all* the evidence. The truth of our religion reſts not wholly on thoſe few witneſſes, who have tranſmitted to us the hiſtory of its firſt promulgation. It is not neceſſary that a man's teſtimony ſhould have been written with his own hand. If his friends and companions publiſhed accounts of miracles, and named him as *preſent* when they were performed, this ſurely was to call him forth as a witneſs; and his adherence to the ſame company, his profeſſion of the religion, which theſe miracles confirmed, was a clear declaration of his aſſent. Thus the twelve Apoſtles, who are named in the Goſpels, as the conſtant attendants of our Saviour, are witneſſes to us of all his wonderful

derful works. And ſo many of his followers as are recorded to have been healed of diſeaſes, or to have been preſent at any of his miracles, are alſo witneſſes of thoſe particular facts. Nor does it ſeem neceſſary that the witneſs be *named*; it is ſufficient, if he be ſo *deſcribed*, that he muſt at the time have been certainly known. The ſeventy, whom our Saviour ſelected from the reſt of his diſciples, and ſent into the cities and towns, to preach and to work miracles, from the nature of their office could not be concealed; and the account given of them by the Evangeliſts is the ſame thing as producing them to teſtify the powers they had received. We might add to theſe the greater part of thoſe five hundred, who were aſſembled together, and ſaw their Maſter after his reſurrection: and perhaps of the five thouſand whom he fed in the wilderneſs. But why ſhould we increaſe the number ſo ſlowly? Every *convert* to our religion in the early times (during the lives of the Apoſtles at leaſt, if not much later) is a witneſs, who ſhould have conſiderable weight in our account. Chriſtianity was received

on the evidence of miracles, either real or pretended. It was not only the duty, but the intereſt, of every man, before he embraced it, to examine them. The examination lay open, the matters were public, the miracles were continually repeated. All muſt be ſenſible that, if they were deceived, they ſhould exchange every thing valuable in this life for a fable. In ſuch caſes men are not inclined to be convinced too haſtily. Great numbers, however, were convinced; and each is indiſputably a better witneſs than we can uſually produce for other remote facts.

What can be added to all theſe proofs of our religion, but an appeal to its *enemies?* Such an appeal is plainly made by the ſacred hiſtorians, when they relate events, of which the truth or falſhood muſt be univerſally known. Whether, at the crucifixion of Jeſus, an unnatural darkneſs was ſpread over the whole land; whether vaſt numbers, collected at Jeruſalem from every corner of the earth, heard the Apoſtles ſuddenly ſpeak to them, each in their own language: were matters, of which neither the Jews, nor the

Romans living among them, could be ignorant. And what ſay their writers? Some, from whom accounts of theſe ſtriking events might have been expected, are ſilent; others acknowledge that ſtrange things happened, but impute them to magic, or unknown cauſes; none contradict the reports of our hiſtorians; many ſpeak of the amazing obſtinacy of the Chriſtians, and the rapid progreſs of their ſuperſtition; which is indeed to teſtify, that the Chriſtians were fully convinced of the truth of their religion, and were able alſo to convince others *.

Upon the whole it appears, that the cleareſt rules of criticiſm, the ſtrongeſt hiſtorical teſtimony; the whole force of written evidence, of private and public records; the atteſtation given to the miracles of our religion by greater numbers than ever concurred in any other facts; by friends and enemies; by friends, who openly confeſſed them againſt their intereſts, and perſiſted in their confeſſion even againſt the terrors of death; by enemies who were forced to believe them againſt their pre-

* See Lardner's Ancient Teſtimonies.

judices,

judices, and to admit the facts whilſt they denied the plaineſt conſequences of them; that all this accumulated evidence gives us ſuch an aſſured confidence in the reports of the Evangeliſts, as may not improperly be expreſſed by ſaying, *We* KNOW *that their teſtimony is true.*

DISCOURSE VI.

The INSUFFICIENCY of Mr. HUME's OBJECTION to the CREDIBILITY of MIRACLES.

ACTS xvii. 32.

And when they heard of the Reſurrection of the Dead, ſome mocked; and others ſaid, We will hear thee again of this matter.

ST. Paul, in his diſcourſe to the Athenians, on that fundamental doctrine of Chriſtianity, the Reſurrection to a final judgement, appeals to the teſtimony of a fact, and alledges our Saviour's return from the grave, as giving aſſurance to all mankind of

of their own future exiſtence. His philoſophical hearers, we are told, were partly Epicureans and partly Stoics; and the reception they gave to his inſtructions was agreeable to the prejudices which each ſect had imbibed: the diſciples of the garden, as is probable, being thoſe, whoſe phyſical tenets diſpoſed them to ridicule the very thought of a Reſurrection; and the ſtudents of the porch, thoſe leſs inſolent hearers, who, being unable to reſiſt the force of his reaſoning, and unwilling to ſubmit to it, deſired a farther account of ſo extraordinary an opinion. The apoſtle however, as it ſeems from the following part of the hiſtory, did not gratify them: but left the Greeks to ſooth their learned vanity, by caſting the imputation of fooliſhneſs on doctrines they could ſo little reliſh or comprehend. And yet neither they who doubted, nor they who mocked, were, by the principles of their ſchools, ſo far from the kingdom of God, as ſome among the infidel philoſophers of modern times. The Epicureans admitted as true the relations of ſome miraculous events; but endeavoured to ſhew, that they were not contrary

trary to nature. The Stoics believed the reality of events, which they confeſſed to be ſupernatural, and conſidered as the interpoſitions of Providence for the good of mankind. Here then the field of conviction was wide and open; and among the others it was not abſolutely precluded. But how ſhall the advocate of Chriſtianity addreſs himſelf to, or reaſon with, thoſe ſubtle diſputants, who refuſe to aſſent to facts the moſt ſtrongly atteſted, if they are not ſuch as experience warrants; who would teach us to reduce all human teſtimony to the precarious ſtandard of our particular knowledge and obſervation? Vain is every inquiry into the abilities, the diſpoſitions, the motives, the number, of the witneſſes, by whom the miracles of Chriſt have been tranſmitted to us; if the very nature of the facts renders them incapable of proof. And, though each of theſe particulars ſhould appear to be ſuch, as might ſatisfy the moſt ſcrupulous examiner; it would be unfair not to attend to an argument; which, if it be concluſive, deſtroys the efficacy of them all. Truth can never want, and ſhould always diſdain to accept,

ſuch ſuſpicious favours. The objection therefore ſhall be fully ſtated, and fairly conſidered.

"It is evident, ſays this objector, that the credibility of a fact depends not entirely on the number, the qualifications, and diſpoſitions, of thoſe who relate it: ſince, where theſe are all equally unexceptionable, the degree of credibility is allowed to be very different. Let a man of common underſtanding relate to us an uſual event; for which he alledges the clear and undiſturbed evidence of his ſenſes: if we know of no purpoſes he has to ſerve, no paſſions to indulge, by leading us into error; and if we have no reaſon to ſuſpect the truth of his relation from oppoſite teſtimony; we readily yield him our aſſent. Yet change but the fact, which is familiar to our apprehenſions, into one of the marvellous kind, and a number of ſuch witneſſes would find it difficult to convince us. Nay, a degree of external evidence, which in common caſes would be admitted without a doubt, by increaſing the repugnancy of the thing related to our obſervations and opinions, may not only loſe all

its probability, but we may even have full conviction that it is falſe; conviction founded upon thoſe very principles which induce us to aſſent to human teſtimony. The experience we have, that men do not generally deceive us in their narratives, is the foundation of the credit we give them. The experience we have of the conſtant uniform courſe of nature produces an expectation of the ſame regularity in the parts untried. The aſſent is determined in the two caſes by the ſame principles: and when they draw it on oppoſite ſides, the ſuperior force muſt prevail. But the experience of nature being continual and unvaried, whilſt that of the veracity of human teſtimony is weakened by many exceptions of fraud or miſtake, the latter can never overcome the former; and therefore no atteſtation of witneſſes, however able and honeſt they may appear, can convince a juſt reaſoner of a miraculous event."

Every part of this objection abounds with ambiguity and fallacy. When experience is made the ſole criterion of truth, muſt we underſtand by it our own experience, or that of others? If *our own*, at what period of our

our lives? Muſt he, who has lived twenty years without ſeeing an eclipſe of the ſun, or a comet, reject the accounts of them as fabulous? or he, who has not dwelt near Veſuvius, believe nothing of its fiery eruptions? There are many real facts, ſo oppoſite to the experience of thoſe to whom they may be related, that, if they govern their aſſent by that experience, they will certainly look upon them as falſe. Some of theſe events are regularly repeated: whilſt others are more ſingular and unconnected; in judging of which from the principles of analogy, the moſt comprehenſive knowledge of nature would be deceived. For though we are continually enlarging our experience, and correcting the judgements formed by it; yet is it ſtill confined to few objects, and open to many uncertainties and errors. We frequently give credit to the relations of others, though they correſpond not with it, and our after-experience convinces us, that the credit was juſt.—Or is it the experience of *others* which muſt fix our opinions? This can only be known to us by teſtimony; and it muſt overthrow itſelf, if

if it deſtroys the force of that teſtimony, on which alone it reſts. If we ſearch into the origin of our knowledge of facts, that portion of it which is acquired by our own powers will be found ſmall in compariſon of that which is derived from teſtimony. And to refuſe our aſſent to well-atteſted facts, becauſe we believe other facts, not better atteſted, is plainly unreaſonable. We muſt therefore weigh the evidence, and not reject, without examination, all ſuch narratives, as contain matters uncommon, or even before unheard-of.

Again, it is difficult to conceive in what ſenſe miracles are ſaid to be *repugnant to experience*. Several relations of the ſame fact may be inconſiſtent; but unconnected facts, how different ſoever, are not repugnant to each other. You have never, for example, felt an earthquake. Yet the man, who aſſerts that he felt one, in a diſtant country, or before you were born, does not contradict your experience. You have never known a dead man reſtored to life. Yet the witneſſes of ſuch an event cannot be refuted by your ignorance.

But nature, we are told, is uniform and unvaried in her operations. This either preſumes the very point in queſtion, or touches not thoſe events, which are ſuppoſed to be out of the courſe of nature. And the concluſion eſtabliſhed upon it, that, from our obſervations of this regularity, we may convict of falſehood all accounts that do not coincide with it, is wholly without foundation.—But let us examine it a little more particularly. The probability of facts, derived from experience, admits all the degrees and changes that are conceivable. An event, once obſerved, leaves an expectation in the mind, that it may happen again. The repetition of the ſame event raiſes that expectation continually, till it mounts to a probability, or even moral certainty. But every change of circumſtances, even diſtance alone, whether of place or time, weakens the force of analogy; and our ſhort and ſcanty experience produces, after ſuch removals, a proportionably lower aſſurance of the regularity of events. That the motion of the heavenly bodies will be the ſame to-morrow as to-day, may be conſidered as

almoſt certain. That it will continue the ſame a hundred years, is probable. But whether it will meet with no interruption in a thouſand or ten thouſand ages, appears doubtful.—When we turn our view backward, the diſtant proſpect, if not enlightened by hiſtory, is equally obſcure. No miracles for the confirmation of our religion have been performed in the preſent age. This creates a preſumption, we may allow, againſt any pretences to them in the age before us, when the condition of religion was nearly the ſame. But, if we carry back our inquiry to remote times, and to the original propagation of Chriſtianity, this preſumption, weak at firſt, and drawn from a ſhort experience, loſes its hold at every ſtep, till it leaves the mind in perfect freedom. Vainly do men preſume, from a few detached and curſory obſervations, to comprehend the whole ſcheme of Providence, and to decide arrogantly what is, and what is not, conſiſtent with it.

But, ſhould we admit the principle, on which this objection is founded, that the laws of the univerſe are conſtant and

and unchangeable, it would not juſtify us in rejecting the evidence of miracles. For may not miracles, though deviations from the general rules eſtabliſhed here, be parts of a higher and more general courſe of nature? May it not be agreeable to the eſtabliſhed laws of a moral government, that God, for the inſtruction of his creatures, ſhould ſuffer ſome of the laws of the natural world to be ſuſpended? To enable us to judge whether this be according to the order of the univerſe, we ought to ſee and examine many like caſes. But where ſhall they be found? We know of no revelations, which God has made of himſelf to mankind, but thoſe recorded in the Old or New Teſtament. Now theſe are all eſtabliſhed on ſimilar proofs. They ſtand united in themſelves, ſeparated from all other events. If you would ſearch for circumſtances of reſemblance, you muſt paſs to ſome other planet, and view other ſyſtems of rational beings*. The experience of what has happened on this our earth, will afford no ground for a compariſon: and yet, without many ſuch compariſons, it is impoſſible to determine, that

* See Bp. Butler's Analogy, Part II.

thoſe changes, in the particular laws of the viſible world, are contrary to the rules of God's univerſal government.

Here then we might reſt the Chriſtian cauſe; content with having proved, that the miracles, by which it is ſupported, and for which there are ſuch abundant teſtimonies, are not in their nature incredible. But perhaps a thinking man may go a little farther, and demonſtrate (what muſt not only remove all theſe objections from analogy, but ſet them on the ſide of religion) that *one* miracle, at leaſt, has been wrought. For was not the creation of mankind a miracle? Certainly it was, in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſignification of the word; if the human race be not as old as the material world. But, if man and all the laws of nature had their birth together, then the late origin of theſe laws muſt greatly leſſen any prejudice againſt their interruption.

But whilſt we diſallow the judgements formed from experience concerning facts unknown, do we not weaken the principal evidence on which our religion is eſtabliſhed? Is it not experience alone, which gives ſtrength

ſtrength to teſtimony? Do we not admit or reject the witneſs of any fact, as we have found that other men in like circumſtances have rarely or uſually deceived us? Experience is, without queſtion, the general foundation of credit. But the force of *united* teſtimonies depends not wholly upon it. When the expectation ariſing from a ſingle witneſs is known, the degree of aſſurance produced by a number is ſubject to a preciſe calculation; though the number be greater than we have ever heard atteſt the ſame fact. Thus, if the relation be of ſuch a nature, and the ſingle witneſs of ſuch a character, that the mind is exactly balanced, and remains in perfect doubt; then may it be ſtrictly demonſtrated, upon the cleareſt mathematical principles, that, if ten ſuch witneſſes agree in their report, the probability of its truth exceeds more than a thouſand times, and, if twenty agree, more than a million of times, the probability of its falſehood. But, ſhould we endeavour to collect the ſum of all the probabilities for the truth of Chriſtianity, we ſhould ſoon be ſtopt by the immenſity of the numbers; and

ſhould find the difficulty like that of anſwering the old inquiries, by how many accidental caſts of the twenty-four letters the Iliad might be formed, or in what time the fortuitous jumble of atoms would produce an animal. And, as the impoſſibility of reſolving theſe queſtions affords the ſtrongeſt proof of deſign and wiſdom in the creation; ſo the difficulty in the other may help us to conceive that maſs of evidence, by which the Chriſtian religion is confirmed.

But, without this nice inquiry, even upon the principles of our adverſaries, our faith muſt remain ſecure. For, unleſs it can be ſhewn, that ſome ſet of men, equal in number to the witneſſes of the reſurrection, and poſſeſſed of equal opportunities of knowing the truth, have yet been deceived in plain facts, about which it was ſo much their intereſt not to be deceived; or have concerted a fraud, from which they had ſo little to hope, and ſo much to apprehend: unleſs one of theſe ſuppoſitions can be proved, (and both of them the advocates of Chriſtianity have often confuted) we may fairly conclude, that there is incomparably better evidence for

for the reſurrection of Chriſt from external teſtimony, than againſt it from its unlikeneſs to other events. For, the degree of external evidence, by which it is confirmed, has never miſled mankind; but the principle of unlikeneſs does often, and muſt neceſſarily, deceive them. The legitimate uſe of this principle is to form a judgement, not of events unlike, but of events like, to our experience; not to decide, that the former never happened, but to ground an expectation, that the latter may happen hereafter. And this uſe was made of it by the apoſtle, when he argues, that Jeſus, by riſing from the dead, became an unqueſtionable witneſs of a general reſurrection.

DISCOURSE VII.

The USE of MIRACLES in proving the DIVINE MISSION of our SAVIOUR and his APOSTLES.

Preached on WHITSUNDAY.

JOHN v. 36.

— *The works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me.*

THOUGH our Saviour frequently appealed to the reaſon of mankind, in ſupport both of his miſſion and his doctrines; yet it was not his practice to explain particularly or minutely the nature and force of the

the arguments he alledged. He referred to certain general principles, juſt in themſelves, and ſuited to the habits of thinking in the country where he preached. But he left every ſcrupulous inquiry into the foundation of theſe principles, and an exact application of them to the proofs of his religion, to be an exerciſe for the inquiſitive and ingenious in other countries and diſtant ages. And a moſt uſeful exerciſe have they proved; engaging the attention of his ſerious followers in many difficult ſtudies, and thus connecting together religion and ſcience. Nor are the ſubjects yet exhauſted. Even in that moſt common and moſt important argument, which demonſtrates the truth of Chriſtianity from the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament, one part has been ſlightly paſſed over by the ableſt advocates of religion. They have laboured, indeed, and with great ſucceſs, to eſtabliſh the *truth* of theſe records, but have been leſs ſolicitous to explain their *uſe*. They have taken it for a clear point, which wants no illuſtration, that a power of working miracles is ſufficient evidence of a commiſſion from heaven.

And even infidels have uſually allowed, that a revelation might be thus confirmed. But a cautious inquirer admits not haſtily either the aſſumptions of friends, or the conceſſions of enemies. He examines both with equal jealouſy, and receives, on the one part or the other, ſuch opinions only as his own reaſon juſtifies. Let us proceed with this honeſt care, and endeavour to diſcover on what grounds we may admit the miracles of our Saviour and his apoſtles, ſuppoſing them to be true, as proofs of their divine miſſion. 1. Are we to receive the interpretation of theſe wonderful works, upon the *authority* of thoſe, who were, or appeared to be, the performers of them? is there reaſon to believe, that they knew the true meaning of them, and have fairly explained it to us? 2. Or, have miracles in *general* any *natural* ſignification, by which they declare to mankind the will of their Creator? 3. Or, are there, among the Chriſtian miracles, ſome of a *peculiar* kind, which could hardly be intended for any other, and were fully adapted to this purpoſe? 4. Or, may we judge of the deſign from the *effect* of them? Ought we

we to be convinced that God's intention was, by theſe miracles, to propagate Chriſtianity, becauſe it was actually thus propagated? 5. Or, did the circumſtances attending the performance of ſome miracles, plainly ſhew, that, beſides their natural import, they had alſo an *inſtituted* one, and were properly ſigns or expreſſions, revealing the will of God to mankind?

The anſwers to theſe five inquiries will each, I think, diſcover a ſtrong connection between the miracles and doctrines of Chriſt, which muſt, united, form an indiſſoluble bond.

1. Firſt then, it is evident, that they who performed theſe wonderful works, had knowledge and power more than belong to mortals: ſuch knowledge and power as muſt wholly prevent all the doubts that might have ariſen, from their teaching doctrines which could never be inveſtigated by any faculties of the human mind, or from their aſſuming authority to publiſh the laws and diſcloſe the myſteries of heaven. For, when we are convinced, and every man who attends to their hiſtory will be convinced, that

ſome

ſome kinds of knowledge were miraculouſly conveyed to them, we have no reaſon to reject their pretenſions to inſpiration of other kinds. Their own teſtimony may then be received as good evidence of a matter, which, from the fact already admitted, independent of the characters of the witneſſes, is become highly probable. When we are convinced that they had power to ſuſpend or alter the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, we muſt conſider them as peculiarly favoured by the Author of nature, and ſhall eaſily allow the title they claimed of his Heralds, commanded to promulgate other parts of his laws. This is agreeable to our method of judging in a thouſand like caſes. We perpetually believe, upon the ſlighteſt evidence, facts ſimilar to thoſe we have experienced; and they who have ſeen many inconteſtable proofs of wiſdom and power, never before given among men, could not ſuſpect any deceit, when the ſame perſons alledged, that they poſſeſſed other treaſures of ſupernatural knowledge, other portions of divine authority. We therefore need only recollect, what has been often urged by the defenders of Chriſtianity, concern-

concerning the witneſſes of the facts on which it is founded; their number, their integrity, their ability to know the truth, their motives to declare it. Theſe have been all ſcrupulouſly examined, and appear to be ſuch as muſt render their teſtimony of the moſt extraordinary ſtories indiſputable. But the ſame arguments might be repeated here with great advantage. For theſe uncommon facts required an uncommon force of teſtimony to ſupport them. Whereas, the facts being once ſuppoſed, the whole force of analogy will lie on the other ſide. A communication with heaven is acknowledged, and whatever explains the nature and deſign of that communication ſhould meet with a ready admittance. For it would be inconſiſtent with the plaineſt rules of philoſophical reaſoning, to give our aſſent to thoſe, who relate a ſeries of aſtoniſhing events; and not to receive, on the credit of the ſame witneſſes, an eaſy ſolution of them.

But this teſtimony, however forcible, would yet be no other than human teſtimony; and miracles are uſually conſidered as

the teſtimony of God. Let us inquire, whether theſe pretenſions can be vindicated.

2. The obvious and certain effects of miracles among the moſt barbarous people is, to excite the paſſions of fear and wonder, and curioſity; and to make them attend to the perſons endowed with theſe powers, as beings ſuperior to themſelves, as gods that are come down in the likeneſs of men. But, among thoſe whom reaſon has taught to acknowledge One Supreme being, the Creator and Preſerver of the univerſe, theſe events will certainly be attributed to Him, as their immediate Author, and be conſidered as notices from Him, which demand attention and reverence. Such, it ſhould ſeem, would be the impreſſions of miracles upon every underſtanding. And if the impreſſions be natural, then are they the warning voice of God. He calls upon us in this, as in various other examples, by the faculties he has given us, to liſten to his laws. The conſtitution of our minds is the declaration of his will. And the evidence, which we cannot reſiſt without violence, is ſuch as He commands us to receive.

3. Theſe

3. Theſe natural apprehenſions may be confirmed, if we attend to the apparent deſign of the miracles. They reveal God's will the more clearly, when they are ſuch as can anſwer no other purpoſe worthy of the interpoſition of Providence. The greateſt part of our Saviour's miracles were indeed marks of his benevolence. But their immediate effects were not illuſtrious or extenſive. All the miſeries he relieved were perhaps ſmall, when compared with thoſe which men often ſuffer from a war, a famine, or a peſtilence. And yet the laws of nature are not changed, to prevent or mitigate theſe calamities. The government of the world is carried on by general laws. Some good reaſons for ſuch a government appear to us. Many more and better we may be unable to diſcover. And, though theſe laws be ſometimes productive of unhappineſs to particular perſons; they are not, they ought not, on this account, to be altered by a wiſe governor, who regards the whole. When therefore many changes in them were obſerved, there was reaſon to expect ſome more

important,

important, more extenſive benefit, than the ſupply of a meal, or the cure of a diſeaſe.

But, to convince us more fully, that the relief of preſent evils was not the principal deſign of our Lord's miracles, ſeveral of them were not accompanied with any ſuch benefit. If his word reſtored the withered limbs of men, it alſo cauſed a fig-tree to wither away. He calmed the ſea to ſave a ſinking ſhip; he walked upon it, and ſupported one of his diſciples, without any ſuch neceſſity. An earthquake and a miraculous darkneſs extorted from the centurion and his companions a confeſſion, that *truly this man was the ſon of God.* And of many of the miracles, we are utterly unable to find the meaning, unleſs it were to imprint the ſame important truth.

In other inſtances the deſign is evident. In none more evident, than in the occaſion of this day's ſolemnity. To what purpoſe were the apoſtles inſpired with new knowledge, and ſuddenly enabled to utter it in every language, but that they might preach, among all the nations upon the earth, the religious doctrines thus communicated to them?

them? Could a divine commiſſion to inſtruct mankind have been written in more legible characters? With what deſign were they taught languages, unleſs that they might ſpeak them? And what had they of importance to ſpeak, but the truths revealed from heaven? The words they uttered were, in a ſtrict and proper ſenſe, the language of God; and the religion they taught was not their own, but his who authorized and enabled them to publiſh it. Other miracles confirmed the authority of the teachers. Theſe had a more direct reference to the doctrine itſelf.

4. But we need not confine our reaſonings on this ſubject to the nature of the facts. For though we ſeem to proceed with tolerable exactneſs, there will always remain ſome room to ſuſpect, that their nature is beyond our comprehenſion. We will examine an argument of another kind, to which we are more accuſtomed, and on which many a tenet in natural religion, many a received principle in philoſophy, depends. Some of the cleareſt maxims in both theſe ſciences are thoſe which relate to final cauſes. When we

we perceive the works of nature to be admirably adapted to certain ends, which they produce frequently and uniformly, we conclude with the fullest assurance, that these were designed by their Author. And, in like manner, it being once eſtabliſhed, that the Chriſtian miracles were real, that is, interpoſitions of the Governor of the world, the purpoſe for which they were performed may be diſcerned from the event. In the works of the Almighty, every thing correſponds to his intention. Nothing is done in vain. But the event was, that vaſt numbers in every nation were preſently converted from idolatry and ſuperſtition, to a firm belief of Chriſtianity. And that which was the immediate effect, was certainly the true deſign, of theſe wonderful works. The whole world is under the government of God, and nothing happens without his permiſſion. But the difference between his permiſſion and deſign, is not obſcure. The events which ariſe, in a natural order, from the laws eſtabliſhed by God at the creation, or from his perceivable interpoſition in human affairs, muſt be acknowledged as his

deſigns. Such as proceed from the uninfluenced choice of free agents, are only permitted by him. When the followers of Mahomet tell us, that the ſucceſs with which he propagated a new religion, proves it to be agreeable to the will of God, the argument has no foundation. Nothing, we confeſs, can happen in the univerſe, which it is not agreeable to the will of God to permit. But the proofs of his deſigns can be derived only from his own actions. Succeſs alone is no evidence of his approbation. The rapid progreſs of a religion can never prove its truth; though it may be ſufficient, when the religion is proved by miracles, to confirm their hiſtory, and explain their deſign.

And what farther evidence of the purpoſe, for which miracles were performed, can either be wiſhed or conceived? The teſtimony of the authors, the nature of the facts, their fitneſs for one purpoſe, and unfitneſs for any other, the effects that followed, all unite in the ſame explication of them. Nothing could be added to theſe abundant proofs, unleſs it were the expreſs, the direct, teſtimony of God himſelf. Even that is not wanted.

5. Miracles, we have obſerved, have a natural ſignification, by which they interpret to mankind the will of the Supreme Being. But a meaning may alſo be fixed to them by conſent, and then they become in the ſtricteſt ſenſe a language. Words, we know, are arbitrary, not natural, ſigns of our ideas; and, when other ſigns are uſed and underſtood, truth or falſehood may be declared by theſe ſigns, as well as ſpoken in words. Examples to illuſtrate this point are too obvious to be mentioned. Nor is this uſe of appointed ſigns neceſſarily confined to men's dealings with each other. God's conſent to the meaning impoſed on them by men may be clearly diſcovered. It ſeems to be clear, when a miracle is performed for the expreſs purpoſe of confirming a particular fact or doctrine, and is before choſen as the ſign of its truth: *The God that anſwereth by fire*, ſaith the prophet, *let him be God.* Jehovah anſwered by fire, and thereby declared himſelf to approve the worſhip uſed by the Jews, not the worſhip of Baal. Our Saviour, before he reſtored Lazarus to life, thus addreſſed his Father; *Father, I thank thee that*

that thou haſt heard me. And I knew, that thou heareſt me always: but becauſe of the people which ſtand by, I ſaid it, that they may know, that thou haſt ſent me. Here then the deſign of the miracle is openly profeſſed. It is aſked of God, as a teſtimony to the people, that Jeſus Chriſt was his meſſenger: and God gives his aſſent to the meaning affixed to it, by immediately performing the miracle. A fuller declaration of aſſent could not have been expreſſed. The miracle had exactly the ſame import with the words pronounced from heaven; *This is my beloved ſon; hear ye him.* And St. John concludes juſtly, that they who reject the Chriſtian revelation, *have made God a liar; not believing the teſtimony, which he gave of his ſon.*

Thus has the great Lord of the univerſe ſubmitted to an intercourſe with his reaſonable creatures; requiring of them none but a reaſonable ſervice, a ſervice which ſprings from conviction, a zeal according to knowledge. He has not only given them faculties, to weigh and examine the pretenſions of thoſe, who come to them in his name; but has encouraged them in the free uſe of

thoſe faculties, by repeated promiſes of effectual evidence. Every man, who *will do his will, ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* He, who cultivates in himſelf a readineſs to underſtand, and a reſolution to practiſe, what religion requires of him, ſhall never be deſtitute of inſtruction. He, who *hungereth and thirſteth after righteouſneſs, ſhall* certainly *be filled.* The influence of the Holy Spirit, joined to his own pious attention, will quicken his ſagacity in the diſcovery of the truth; enabling him to form juſt concluſions himſelf, and to underſtand and diſtinguiſh them when ſet before him by others.

Such are the effects upon our minds of the divine aſſiſtance, in our ſtudy of Chriſtianity; and by theſe effects only can that aſſiſtance be diſcerned. They who expect to feel, or fancy that they have felt, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, miſtake the nature of his ordinary operations. The Scriptures no where declare, all our experience of God's government forbids us to imagine, that a miracle is continually repeated, not for the great purpoſe of inſtructing or amending mankind, but

but to give to the particular favourites of heaven, ſuch an aſſurance of ſalvation, as tends to render them indifferent about the only means of obtaining it, the ſtudy and practice of religion. God's promiſes of aid and comfort muſt be underſtood, as his other promiſes of providing for us food and raiment: neither of them extends to the vicious or the idle, neither of them is fulfilled by extraordinary interpoſitions; but they were intended as encouragements to activity and induſtry, both in our temporal and ſpiritual purſuits.

DISCOURSE VIII.

Of the EVIDENCE arising from the PROPHECIES of the OLD TESTAMENT.

MATTHEW ii. 2.

Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his ſtar in the eaſt, and are come to worſhip him.

SUCH was the language of the Eaſtern Magi, whoſe devotion had led them to Jeruſalem to attend the birth of our Saviour. They were men of a religious order among the Perſians, no leſs eminent for their knowledge of nature, and particularly of the appearances

pearances in the heavens, than for the conſideration and rank which they held in the ſtate. The coſtly preſents they brought, proved at once their riches and the ſincerity of their conviction. Of the latter indeed there could be no doubt, by whatever means it was produced; as it had determined them to perform a pious pilgrimage into a diſtant and hoſtile nation, in order to teſtify the revelation they had received, and pay a religious homage to the new-born prince. Religious it certainly was, if they were called to it by a ſummons from heaven; a ſummons given, as they conceived it, by the appearance of a ſtar, and explained by the predictions of the ancient Jews. The prophecies of the Old Teſtament were not unknown in the Eaſt. And the title *King of the Jews* was undoubtedly taken from thoſe writings, and was deſigned by the wiſe men, as it was applied by the Jewiſh people, to ſignify their promiſed Saviour, the Meſſiah, or Chriſt. So Herod, who then filled the throne, underſtood it. For he immediately *gathered the chief prieſts and ſcribes together, and*

demanded of them, where Chriſt ſhould be born.

But what muſt we think of the *reaſon* which theſe travellers gave for their enquiry? *They had ſeen his* STAR *in the eaſt.* Muſt we therefore be led to credit the exploded ſcience of judicial aſtrology? Or, as the cavillers at revelation would perſuade us, reject the argument of theſe ſages, as a mere chimæra, the whimſical concluſion of Chaldean ſoothſayers? The rational inquirer will do neither the one nor the other. For, though the common pretences to predictions and declarations from the ſtars be groundleſs and abſurd, yet the judgement of theſe aſtronomers may have been juſt and concluſive. The obſervation of the heavens was the favourite amuſement of Eaſtern nations. *They* firſt diſcovered, and marked out, the different motions of the ſun, moon, and ſtars, their periods and the rules of their appearance. In all this was ſcience and certainty; and the learned of later ages have been benefited by their ſtudies. But on this ſolid knowledge curioſity, or ſuperſtition, had hung the weak appendage of Aſtrology; and the caſual events

of human life were conceived to be connected with, and ſignified by, the appearances of the heavens. Here was error only and illuſion; which, as juſt reaſoning and true philoſophy grew up and flouriſhed, gradually withered away, and is now entirely neglected and forgotten. Whereas the ſcience of Aſtronomy is both ſolid and uſeful. The ſtudy of it not only furniſhes our minds with real knowledge; it prepares them alſo, and more perhaps than any other, for religious contemplations. It opens and enlarges our conceptions of the immenſe extent, the diſtant connexions, the regular and perpetual government, of the creation; and conſequently of the power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, of the Creator. And this influence of it ſeems, in ſome ſort, to be confirmed by the example before us. For we may reaſonably believe that, of all the gentile world, *their* minds were beſt prepared for the reception of the Goſpel, to whom it was firſt communicated, and who firſt came to worſhip its divine Author. Now, ſuppoſing in thoſe nations ſuch a general diſpoſition to contemplate the heavens, and that God had purpoſed to reveal

to them the important event of our Lord's nativity; in what apter manner could the alarm be ſpread, than by a miraculous change of the objects they were moſt uſed to conſider? What could ſooner excite the attention of Aſtronomers than the appearance of a new ſtar? The concluſion they drew from this wonderful ſpectacle, might either be ſuggeſted by Divine Inſpiration, or be the ordinary effect of human opinion; an opinion perhaps founded in their own vain theories, but confirmed by the Jewiſh prophecies of the Meſſiah, which then held the world in anxious ſuſpenſe, and were ſuppoſed to draw near their completion. And the latter will appear the more probable ſuppoſition to thoſe, who conſider the words of the Scripture hiſtory: where the wiſe men, ſeeing again in Judea the ſtar, which had occaſioned their journey, are ſaid to have *rejoiced with an exceeding great joy*; the proper deſcription of men, who, on a ſudden, were become abſolutely convinced of an opinion, which before they had held only on grounds of probability, and on which they had hazarded their eaſe and reputation.

But may we allow ourſelves to imagine that the God of truth would build the evidences of his revelation on error; and, becauſe the warm imaginations of certain fanciful prophets had connected the riſing of a bright ſtar with the nativity of a hero, would ſignify the birth of his ſon by a miraculous appearance of the ſame kind? The difficulty deſerve a ſerious anſwer. We will proceed to it by degrees. Perhaps, in all our reaſoning, there are ſo many defects, ſuch a mixture of uncertainty and falſhood, that to the all-diſcerning eye of God there may be little difference between our firmeſt and weakeſt concluſions. Poſſibly it may be of no great importance to the happineſs of mankind to judge right in queſtions of philoſophy. But whether it be important or not, certainly men have fallen into many miſtakes of this kind, which the Goſpel has not attempted to correct. And there ſeems to have been no reaſon why theſe miſtakes ſhould not be applied, if they could be applied, to ſupport truth. For, ſince it is the uſual method of God's providence to bring good out of evil, why may we not alſo believe, that He ſometimes

conducts men to truth through error? The error, indeed, must not make a neceſſary part of the argument. For then the whole would be fallacious. But it may excite attention to a juſt and ſolid proof, without any imputation on the wiſdom, or the veracity, of its author. Thus, in the example we are conſidering, the circumſtance on which the whole evidence reſts, is the nature of that extraordinary light by which the eaſtern travellers were conducted. And the hiſtory clearly ſhews it to be miraculous. A real ſtar, we know, in its regular motions, could not have pointed out a certain country, much leſs a ſingle village, or a particular houſe. But a miraculous light, which moved towards, and ſtood over, the habitation of the heavenly infant, was equally a proof of his divine miſſion; whether the opinion, entertained, as we may ſuppoſe, by theſe ſages, that the riſing of an uncommon ſtar denoted the nativity of ſome eminent perſon, were the genuine dictate of nature, or the ſpurious offſpring of fancy and folly.

A ſimilar remark may facilitate our progreſs in examining the arguments for the truth

truth of Chriſtianity taken from the completion of ancient prophecies. Learned men have thought, that ſeveral of the paſſages cited from them by the Evangeliſts, had not originally the ſame ſenſe, in which they are applied. And, amidſt the obſcurity of thoſe writings, and the ſhort and imperfect hiſtories of the times when they were compoſed, it may not always be eaſy to determine, which of them related to the Meſſiah. But it will be equally available to our purpoſe to diſcover, which of them were ſo *applied by the Jews*, before the coming of Chriſt. For, if the number and nature of the predictions, which they underſtood of the Meſſiah, be ſuch, that neither art nor accident could fulfil them; then have we the ſame evidence of God's interpoſition for their accompliſhment, whether they underſtood them *rightly* or not. The miracle conſiſts in the correſpondence of the events with the expectations, and it is not neceſſary to inquire, whence theſe expectations were derived. It is the leſs neceſſary, becauſe the argument from ancient prophecies is intended chiefly to convince the Jews, who ſtill adhere

adhere to the ſame interpretations of them, and believe them to relate to the yet future kingdom of their expected Meſſiah. Let us therefore attend to the deſcriptions of this kingdom, and examine how far Chriſtianity anſwers them. We ſhall then be able to determine, whether Jeſus had a fair claim to that title, by which the wiſe Men enquired for him, of *King of the Jews.*

And firſt, the extent of that empire, of which the Meſſiah was to be the Founder and Governor, is deſcribed in remarkable terms. *All* * *nations,* ſay the prophets, *ſhall flow unto it; all* † *people and nations, and languages ſhall ſerve him; the* ‡ *Heathen ſhall be his inheritance, and the uttermoſt parts of the earth his poſſeſſion; his* ‖ *dominion ſhall be from ſea to ſea, from* § *the riſing of the ſun unto the going down thereof.* And, though all other mighty monarchies have grown up by ſlow degrees, and, when arrived at the

* If. ii. 2. Mic. iv. 1.
† Dan. vii. 14.
‡ Pſalm ii. 8.
‖ Pſalm lxxii. 8.
§ Pſalm l. 1.

ſummit

ſummit of their power, have ſpeedily fallen to ruin; days ſometimes deſtroying the works of ages: of the New Jeruſalem, the kingdom of the Meſſiah, it was predicted, that its eſtabliſhment ſhould be without delay, its duration without end. The prophets ſpeak of this Meſſenger of the Lord, as ſubduing * the nations in a day, and keeping them in ſubjection for ever and ever. His appearance was to be ſudden †, like the *lightning* ‡; his continuance ‖ *as long as the ſun and moon endureth.*

Now none of the greateſt empires, that have ariſen among mankind, ever equalled Chriſtianity, either in its rapid progreſs, its extenſive dominion, or the length of its proſperity. Suddenly indeed was this call from Heaven heard and obeyed, in all thoſe countries which could come within the view of the prophets, in every nation of the then known world. And, as the world has been enlarged by new diſcoveries, the laws

* If. lx. 22. and Mal. iii. 1.
† Matt. xxiv. and Luke xvii.
‡ Pſalm lxxii. 5.

and

and doctrines of Chriſt have been carried far beyond its ancient boundaries, into thoſe regions where the ſun was ſuppoſed to riſe and ſet. Nor is there any reaſon to believe, that his authority, though continually encreaſing, is yet approaching to its utmoſt limits. On the contrary, the preſent ſtate of the world affords a preſumption, independent of all predictions, that Chriſtianity will become the univerſal religion of mankind. Several Chriſtian ſtates have been, for ſome ages, and are now, ſending forth large and flouriſhing colonies into the moſt diſtant countries. Mahometans and Heathens are not doing the ſame. The profeſſors of Chriſtianity, wherever they can gain admiſſion, labour to make proſelytes. Thoſe of other religions are either indifferent about the propagation of them, or proudly refuſe to communicate the ſuperior advantages they ſuppoſe themſelves to enjoy. So that the kingdom of Chriſt, by the encreaſe of its own ſubjects, and by the gradual acceſſion of ſtrangers, ſeems likely to overſpread the earth.

Again,

Again, the prophets declared, that the Meſſiah ſhould not eſtabliſh his dominion either by fraud or conqueſt. In him was to be neither *violence* * nor *deceit*. He was *not* to *ſtrive* † *or cry*. He was *not* to *break* even *a bruiſed reed*; but, without noiſe or tumult, to *ſmite* ‡ *the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips to ſlay the wicked*. Inſtruction and perſuaſion were to be his only arms. He could want no other. For he was to be *the* § *deſire of all nations*, who would come from the utmoſt parts of the earth to *bow* ‖ *down before him, and to lick up the duſt of his feet*. The moſt fierce and diſcordant natures were to unite in their ſubmiſſion to him. *The* ** *wolf was to dwell with the lamb, the leopard to lie down with the kid, and the lion to eat ſtraw like the bullock*. And not the people only, but their rulers alſo, were willing to acknowledge his authority. *Kings*, it is foretold, *ſhall*

* Iſ. liii. 9.
† Iſ. xlii. 2. cited Matt. xii. 19.
‡ Iſ. xi. 4.
§ Hagg. ii. 7.
‖ Iſ. xlix. 23.
** Iſ. xi. 6. and lxv. 25.

ſee

ſee him, and ariſe; *Princes alſo ſhall worſhip him**. The *Kings* † of the *Gentiles ſhall ſee his glory*; *they ſhall* ‡ *miniſter unto him*; they *ſhall* § *be* the *nurſing fathers* of his people. And, whereas all extenſive governments have been found injurious to the common rights of mankind, and an univerſal empire has been ever dreaded as an univerſal calamity; the kingdom of the Meſſiah is repreſented by the prophets, as a wiſe, a righteous, a mild and peaceful government; which ſhould cultivate the underſtanding, encourage the virtue, and ſecure the happineſs, of all its ſubjects. Among the offices aſcribed to the expected Deliverer of Iſrael, were theſe, to fill *the* || *earth* with *the knowledge of the Lord*, *to* ** *bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs*, to *publiſh* †† *peace* and comfort to God's people, *to give* ‡‡ *unto them the oil of joy for mourning*, and *the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs*.

* Iſ. lxii. 2. † Iſ. lx. 10.
§ Iſ. xlix. 23. || Iſ. xi. 9. Hab. ii. 14.
** Dan. ix. 24. †† Iſ. lii. 7.
‡‡ Iſ. lxi. 3.

And

And ſurely theſe predictions denote (though the Jews, whilſt they diſcerned the relation of them to the Meſſiah, were blind to their true meaning) that the kingdom thus deſcribed ſhould not be a *temporal* one. Its riſe was to be by influence on the minds, not by force on the bodies, of men; its aim, not to deſtroy the kingdoms of the earth, but to receive both the rulers and people into its protection; its end, to make men wiſe, and good, and happy. Such a kingdom exactly is that which Chriſt hath founded; eſtabliſhed at firſt, and increaſed afterwards, in that wonderful manner which the prophets foretold. When a ſmall band of fiſhermen and mechanics, without power or intereſt, went forth on this vaſt deſign, and carried with them no other arms than the plain words of truth and ſoberneſs; they were ſuperior to all the forces of their enemies. They overcame in every conflict; they ſubdued the world. But, when a number of potent princes and warriors, with a profeſſed reſolution to enlarge the bounds of Chriſtendom, drew together immenſe armies, armies animated with ſuch an extraordinary

zeal and enthuſiaſm, as nothing ſeemed able to withſtand; after repeated and obſtinate attempts, and a terrible ſlaughter of their ſubjects, they returned (the few who did return) with ſhame and diſappointment: having learned, by miſerable experience, what they might have learned from the Old or New Teſtament, that it is not the deſign of Providence, that Chriſtianity ſhould be propagated by the ſword. The evidence it offers to the underſtanding, and its influence upon the morals of men, are the proper recommendations of it to unbelievers. And, though ſome have interpreted the encomiums, given it by the prophets, of thoſe effects only, which it is *capable* of producing in the minds and hearts of men; if they would ſeriouſly attend to it; yet whoever compares the manners of Chriſtian nations with thoſe of other religions; whoever obſerves how neceſſary it is, that perſons, ſet apart to ſtudy and teach Chriſtianity, ſhould be ſkilled in the various branches of ſcience and learning; will ſee ſufficient reaſon to confeſs, that the world is *actually* indebted to this inſtitution for much both of its virtue and knowledge.

The prophets, it muſt be owned, often ſpeak of theſe benefits in high figurative expreſſions; which makes it ſometimes difficult to determine, whether the events have fully anſwered the predictions. But enough is clear to afford an important argument for the truth of Chriſtianity. The ſum of the predictions is, that, among the Jews, a people deſpiſed and deteſted by all the neighbouring nations, a perſon ſhould ariſe, who, without any power but that of perſuaſion, ſhould prevail on all the kingdoms of the earth, the ſubjects and their governors, to own him for their ſovereign, and ſubmit to his laws; that he ſhould thus preſently form, and afterwards govern, by the ſame methods of gentleneſs and peace, a laſting empire, perpetually increaſing, till it ſhould become univerſal. Could any prediction have appeared more incredible? Could any be more fully or clearly accompliſhed? Allow only, that Chriſt's authority is properly ſtyled a government, a dominion, a kingdom, (and by what apter names could it be expreſſed?) and every part of the prophecy is either

literally fulfilled, or appears to be now going on towards its completion.

With assurance then may we believe, that the child to whom the Magi were conducted by a new star, is the same who was foretold by the prophet under these magnificent titles, *Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE IX.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE xxiv. 25, 26.

Then he said unto them; O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

THEY who have studied most diligently the prophecies of the Old Testament, have been the most ready to acknowledge their obscurity *. The language, in which these books are written, they observe, is neither clear nor copious. It consists of few words, used in a great variety of senses; and

* See Bp. Chandler's Introduction to his Defence of Christianity, p. 13, &c.

theſe ſenſes often not connected, but by ſome minute and ſcarce diſcernible reſemblance. The ſtyle of theſe writings, agreeably to the genius of the Eaſtern nations, abounds with bold figures, ſudden apoſtrophes, and frequent and unprepared tranſitions. The Prophets too uſually mix with their predictions hiſtories of the preceding times, or cenſures of their own. And to us, who have nothing to guide our ſearch through theſe dark and diſtant ages, ſo neceſſary a diſtinction is not always ſufficiently marked: ſo that we ſometimes are in doubt, whether the writer is ſpeaking of things paſt or future. Amidſt ſo many difficulties, what wonder, it may be aſked, that we ſhould not readily diſcern all the characters of the true Meſſiah, when his own immediate diſciples were ſlow in comprehending them? But the rebukes, which they frequently received from their gracious Maſter for this dulneſs, ſhew that it proceeded from faulty prejudices*: probably from the prejudices then common among the Jews; who expected a mighty

* See Berriman's Sermon on this text, preached at Boyle's Lecture, Serm. xiii.

temporal

temporal Prince, commiſſioned by God to reſtore their fallen ſtate to its ancient ſplendor, and, in the warmth of theſe expectations, were inattentive to the deſcription of the ſufferings he was firſt to undergo. And the obſcurity we complain of is ſuch, as ſhould excite our induſtry, not lead us to deſpair of ſucceſs. If we uſe a little attention, there are two caſes, in which the difficulties before-mentioned, as far as they concern the evidence of Chriſtianity, will totally vaniſh.

One of theſe caſes is, when we can collect from clear teſtimonies, how the predictions were underſtood before the coming of Chriſt. This circumſtance has been conſidered on a former occaſion; when it appeared, that, in order to judge of the evidence ariſing from the conformity of events to ancient prophecies, it is not always neceſſary to diſcover the exact ſenſe, in which theſe prophecies were delivered. It is ſufficient, if we can learn, what meanings were affixed to them before their accompliſhment. When theſe interpretations are juſtified by the ſucceſs of them, then may we ſafely conclude that either the Prophet or his interpreter was inſpired.

ſpired *: and we have a ſeries of predictions, in the caſe before us, which (though the deſign of the Authors may not now, in every inſtance, be ſo apparent as to preclude all controverſy) were certainly referred by the Jews to their expected Meſſiah, and were as certainly fulfilled by Jeſus Chriſt.

The other caſe, in which a prophecy, delivered in dark and ambiguous terms, may yet afford a full conviction, is, when ſuch a prophecy is at once explained and verified by the events. For it ſeems to be of little importance, in weighing the evidence, at what time the prediction became clear; provided it be ever clear, that matters, placed beyond the reach of human foreſight, were predicted. I will illuſtrate my meaning, before I proceed, by two examples taken from the diſcourſes of our Saviour. † *Deſtroy this temple*, ſaid he, *and in three days I will raiſe it up.* The Jews anſwered, *Forty and ſix years has this temple been building* (ſo it ſhould be tranſlated ‡; for the work was not yet finiſhed): *and wilt thou rear it up in three*

* Unleſs we rather chuſe to ſay, what comes to the ſame thing, That the events were accommodated to the expectations, by an *extraordinary* Providence.

† John ii, 19. ‡ See Berriman, p. 43, Note.

days?

days? They certainly underſtood him, as the place and the occaſion naturally ſuggeſted, to be ſpeaking of that temple, whence he had juſt driven the traders and money-changers; and they looked upon ſuch a declaration as a vain boaſt of inconceiveable power. But after we had been told, that within three days he reſtored his own life, which the Jews had deſtroyed; we could not have doubted, even though the Evangeliſt had not explained the meaning to us, but *he ſpake of the temple of his body*; a fabric not improperly compared to that magnificent building, though infinitely more complicated, more nicely and wonderfully adjuſted, than any ever framed by human art.—Again, when Chriſt was foretelling the utter overthrow of the Jewiſh nation, ſome of his attendants aſked him *, *where*, or † *when*, (for the Evangeliſts expreſs the queſtion differently), *theſe things* ſhould happen; to which he anſwered, in a line borrowed from the book of Job ‡, *Whereſoever the carcaſe is, there will the eagles be gathered together* ‖. If this ſign was at firſt uncertain, it could remain ſo no

* Luke xvii. 37. † Matt. xxiv, 3. ‡ Job xxxix. 30.
‖ Matt. xxiv, 28. Luke xvii, 37.

longer,

longer, when the army of Titus ſurrounded Jeruſalem. That was the *carcaſe*, the city devoted to deſtruction, about which the *eagles*, the enſigns of the Roman legions, were *gathered together*.

Many paſſages in the Old Teſtament, relating to the Meſſiah, are ſimilar to theſe predictions in the New; particularly that famous prophecy contained in the 53[d] * chapter of Iſaiah. It might be doubted by the Jewiſh, it has been controverted even among Chriſtian interpreters, of whom the prophet is ſpeaking. And, from the paſſage itſelf, conſidered independently of all the events which have followed it, the queſtion could not be eaſily decided. But whoever compares the ſeveral parts of the prophecy with the goſpel hiſtory, may be convinced, that there has been One, and only One, of all the human race, to whom the whole of it is applicable. The perſon here deſcribed was to be condemned, and to ſuffer death as a malefactor. *He was taken*, ſays the pro-

* See this chapter illuſtrated, Chandler, ch. xi. § 2. Barrow on the creed. Bullock's Sermons.

phet,

phet, * *from priſon, and from judgement*; *he* † *was cut off out of the land of the living*; *he* ‡ *made his grave with the wicked*; *he was numbered with the tranſgreſſors*.—His puniſhment was to be remarkably painful, accompanied with *ſtripes* ||, and *bruiſes*, and *wounds*. —It was alſo to be of the moſt ignominious kind. He was *a* § *man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid our faces from him*; *he* was *deſpiſed and rejected of men*.— But theſe ſufferings, and this ignominy, were not for any offences of his own; *(he* ** *had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth)* but, for the wickedneſs of others: *he* †† *was wounded for our tranſgreſſions, he was bruiſed for our iniquities*. His ſufferings are repreſented as voluntary. *He* ‡‡ *was oppreſſed and afflicted, he was brought as a lamb to the ſlaughter*; *yet he opened not his mouth*. *His* ||| *ſoul* was made *an offering for ſin*.—And this voluntary offer was to be efficacious for others, and glorious to himſelf; *he* §§ *made*

* Iſ. liii. 8. † Ib. ver. 9. ‡ Ib. ver. 12. || Ib. ver. 5. § Ib. ver. 4. ** Ib. ver. 9. †† Ib. ver. 5. ‡‡ Ib. ver. 7. ||| Ib. ver. 10. §§ Ib. ver. 12.

inter-

interceſſion, he bare the ſins of many, he juſtified many*; and *becauſe† he hath poured out his ſoul unto death, therefore*, ſaith God, *I will divide him a portion with the great, and he ſhall ſee his ſeed, he ſhall prolong his days, and the pleaſure of the Lord ſhall proſper in his hand*‡.—Now, if the whole character thus drawn by the prophet belongs to one and the ſame perſon: if it be the ſame ſervant of God, who was unjuſtly condemned, and ſuffered a cruel and ignominious death; who endured the pain, and ſubmitted to the ignominy, not only with patience and contentment, but willingly and of choice; who obtained, by this ſacrifice of himſelf, pardon and privileges for others; who, in recompence for his virtue and ſufferings, was highly exalted, and became the parent of a long and happy race of diſciples and followers; and, under whoſe government, true religion, the pleaſure of the Lord, flouriſhed and ſpread itſelf over the face of the earth: then certainly this deſcription can with no degree of propriety be applied to any other, than our Lord and Saviour, Jeſus Chriſt.

* Iſ. liii. 11. † Ib. ver. 12. ‡ Ib. ver. 10.

To

To avoid the force of this concluſion, ſome of the Jews have had recourſe to the fiction of two Meſſiahs; one appearing in a mean and afflicted condition, the other powerful and victorious. But their invention has nothing to ſupport it in the Scriptures, or even in their own traditions. The two parts of the Meſſiah's character, the miſeries of his life, and the glories of his reign, are conſtantly attributed to one perſon, and are ſo cloſely connected, that to ſeparate them, would be to overthrow the evidence of both. Nor was ſuch a diſtinction thought of before the appearance of Chriſt. It has ariſen wholly from the inſuperable difficulty of reconciling, by any other than the Chriſtian ſcheme, ſuch diſcordant ſituations. How clear ſoever the predictions are of the Meſſiah's ſufferings, yet, at the time of his appearance, they were ſo much diſregarded, or miſapplied, that the accompliſhment of them produced, for a time, a general prejudice againſt him. Nothing could appear leſs credible, than that *he* ſhould be *the mighty Prince, to whom God had given the utmoſt parts of the earth for his*

poſſeſſion, who wanted even where to reſt his his head; that *he* ſhould redeem his country from miſery and bondage, who was himſelf continually afflicted, and treated as a ſlave; that *he* ſhould reign and conquer, who had juſt been crucified and ſlain. But the ſtronger the inconſiſtency may appear, between the ſeveral parts of a prediction, the more convincing evidence does it afford, when the whole is accompliſhed, that it was *ſpoken* by a true prophet. Let a man pretend to foretel future events, not unlike to thoſe which have already happened: and the caſual turns of human affairs may, in a courſe of ages, produce ſomething correſponding to his conjectures. But, when the things predicted are ſuch as could not be conceived to be poſſible before they came to paſs, and, when they came to paſs, bore evident marks of a divine power: then the inſpiration of the prophet is unqueſtionable.—Again, the more inconſiſtent the parts of a prediction appear, the greater aſſurance have we, that it is fully *accompliſhed*, when the ſeveral contrarieties are united. Our Saviour reconciled, by a ſingle word, all the apparent oppoſitions

poſitions in the prophecies relating to the Meſſiah, *My kingdom*, ſaid he, *is not of this world**. And, when this ſolution of the difficulty is offered, we cannot but wonder, that the ancient Jews did not diſcover it from their own prophets: who repreſent this Prince of peace, as eſtabliſhing his empire, by the mild influence of reaſon and religion, not by the violent efforts of uſurpation and war; who deſcribe that empire, as founded in juſtice, and yet univerſal; as ſupported only by conſent, and yet everlaſting; who declare, that, under this government, all nations of men ſhould be enlightened with religious knowledge, and converted to the practice of true righteouſneſs, ſhould be aſſured of pardon for their former ſins, be bleſſed with peace of conſcience, and be received into God's ſpecial favour and protection. Such is the prophetical deſcription of the Meſſiah's kingdom; a deſcription, when rightly underſtood, perfectly conſiſtent with the account of his ſufferings; but never rightly underſtood, till it was fulfilled. And

* John xviii. 26.

the difficulty which ſubſiſted ſo long, of conceiving, how theſe prophecies could agree, affords at once the cleareſt proofs, that they were not of human invention, and that he, who has explained and reconciled, has fully accompliſhed them.

The Prophets, who delineated theſe principal parts of the Meſſiah's *office* and *character*, touched alſo other circumſtances relating to his perſon, leſs important indeed in their own nature, but equally deciſive in the examination of his pretenſions. The *time* of his appearance was predicted in ſuch a manner, that the Jews of that age were in continual expectation of it, and ſpread this expectation through the whole Roman empire. The *place* of his birth is expreſſly named by * one prophet, his *tribe* and *family* by ſeveral. His *forerunner* is mentioned as a † *voice in the wilderneſs*, that is, a preacher to barren hearers, to thoſe who brought not forth the fruits of righteouſneſs; and again under the name of ‡ *Elias*, in whoſe ſpirit and power he went forth, and whom he re-

* Micah v. 2. † Iſ. xl. 3. ‡ Mal. iv. 5.

ſembled

ſembled in the auſterity of his life and the tendency of his doctrine. Theſe predictions clearly ſhew, that the perſon who anſwered to them was the promiſed Meſſiah. Each of them taken ſingly would have conſiderable force. All together muſt be irreſiſtible.

When the *completion* of the prophecies is manifeſt, the *application* of them to the proof of our religion is the ſame as of other miracles. But there is one advantage peculiar to them, and ſuch as deſerves our notice. They connect together the Old and New Teſtament. To a Jew, who acknowledges the authority of Moſes and the Prophets, they offer the ſhorteſt and plaineſt evidence of Chriſtianity. To a Chriſtian, already convinced by the miracles and doctrines of our Saviour that he was a teacher ſent from God, they prove with equal clearneſs the divinity of the Old Teſtament. In fact, ſuch learned Jews as have in modern times embraced Chriſtianity, (and, compared with thoſe among them who have made any progreſs in letters, the number is not ſmall *), have uſually been convinced by

* See Chapman's Euſebius, vol. i. at the end.

this argument; and ſeveral of them have written treatiſes to prove from the prophecies, that Jeſus is the Meſſiah. On the other hand, the defenders of Chriſtianity ſeldom begin with eſtabliſhing the divine authority of Moſes and the Prophets. For, though many direct proofs, both external and internal, may be brought to ſupport it; yet the Goſpel hiſtory, being of times much nearer to us, in which we have a number of contemporary writers, and being connected with other known facts, is confirmed by clearer and more abundant teſtimonies. This hiſtory being once eſtabliſhed, it appears that the prophecies recorded in the Old Teſtament have been fulfilled; and it eaſily follows, that the Prophets were commiſſioned and inſtructed from heaven. Thus the ſame argument, propoſed to the Jew and the Chriſtian, confirms to each the other's Scriptures. To both it demonſtrates, that it is the ſame perpetual Governor of the world who has ſpoken, in diſtant ages and in different manners, to the Patriarchs, to the Iſraelites, and to all mankind; and it ought to

to increaſe their attention and reverence to that Religion, for the introduction of which his providence appears to have been ſo long exerted, "*deſigning it from the beginning, "forming plans for the diſcloſure, and "preparing evidence for the confirmation "of it."

* Barrow.

DISCOURSE X.

Of the ARGUMENT drawn from the SWIFT PROPAGATION of the GOSPEL.

MATTHEW, xiii. 31, 32.

Another parable put he forth unto them, ſaying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of muſtard-ſeed, which a man took and ſowed in his field; which indeed is the leaſt of all ſeeds; but, when it is grown, it is the greateſt among herbs, and becometh a tree, ſo that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

THE antient prophets having deſcribed the Meſſiah, as a mighty prince, the founder of an extenſive and laſting dominion; our Saviour, in alluſion to theſe predictions,

and to remind men of their accompliſhment, often ſtyled the religion, he inſtituted, *the kingdom of God*, or *the kingdom of heaven*. This is evidently the meaning of the words in the paſſage before us. It is the Chriſtian diſpenſation, which is here compared to *a grain of muſtard-ſeed*. The beginnings of it were the ſmalleſt that can be conceived; they promiſed nothing of its future greatneſs. This minute ſeed was *ſown in a field*. In appearance it was loſt, it periſhed. The ſufferings and death of Chriſt, and the diſperſion of his diſciples, ſeemed to have put a final end to all his pretenſions. But the religion, he preached, revived and flouriſhed. It preſently became a great *tree*; and *the birds of the air*, men diſperſed in every region under heaven, *came and lodged in the branches thereof*: found in its doctrines and precepts that peace and ſecurity, which they had ſought in vain among other ſyſtems of religion or philoſophy.

* The rapid and extenſive progreſs of Chriſtianity, and the extraordinary changes it

* On the ſubject of this Diſcourſe, conſult Lardner's Ancient Teſtimonies, 4 vols. 4to.

produced in the ſentiments and diſpoſitions and behaviour of mankind, have appeared to many unprejudiced inquirers to be miraculous. And, when they are acknowledged to be ſo, they furniſh us with the ſame arguments for the defence of our religion as other miracles; the force of which has been formerly explained. But theſe events ſeem to deſerve a diſtinct examination, as there is ſomething peculiar in the teſtimonies by which they are conveyed to us, and ſome variety in the uſes to which they are applied by the advocates of Chriſtianity.

All the evidence we are able to offer in ſupport of our religion may be properly called *hiſtorical*. Our arguments are all founded on certain facts, delivered down from remote times, and preſerved by written memorials. But, according to the different natures of theſe facts, the proofs of them are different. The miracles recorded in the Goſpels were uſually the plain objects of the ſenſes, of which the diſciples of Chriſt were the immediate witneſſes. They atteſted theſe miracles conſtantly and conſiſtently; and confirmed their atteſtations, many by the loſs,

loſs, all by the hazard, of their lives. We cannot conceive any fuller teſtimony. But the progreſs of Chriſtianity in different countries and for ſeveral ages, and the influence of it upon the characters and behaviour of its converts, could never come to the immediate knowledge of any ſingle witneſs. He who alleges facts of this kind, muſt have collected them from the teſtimony of many. Nor are theſe things of ſo preciſe a nature, or ſo eaſily determined, that they could not be either miſtaken or miſrepreſented. When the preaching of the Apoſtles had converted great multitudes in many diſtant provinces, it muſt be difficult to aſcertain the numbers, or to compare them with thoſe who had opportunities of learning the truth and yet rejected it. And when the converts, in obedience to the laws of Chriſt, had forſaken not only their ſuperſtition and idolatry, but their vices alſo, the ſudden change would naturally lead men to aggravate their former wickedneſs, and magnify their preſent virtues. The account therefore given by the primitive Chriſtians of the ſurprizing increaſe of their religion, both in the number

number of its outward profeſſors, and in its prevalence over the ſtrongeſt paſſions and moſt confirmed habits, ought not to have been received without caution, if it had not been acknowledged without reſerve, even by their *enemies*. The triumphs of the Chriſtians and the complaints of the Heathens plainly correſpond. And, that we may not aſſume more of theſe facts than the moſt ſceptical muſt admit, we will view them only as they are repreſented by the Roman hiſtorians, or other authentic vouchers, who were ſo far from being favourable to the Chriſtian cauſe, that they uſually expreſs their zeal for the deſtruction, whilſt their writings contribute to the ſupport, of it. What they have recorded concerning the *propagation* of this new *doctrine* will ſuffice for the preſent occaſion. The *characters* they have given of its *profeſſors* muſt be reſerved for another.

Some years after the reſurrection of Chriſt, the Apoſtles remained in Judæa, preaching the word to the Jews only. At what time they began to diſperſe themſelves among the Gentiles, is not exactly ſetled. But eccleſiaſtical

aſtical writers have generally agreed, that it was about the beginning of the reign of Claudius. And, before the end of it, the Chriſtians of Rome were become ſo numerous as to give umbrage to the government. The notice we have of it is from Suetonius *. The Emperor, he ſays, baniſhed from Rome the Jews, who, being excited by Chriſt, made continual tumults. Chriſtianity paſſed at firſt among the Heathens for a ſect of Judaiſm. It was ſcarce poſſible for them to form any juſter notion of it. It ſprang up in Judæa; the firſt preachers of it were Jews; the Jews and Chriſtians believed in, and worſhipped, the ſame God; they received the ſame Scriptures; they ſet apart for ſacred purpoſes a like portion of time; and, what was the moſt peculiar and the moſt ſtriking feature of their religions, they equally refuſed to be partakers with any of the Heathens in their ſolemn rites or ſacrifices. And, though all Jews might be included in Claudius's edict, as appears probable from the paſſage in the Acts of the Apoſtles †, where this edict is mentioned; yet the conduct

* Claud. 25. † Chap. xviii. 2.

which

which offended the Emperor, whatever it was, was certainly the conduct of Chriſtians; ſince the hiſtorian tells us that they acted, *impulſore Chreſto*. It is obſerved by ſome early Chriſtian writers, that the Heathens neither underſtood nor pronounced rightly the name of Chriſt. They imagined it to be derived from the Greek word χρηστος. And the paſſage we are conſidering contains an inſtance of this miſtake. But what ſort of tumults were theſe, which could occaſion, even in the reign of a Claudius, a reſolution to baniſh at once the whole fraternity? The primitive Chriſtians were never accuſed of any deſigns againſt the quiet and good order of the governments under which they lived. The jealous eye of tyranny never diſcerned in their behaviour any thing like ambition or treachery. Nor was their private worſhip oppoſite to the public laws. Six hundred nations, as Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus tells us, had taken up their abode in Rome, and every one obſerved its own peculiar rites. And the Chriſtians without queſtion might have enjoyed the ſame liberty, had they been content to enjoy it in ſilence. But they maintained,

maintained, and that publicly, that all the deities of Greece and Rome were fictitious, and the adoration of them mere ſuperſtition. The ſucceſs with which they preached this doctrine, and their withdrawing men from the eſtabliſhed worſhip, were probably what the writer meant by the *continual tumults* of which he here ſpeaks. The temple of ſome great goddeſs, as at Epheſus, or ſome image that fell down from Jupiter, was in danger of being ſet at nought. And we may judge of the deſign of this edict from the execution of it. For Claudius (thus Dio* relates the ſame tranſaction,) finding theſe Jews, as they were called, to be ſo numerous, that they could not be expelled the city without danger, ſuffered them to remain, but forbad their aſſemblies. The public exerciſe of religion is the ſureſt method of ſpreading it. And the Emperor hoped to prevent the one, by reſtraining the other. But neither his power nor his art were effectual. For, not many years after, the Chriſtians at Rome are ſpoken of by Tacitus, as *ingens multitudo* †; when he deſcribes the

* Lib. lx. † Ann. lib. xv. c. 44.

unexampled

unexampled cruelties of Nero, who, to remove from himſelf the infamy of ſetting fire to the city, and to caſt it upon the innocent, but hated, Chriſtians, ordered ſome to be crucified, others to be wrapped in inflammable clothing, and ſlowly burnt, like torches, and others, in the ſkins of beaſts, to be worried by dogs. If, by this perſecution, the Chriſtians were driven from the capital, they carried with them their religion, and propagated it. For Julian * confeſſes, that, before St. John wrote his Goſpel, great multitudes, in many cities of Greece and Italy, were ſeized with this diſtemper; ſo he ſpeaks of their ſudden converſion to Chriſtianity. And we may give him credit for this fact, though he lived almoſt three centuries after it; ſince he would not have related any thing ſo favourable to the religion he had deſerted, without the fulleſt evidence. The reigns of the ſucceeding emperors being very ſhort, or their diſpoſitions leſs cruel, we hear nothing from the Roman hiſtorians, concerning their treatment of the Chriſtians,

* As cited by Cyril, lib. x.

whoſe

whoſe hiſtory, in the firſt ages, was ſeldom written, but in blood. For near thirty years however they ſuffered no remarkable perſecution. And, during this interval, not only great numbers were converted, but perſons of the higheſt rank. Dio * names two, who had been conſuls, one of them the emperor's nephew †; and adds, that many others with them ſuffered death about the end of the reign of Domitian, being accuſed of atheiſm, and of having embraced the religion of the Jews. The two parts of the accuſation, however inconſiſtent, were uſually brought againſt the Chriſtians. Their atheiſm conſiſted in a diſbelief of all the heathen theology, their Judaiſm in the belief of one God only. For the other parts of Judaiſm, the heathens, whoſe religion was all ceremony, would hardly comprehend the Chriſtian diſtinction between the moral and ceremonial

* In Excerpt. Xiphilini, lib. lxvii.

† Titus Flavius Clemens, who was conſul, A. C. 95. The other was M. Acilius Glabrio, conſul, A. C. 91.

See alſo Sueton. Domit. 15. and Euſebii Hiſt. Eccl. l. iii. c. 18. Alſo Euſeb. Chron. 15. Domit, where he refers to Brutius, an Heathen author.

law.

law. However, the magiſtrates ſeem, about this time, to have entertained ſome doubts, whether they were really Jews. For Domitian, as we learn from Suetonius *, exacted with great ſeverity a tribute from thoſe who did not *profeſs* themſelves Jews, but lived *after their manner*. And the next emperor, Nerva, being more inclined to favour the Chriſtians, ordered, that none ſhould be brought to judgement for impiety, or for living *like* the Jews †. But, if this edict again reſpited their ſufferings, the benefit laſted not long. Under the ſucceeding emperor ‡, Pliny thought it evident, that the Chriſtians were to be puniſhed with death, for an obſtinate refuſal to ſacrifice. But the great numbers, in the province he governed, on whom the fear of this puniſhment ſeemed to have no influence, perplexed him, and occaſioned his celebrated letter to Trajan ‖. He deſcribes the perſons accuſed as of all ages, of each ſex, of every rank, ſlaves and Roman citizens; he ſays, that the contagion had ſpread itſelf, not only in the cities and

* Domit. 12.

† See Dion. in Excerpt. Xiphilini, lib. lxviii.

‡ Trajan. ‖ Ep. 97. lib. x.

towns,

towns, but through the whole country; and he repreſents paganiſm as almoſt extirpated, the temples deſolate, the religious ſolemnities long intermitted, very few purchaſers of the victims. Theſe are Pliny's expreſſions, and we muſt either ſuppoſe, that the Governor of a province, writing to the emperor about a difficulty which embarraſſed his adminiſtration, and requeſting his directions how he ſhould proceed, uſes the arts of oratory, and totally miſleads *him*, whom he will be obliged to follow: or muſt confeſs, that the Chriſtians, in that extenſive and remote country, on the borders of the Euxine ſea, far exceeded in numbers the other inhabitants.—In the next reign, Adrian's, it appears, that a great part of another large and populous kingdom had been converted to Chriſtianity. A letter remains, written from Egypt by the emperor himſelf *, and thus deſcribing the manners of that country. Nobody here is unemployed; all are buſy in trade; they have only One God, *their gain* †; him the Chriſtians,

* In Vopiſci Firmo, Saturnino, &c. c. 7.

† The author follows a conjecture of Dr. Jortin's, mentioned in his Remarks on Eccl. Hiſt. vol. II. p. 89. where he refers to Miſc. Obſerv. vol. ii. p. 309.

him

him the Jews, him all the Gentiles, worſhip. But ſo inconſtant are they to any other religion, that the worſhipers of Serapis are Chriſtians; and *they* are devoted to Serapis, who call themſelves Chriſt's biſhops. One part of this ſatyr muſt have been unjuſt, in an age, when no man's intereſt would lead him to Chriſtianity. Though many might believe it in their hearts, who were outwardly idolaters; yet few or none would profeſs without belief, what they could not profeſs without danger. But it is remarkable, that the preachers of this new religion were become as conſiderable in Egypt as the prieſts of Serapis; whoſe worſhip had been eſtabliſhed there from the moſt remote antiquity.

All this progreſs did the goſpel make within a century after our Saviour's reſurrection. The facts here cited are ſuch only, as are occaſionally mentioned by heathen authors indiſputably genuine. But theſe teſtimonies may perhaps prove much more than they relate. They are not only good evidence of theſe particular facts; but they ſtrongly confirm the accounts given by the primitive

primitive Chriſtians, of a like progreſs of their religion, in every other part of the world. I will not at preſent trace its footſteps farther. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that, for the next two centuries, the conduct of all the emperors towards the Chriſtians, whether mild or ſevere, witneſſes the continual increaſe of their numbers. A heathen hiſtorian * relates, that two of the emperors †, being inclined to tolerate the religions of all their ſubjects, and willing that Chriſt ſhould be worſhiped with the other deities, had thought of conſecrating temples to him; but were diſcouraged by thoſe, who, having conſulted the oracles, told them, that, if the Chriſtians had temples, all men would become Chriſtians, and the other temples be all deſerted. Some have doubted, whether the hiſtorian was rightly informed of thoſe deſigns of the emperors, which were never executed. Nor is it of much importance. He certainly knew *that*, for which I cite the paſſage, the general opinion of the heathens

* Lampridius in Sever. Alexand. c. 43.

† Adrian and Alexander Severus.

about this matter; in which their experienc was ſufficient to inſtruct them without the aſſiſtance of an oracle.

The edicts alſo of the perſecutors confirm the ſame fact. Theſe aimed not to extirpate, but to prevent the growth of, Chriſtianity *. The general form of them was to forbid men to forſake the religion of their anceſtors.—Some Chriſtian writers, who lived near the times, aſſert, that theſe perſecutions waſted mankind as much as the moſt bloody wars. And yet, after the longeſt and moſt cruel of them all, the emperor's chief miniſter †, writing to the governors of the ſeveral provinces, acknowledges, that it had manifeſtly appeared by repeated experience, that the Chriſtians could not be induced, by any means whatever, to depart from the obſtinacy of their diſpoſition; and the emperor himſelf recites ‡, as the reaſon of the puniſhments which had been inflicted, that almoſt all mankind were forſaking the immortal gods, and going over to the ſect of the Chriſtians.

* See, for inſtance, the edicts of Severus, mentioned in his Life by Spartian.

† Sabinus, cited by Euſeb. Hiſt. Eccl. lib. ix. c. 1.

‡ Maximin to Sabinus, Euſeb. lib. ix. c. 9.

Se

So many indeed were going over, that, when Conſtantine ſoon after aſcended the throne, the Chriſtian party was equal, perhaps ſuperior, to their adverſaries, through the whole empire. It has even been ſuſpected, that his converſion might be influenced by political conſiderations. This, at leaſt, is certain, that, though the zeal of the Heathens againſt Chriſtianity was ſuch, that ſeveral cities petitioned his immediate predeceſſors * not to ſuffer any who profeſſed it to live among them; yet Conſtantine was in no fear from their power. But, when one of his ſucceſſors † had yielded up his faith to a fondneſs for antient philoſophy, he found it neceſſary, through fear of the Chriſtians, to diſſemble, till he was in ſecure poſſeſſion of the government; and, even after he was ſaluted Auguſtus, publicly worſhiped in their churches, whilſt in private he practiſed augury and divination ‡.

Conſider now, from how weak an origin to what an amazing ſtrength Chriſtianity

* See Maximin's letter, as above. † Julian.

‡ Amm. Marc. lib. xxi. c. 2. and lib. xxii. c. 5.

had grown up, before it received any nurture from the powers of this world. A ſmall company of men, without authority, or reputation, or learning, ſet out, on a deſign of teaching mankind a new religion*. "They perſuade many perſons to receive this religion, and, for the ſake of it, to quit every ſentiment in which they had been educated, and, with them, eaſe, and all external happineſs; ſome to give up ample fortunes, others to diſoblige their deareſt friends, all to offend the magiſtrates, many to leave their country, and ſuffer every kind of temporal evil, even the loſs of life:" and all this, not from a ſudden flight of enthuſiaſm, which has ſometimes produced extraordinary effects, but upon the ſober principles of truth and piety. They adhere ſteadily to theſe principles, and tranſmit them, perhaps unimpaired, to their immediate ſucceſſors; who, in like manner, inſtruct and perſuade others, till, notwithſtanding the oppoſition of prieſts and philoſophers in every country, notwithſtanding the oppreſſion of

* Jortin's Rem. vol. II. p. 14.

the

the moſt powerful and moſt unfeeling tyrants that ever diſgraced humanity, they have brought over, to an open profeſſion of their faith, one half of mankind; and many of the other wait only for the permiſſion of the magiſtrate, to declare themſelves convinced. Such was the progreſs of Chriſtianity before Conſtantine; and an attention to its progreſs may, in various ways, confirm its truth. Some conſider it as an additional proof of the Goſpel hiſtory. Theſe great events, ſay they, are utterly inexplicable; unleſs the wonderful works related in the Goſpels were really performed. But, if that hiſtory be true, the conſequences are not ſtrange. All mankind muſt neceſſarily be convinced by ſuch powerful arguments.—Others obſerve, that theſe miracles were all performed in one country, and thoſe of the apoſtles in one age; and they doubt, whether, in the following ages, and in diſtant nations, they could have ſufficient influence to make many new converts, admidſt ſo great diſcouragements. They ſuppoſe therefore, that, whilſt Chriſtianity ſubſiſted without human aid, it was not deſtitute of divine; and that the conti-

nual increaſe of its diſciples, during the firſt three centuries, affords ſome evidence, that the power of working miracles remained ſo long amongſt them.—Others again conceive, that even ſuch a ſeries of miracles could never have removed inveterate prejudices, and have overcome the united force of affections, paſſions, and intereſts; had not a more powerful influence than that of reaſon operated on their minds, and produced this wonderful change. To them it appears, that the Holy Ghoſt muſt have given, not only to the firſt preachers of the Goſpel a variety of languages, with courage and fervent zeal, but to the hearers alſo, attentive and teachable diſpoſitions. Which of theſe opinions is the moſt probable; whether the quick growth of Chriſtianity was itſelf miraculous, or was the natural effect of other miracles, either perpetually performed, or plainly related; it is not neceſſary for us to decide. In any of theſe views, it is equally certain, that our religion was not introduced into the world by the power or wiſdom of man, but by the immediate interpoſition and authority of God.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XI.

Of the CHARACTERS, given by HEATHEN WRITERS, of the FIRST CHRISTIANS.

MATTHEW V. 11.

Bleſſed are ye, when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſely, for my ſake.

IT is a circumſtance favourable to any cauſe, that the witneſſes produced againſt it, are either inconſiſtent, or manifeſtly falſe, even in points not eſſential to the merits. We naturally ſuppoſe, that the principal ſtory cannot be reconciled with truth, when the

the minuter parts of it cannot be reconciled with each other. And juſtice will be conceived to be on that ſide, to which fraud and falſehood are oppoſed. Theſe advantages the Chriſtian cauſe receives, from the teſtimonies of its adverſaries. Not only the truths they have acknowledged, but even the falſehood they have invented concerning it, help to confirm it. We have conſidered, on a former occaſion, what the Heathen writers have confeſſed of the ſurpriſing progreſs of Chriſtianity. Let us now attend to the characters they have given of the firſt profeſſors of it. Theſe characters muſt be collected from a variety of paſſages, in which the Chriſtians are *accidentally* mentioned, ſoon after their appearance in the world, by the hiſtorians, philoſophers, and poets of thoſe ages. For, though our religion was firſt propagated at a ſeaſon, when arts and literature were cultivated with the greateſt induſtry and ſucceſs; and ſeveral learned Heathens compoſed laboured works, in oppoſition to it: yet none of theſe pieces have remained to our time. There are, indeed, large extracts remaining from them, preſerved in

in the writings of the early Chriſtians; and, if we may judge from theſe quotations, they contained nothing very plauſible, either againſt the manners of the Chriſtians, or the evidence of their religion. But, ſhould we endeavour to learn from them the objections of the Heathens, a doubt might ariſe, whether theſe controverſialiſts had fairly conveyed to us the opinions of their opponents. My obſervations, therefore, ſhall be chiefly taken from thoſe notices of the Chriſtians, which we find caſually diſperſed in the writings of the Greeks and Romans upon other ſubjects. And, though their accuſations be not only different, but oppoſite; we may perhaps diſcover ſomething, in each part, which approaches to the truth, and diſcern through their falſe colours the true grounds of the complaint. They accuſe the Chriſtians of ſuperſtition, and of atheiſm; they ſpeak of them ſometimes as credulous, eaſy, ductile people, and ſometimes as perverſe and obſtinate, even unto madneſs; now they repreſent them as weak and illiterate, now as wonderfully ſkilled in the hidden ſciences of magic and necromancy; now, as moſt contemptibly

temptibly indolent and inattentive, and again as watchful and indefatigable in every kind of miſchief.

The firſt charge upon the Chriſtians we meet with, is *ſuperſtition*. Tacitus and Suetonius, writing the hiſtory of Rome at that period when Chriſtianity juſt began to be heard of there, agree in giving it this appellation. One calls it, a *new* * ſuperſtition; the other, a *foreign* † and *peſtilent* ‡ ſuperſtition. And *Pliny* ||, ſome time after, ſpeaks of it, as a *wicked* and *immoderate* ſuperſtition. Nor did the accuſers of the Chriſtians conceal the foundation of this charge. It was urged as a ſufficient proof of their weak and perverted underſtandings, that they had embraced a religion different from that of their anceſtors. It was ſuppoſed, that they ſhewed, not only weak underſtandings, but wicked hearts, and an *enmity* § to the whole human

* Suet. Nero, 16. The charge of *novelty* was often brought againſt the Chriſtians. See Luc. de morte Per. & Symm. lib. x. ep. 54.

† Tac. Ann. xiii. 32. ‡ Id. xv. 44.

|| Lib. x. ep. 97. See alſo Lucian. Pſeudomant. & Ariſt. Orat. Plat. xi.

§ Tac. Ann. as before. See alſo Pliny.

race,

race, when they refuſed to join with others, in the public adorations. And their own devotion was conſidered as a crime againſt the ſtate, when it was the neceſſary occaſion of their meeting in private aſſemblies. So that, what was called their deteſtable and pernicious ſuperſtition, conſiſted only in their ſteady belief and practice of a new religion, inconſiſtent with that which was eſtabliſhed.—The Romans ſeem to have reſted all their religious notions upon the authority of their anceſtors, and the proſperity of their country. Theſe opinions, and theſe ceremonies, ſaid they, were delivered down to us from remote ages: under the protection of the gods we have ever worſhiped, and, whilſt we worſhiped them according to theſe ancient forms, the empire has grown up from ſmall beginnings, and ſubdued the world. They thought it therefore a fooliſh ſuperſtition in private perſons to inquire for other deities or other modes of adoration. But, not conceiving the gods of Rome to be the only gods, they were not unwilling, when other religions were propoſed to them, to receive them by publick authority and unite

them with their own. On this principle *one* * at leaſt of the Emperors had a deſign of admitting Chriſtianity into the eſtabliſhment. But, when it was underſtood, that the Chriſtians would not conſent to this union; that they had the utmoſt contempt for the whole pagan theology, and would not build their temples but on the ruins of all the reſt: the accuſation againſt them was then changed; they were no longer charged with ſuperſtition, but with *impiety* and *atheiſm* †. "Away with the Atheiſts," "The Chriſtians to the lions," were expreſſions of the ſame import, and became the common cry of the people in the times of any public calamity. Lucian ‡ deſcribes an impoſtor who ſet up an oracle, inſtituted myſteries, and practiſed the rites of initiation. It was uſual at the beginning of ſuch ſolemnities to admoniſh the profane to withdraw; Ἐκας, ἐκας ἐστε, βέβηλοι. And this man, in imitation of

* Alexander Severus. See Lamprid. c. 43. Alſo c. 29, & 31. The ſame thing has been reported of Tiberius and Adrian.

† See the paſſages before cited in Lucian & Ariſtides: alſo Julian, in many places. Some of them are referred to, p. 175.

‡ Pſeudomantis.

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the accuſtomed ceremony, proclaimed aloud, If any Atheiſt, or Chriſtian, or Epicurean, be come hither as a ſpy on theſe myſteries, let him depart.

When a benevolent Emperor * put a ſtop to a perſecution againſt the Chriſtians, Dio † thus expreſſes it: He ordered that none ſhould be accuſed of Judaiſm or *impiety*. And Julian ‡ frequently mentions Chriſtianity by the title of Atheiſm. Nor is there any thing in either of theſe calumnies, which might not well be expected from the nature and circumſtances of our religion. The novelty of it, and the zeal of its converts, would be called by its adverſaries ſuperſtition. Its denial of every god except one unknown to the Heathens would paſs among them for atheiſm. So that theſe objections agree with and confirm the accounts, which the Chriſtians have given of themſelves.

Another charge againſt them was *credulity*, and eaſineſs of temper. And the inſtances alleged to prove it are their reliance on the

* Nerva.

† In Xiph. Excerp. l. lxviii.

‡ In Ep. ad Arſacium, ἀθεοτητα; ad Boſtr. ἀσεβείας. In Fragment. δυσσέβειας, ἀθεων.

evidence

evidence of miracles; their expectations of immortality; their contempt of the goods of fortune. The Galilæans, ſays Julian *, abuſing that puerile turn of mind which makes men fond of fables, have founded their faith on miraculous ſtories. Theſe poor wretches, ſays Lucian †, are fully perſuaded that they ſhall be immortal;—they deſpiſe all the things of this world, and truſt them to each other without carefully examining the ſecurity; ſo that, if any ſubtle fellow gets among them, he eaſily tricks theſe ſimple people, and ſoon enriches himſelf. Such notions did the heathens entertain of them, when they ſaw what numbers were continually going over to the new religion. But, after many attempts to recall them to the eſtabliſhed rites by every method, either of mildneſs or ſeverity; by neglect, by ridicule, and by terrible perſecutions, their enemies were at laſt convinced, that they were not ſo flexible, ſo eaſily removed from their opinions, as they had imagined. They now charged them with the oppoſite extreme, rigid perverſeneſs

* As cited by Cyril, lib. ii.
† De morte Pereg.

and

and obſtinacy. Pliny *, when governor of Bithynia, judged, that, how innocent ſoever their tenets might be, yet certainly their inflexible obſtinacy deſerved puniſhment. But no puniſhment, not even inſtant death, was able to ſubdue it. A man ſhould be prepared to die, ſays the philoſophic emperor †, from his own judgement, not from mere obſtinacy, like the Chriſtians. Nor was this contempt of death, the ſpirit of only few of them. It was their general habit of thinking. Epictetus ſuppoſes, that they taught it to each other. Men, he ſays ‡, may acquire this temper by *faſhion*, as the Galilæans. And the faſhion prevailed ſo much among them, that their obſtinacy became proverbial. Galen ‖, ſpeaking of the rooted prejudices among thoſe phyſicians or philoſophers, who adhered to particular ſects, expreſſes himſelf thus; You might as eaſily convince the diſciples of Moſes or of Chriſt. And, after they had been perſecuted for almoſt three centuries, a Heathen orator § obſerves, that nei-

* Ep. before cited.
† Marc. Antoninus, l. xi. c. 3.
‡ Arrian, lib. iv. c. 7.
‖ De diff. pulſuum, lib. iii.
§ Themiſt. Orat. ad Jov.

ther fines, nor fires, nor gibbets, had been able to prevail againſt that divine law, which leaves every man to worſhip God in the way which he thinks beſt.—And now what fuller teſtimonies can be deſired or imagined, either of the ready reception which Chriſtianity found in the firſt ages, or of the immoveable firmneſs and invincible courage of its diſciples?

But this ſteady and conſiſtent conduct had the leſs influence among the Heathens of the ſuperior ranks, becauſe they conſidered the Chriſtians as a *low* and *illiterate* rabble. A paſſage in Juvenal ſeems to allude to this charge. Domitian, under whoſe government, as a hiſtorian obſerves, the reward of worth and virtue were inevitable and quick deſtruction, having before baniſhed all philoſophers from the cities, towards the end of his reign, exerciſed his cruelty againſt the Chriſtians; upon which, the ſatiriſt thus remarks*: He robbed the ſtate of many noble and illuſtrious characters, without ſuffering for it; but, when he began to be formidable to the meaneſt people, then he periſhed. Another

* Juv. Sat. iv. 153.

writer,

writer *, ſpeaking of the Chriſtians, calls them, the men, who, having left the tongs, the hammer, and the anvil, pretend to talk of the heavens, and of them that dwell therein. And theſe obſervations agree with the teſtimony of St. Paul †, that *not many* excellent in human *wiſdom*, *not many mighty*, *not many noble*, were *called* into the church at the beginning. But, when ſome of the Heathens were led by this remark, either to fancy or feign, that our religion was deſigned for the vulgar only, and that the learned, the rich, the powerful, were not invited, or even admitted, to partake of it; their notions were neither conformable to the meaning of the apoſtle, nor to the ſtate of Chriſtianity: which was indeed ſo preached, that human wiſdom and human power appeared to have no influence in the propagation of it; but was nevertheleſs ſo received, as to ſhew, that the ignorant and illiterate were choſen by God, to confound the wiſe, and the weak and deſpicable, to bring down the mighty:

* Liban. Orat. pro Templis, ad Theod.

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

many of the higheſt ranks, both in letters and in the ſtate, having been early converts; though it muſt be confeſſed, and Chriſtians have always gloried in the confeſſion, that they followed, and did not lead, the vulgar, that is, the bulk of mankind.—But, though the Chriſtians are repreſented ſometimes as extremely ignorant, at other times we hear, that they were profoundly *ſkilled* in the *hidden ſciences*, the curious and clandeſtine arts of Egypt. This was among the firſt, and the laſt, accuſations, brought by the Heathens againſt them. The hiſtorian*, who mentions Chriſtianity as a new, adds alſo and a *magical* ſuperſtition. And, after three centuries, Julian† repeats the ſame charge, ſpeaking of ſome of the firſt preachers of the Goſpel, as the principal magicians that ever lived. Now what is there in this calumny, but an acknowledgement, that they performed certain extraordinary and wonderful works, which demonſtrated, even to the conviction of their adverſaries, power and knowledge more than human?

* Sueton. in Ner. c. 16.

† In Cyr. lib. iii. See alſo Celſus, in Orig. lib. i. § 28.

The

The two remaining accuſations, neither leſs frequent nor leſs inconſiſtent than thoſe we have been conſidering, related to the morals of the Chriſtians. Some complained of them as a *lazy* idle ſet of people, negligent of their own affairs, uſeleſs to the public. Others deſcribed them as *reſtleſs*, cunning, full of ſtratagems, vigilant and active in deceit and miſchief. And it might perhaps have been difficult for us to reconcile theſe contradictory charges without the aſſiſtance of paſſages in two Greek writers, of whom one was an avowed enemy to all religion, the other particularly to the Chriſtian. The former, Lucian*, gives an account of a man, who called himſelf ſometimes a Chriſtian, and ſometimes a Philoſopher. When he aſſumed the religious character, he was impriſoned for it in Syria. Immediately the Chriſtians attended him with the greateſt aſſiduity. Some came to him early in the morning, others bribed the keepers to ſuffer them to paſs the night with him in the priſon. They ſupplied him with money and every thing he wanted. And

* De morte Peregrini.

from ſeveral cities of Aſia Minor perſons were deputed by the ſocieties of Chriſtians to relieve, encourage, and comfort him. So zealous are they, adds this writer, in aſſiſting thoſe who, having renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worſhiping their Maſter that was crucified, are ſtyled their brethren*; whilſt on other occaſions they ſeem to neglect and even deſpiſe all the intereſts of this world.—The other writer, to whom I referred, was contemporary with Lucian, the Sophiſt Ariſtides. He ſpeaks† of the pretences of the Chriſtians to a contempt of riches and to great generoſity; but no fruits, he ſays, of this generoſity appeared, no ſervices either to gods or men. And he explains himſelf by theſe among other inſtances. They contribute nothing to the public ſolemnities; they conſecrate nothing to the gods; they enter into no deliberations about the affairs of the ſtate; they are ſcarcely civil to others, but, for the ſake of converts, they travel to the ends of the earth; they promiſe to teach them virtue, but really

* See more teſtimonies from Jul. in Miſopog. Epiſt. ad Arſac. & Fragm.

† Orat. in Nept.

ſet them at variance with the Greeks, or rather with all good men.—From theſe paſſages it appears, that the indolence, which the Heathens looked upon with ſuch contempt, was no more than that diſregard to worldly intereſts, without which in thoſe ages men could not have embraced Chriſtianity, and was perfectly conſiſtent with the greateſt activity and earneſtneſs in the aſſiſtance of their friends and the propagation of their faith: and that they were eſteemed uſeleſs or miſchievous to the public, only becauſe they did not ſupport the popular religion, nor connect themſelves with thoſe who adhered to it; but that they claimed themſelves, and engaged to teach others, the moſt ſplendid virtues.

Obſerve then the amount of all theſe teſtimonies, when taken together, and reduced to as much conſiſtency as can be given them. It appears to be this. That, not long before the days of theſe writers, a new religion had appeared among mankind: diſagreeing ſo with the opinions of the wiſeſt and moſt learned in thoſe ages, that they conſidered it as extreme folly and ſuperſtition; and con-

tradicting ſo flatly all the ancient theology, that it paſſed with the generality for downright atheiſm. That this religion was received by vaſt numbers with unaccountable eagerneſs; chiefly, as was ſuppoſed, by that weak part of mankind, who fondly entertain any new doctrine, and preſently deſert it for a newer; but that they were no ſooner admitted into this ſect, than they laid aſide their inconſtancy, and adhered to it with ſuch ſteadineſs and perſeverance, in oppoſition to dangers and torments and inſtant death, as appeared to be contrary not only to the fickle diſpoſitions of the vulgar, but even to the firſt principles of human nature. That the men, who thus deceived the world, were mean and illiterate: not inſtructed in philoſophy, not verſed in the finer arts; but nevertheleſs acquainted, either with ſome ſecrets of nature, or with the means of obtaining the aſſiſtance of thoſe beings who can controul nature, by which they performed many wonderful works. And laſtly, that, being wholly engaged in learning or teaching this doctrine and attending to theſe works, they ſeemed to have no concern about

about the moſt important intereſts of themſelves or others; but were active and induſtrious in perſuading men to deſpiſe the public authority, and caſt off the public religion.

Now it ſeems remarkable, that in all this charge againſt the Chriſtians, and their anſwers to it, no one perceptible fact, nothing which is properly the ſubject of teſtimony, is alleged on one part and denied on the other. The accuſation and the defence reſt entirely on the ſame acknowledged facts, the ſame external circumſtances. The difference is only in the concluſions formed from theſe known facts concerning mens inward diſpoſitions.—That the doctrines taught by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and the forms of worſhip inſtituted by them, were new, and before thoſe ages unheard of in the world, are facts, about which the witneſſes, Heathens and Chriſtians, agree. But whether every thing new in religion be always folly and ſuperſtition, is a matter not to be decided by teſtimony, and too evident, it ſhould ſeem, to admit any rational diſcuſſion.—That the Chriſtians refuſed to join in

in the Gentile worſhip, that they would not throw a little frankincenſe upon an altar, or put their hand to their lips when they paſſed by a temple, are facts not more ſtrenuouſly charged, than readily acknowledged. The concluſion from them, that theſe men muſt be Atheiſts, we know to be falſe.—That vaſt numbers very ſoon and very eagerly embraced Chriſtianity, and adhered to it afterwards with aſtoniſhing firmneſs, we may learn either from the complaints of their adverſaries or their own apologies. That conduct indeed, which is repreſented by one party as ariſing from attentive inquiry and ſteadineſs, is imputed by the other to flexibility and obſtinacy. But it might be obſerved, even if we were unacquainted with the evidence of our religion, that the accuſers are obliged to ſuppoſe in the ſame perſons the contrary extremes of temper to be united*; the defenders maintain, that they adhered to an uniform and rational medium.—That the

* It is true indead, that an indolent turn of mind may produce both credulity and obſtinacy; as has been obſerved in the Firſt Diſcourſe; but the obſervation is plainly inapplicable to the caſe of *perſecution*.

Chriſtian

Chriſtian preachers performed ſome extraordinary works, the unbelievers, when they called them magicians, plainly acknowledged. But by what power, natural or divine, theſe works were performed, by what means that power was obtained, for what purpoſes granted, to what uſes applicable, are queſtions not to be determined by teſtimony. How far reaſon is able to anſwer them, has been formerly conſidered.—That the converts to Chriſtianity were not very attentive to ſecular affairs, but were chiefly employed in converting others, was a charge they readily confeſſed. But, if we want to be informed whether their inattention rendered them uſeleſs, or their employment miſchievous, to the world, we ſurely ought not to inquire of men, who had neither conſidered the deſign, nor experienced the effects, of their doctrine. If it was indeed a divine meſſage, they could not have been engaged in any office equally important to mankind.

Thus, in every inſtance, when we apply that caution which is always neceſſary in judging from teſtimony, and ſeparate the facts related from the opinions of the relators,

we

we find, that the calumnies of the Heathens ſtrongly ſupport the hiſtory of the firſt propagation of Chriſtianity, as delivered by the Chriſtians themſelves; and may preſume, that this was one of the views, in which our Saviour declared to his diſciples, that they ſhould be happy, *when men ſhould revile them, and perſecute them, and ſay all manner of evil againſt them falſely for his ſake.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE XII.

Recapitulation of the ARGUMENTS brought in Support of CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN v. 37.

The Father himſelf, which hath ſent me, hath borne witneſs of me.

THE occaſions of my Diſcourſes in this place return ſo ſeldom, and the ſubject of them has been found ſo extenſive, that, although they have been confined to ſome principal parts of it, not many of you can have heard them all. It may, therefore, not be improper to conclude this ſubject by drawing together, into one view, the general heads of the arguments, which have been offered for eſtabliſhing the truth and divine

authority of the Chriſtian revelation. Theſe arguments were three; one taken from the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament, another from the prophecies in the old, and the third from the propagation of our religion, and the circumſtances attending it.

I. 1. In examining the argument from miracles, the evidence of the facts was firſt conſidered, and then the application of them. Theſe facts, like all others which fall not under our own immediate notice, muſt be proved by teſtimonies; of which the principal are contained in the books of the New Teſtament. It was therefore neceſſary to enquire when, and by whom, thoſe books were written. That they were not written in theſe latter ages, appeared indiſputably from a number of ancient manuſcripts now extant in almoſt every Chriſtian country, from more ancient verſions into languages which for many centuries have not been ſpoken in any corner of the world, and from ſtill more ancient quotations of them, and references to them, by the earlieſt Chriſtian writers. Thus we traced them backwards for almoſt ſeventeen centuries, and ſhewed clearly,

clearly, that they were publiſhed ſoon after the origin of Chriſtianity. By whom they were written, was the next enquiry. And that all the hiſtorical books are the genuine works of the perſons whoſe names they bear, was proved, not only by the general reception of them among men of all practices, the Chriſtians, and their adverſaries, who lived neareſt to the time of their publication, and were beſt able to judge of their authenticity, but alſo by the particular teſtimonies of many grave writers, of whom ſome received the Goſpel from the apoſtles themſelves, and others from their immediate diſciples. Unleſs, then, the manuſcripts, verſions, quotations, in every language, and diſperſed through every country, be all counterfeit; theſe books have deſcended from the age to which they are commonly referred. Unleſs the atteſtations not only of contemporaries, but of men who converſed with the writers, and were inſtructed by them in the ſubjects of theſe books; atteſtations given in public, and uncontradicted; received with an univerſal concurrence by friends and enemies, by thoſe who were moſt concerned to know

know the truth, and thoſe who were moſt inclined to diſpute it; unleſs all theſe atteſtations deceive us, the books we are ſpeaking of were compoſed by the perſons to whom they are aſcribed.

That theſe perſons are credible witneſſes of the facts they relate, was my next propoſition. In diſcourſing of it, I conſidered them firſt as common hiſtorians, and then as witneſſes of the reſurrection and other miraculous events. Conſidered as common hiſtorians, they appear to exhibit ſeveral clear determinate narratives of plain facts, told with all their circumſtances, and, as it ſeems, without diſguiſe and without reſerve. The accounts were publiſhed in the times and places of which they ſpeak. They might, if falſe, have been eaſily confuted; they would probably have confuted each other. But in all the principal events they are wholly uncontradicted, perfectly conſiſtent. Theſe accounts are further confirmed by the letters from the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity to the churches they had planted; and by their exact correſpondence with the laws, cuſtoms, and hiſtory of the Jews and Romans

Romans.—When we conſidered the writers of the New Teſtament, as witneſſes of the miracles they have recorded; the force of their teſtimony was eſtimated from their characters, their motives, and their number. Their characters conſiſted in their ability to know the truth, and integrity to declare it.

Of their ability no doubts could ariſe: ſince the wonderful works they reported were uſually the plain objects of the ſenſes, in which it was not poſſible for thoſe to miſtake, who affirmed, that they ſaw and heard them; and the evangeliſts were either themſelves preſent at theſe great events, or received the accounts immediately from thoſe who were. —Their integrity was ſhewn, both from their writings and their conduct: from their writings, becauſe they relate openly what inſincere and artful men would have endeavoured to conceal, the poverty and mean condition of their maſter, the contempt with which he was treated, the ignominious death he ſuffered, their own low employments, their ignorance, miſtakes, fooliſh contentions, and cowardice; from their conduct, becauſe, without any other view but that of inſtructing

mankind in virtue and religion, they expoſed themſelves to perils and hardſhips of every ſort, and neither ſtripes nor impriſonment, nor the terrors of inſtant death, could prevail on them to deſiſt from their public atteſtations.—If the things they teſtified were true; the motives, on which they acted, appear to have been of the nobleſt kind, obedience to God, and love to men. If they were falſe; no imagination can feign any ſufficient, any probable, motives, for their giving up every thing valuable in this life, without the proſpect of a future recompence. —The laſt circumſtance, on which the ſtrength of this teſtimony depends, is the number of the witneſſes. And this was far greater than it appears at the firſt view. The truth of our Saviour's miracles reſts not wholly on the credit of thoſe, who have written his hiſtory. They have produced many other witneſſes, to confirm their accounts. For, when a man was named by them, as preſent at any of the miracles, or ſo deſcribed that he might be eaſily known, he was thereby ſummoned to ſtand forth as a witneſs; and his adherence to the ſame ſociety,

ciety, his profeſſion of the ſame religion, was a plain aſſent to the facts, which his friends and companions had publiſhed. Thus the twelve apoſtles, who are named in the Goſpels, as the conſtant attendants of our Saviour, and the ſeventy diſciples, ſent forth to preach in the cities and towns, who, from the nature of their office, could not be concealed, were conſidered as ſo many witneſſes to us, of the miracles at which they were preſent, or which they themſelves performed. To theſe were added, the greater part of thoſe five hundred, who were aſſembled together, and ſaw their Maſter after his reſurrection; that is, ſo many of them, as were alive, when St. Paul cited their teſtimony. Other multitudes alſo were witneſſes of other miracles. That ſome miracles were performed, every convert to our religion, in the early times, moſt plainly declares. Chriſtianity was received on the evidence of miracles, real or pretended. A man's preſent intereſt would incline him not to be too haſtily convinced of their reality. Yet great numbers were convinced; and each is indiſ-

putably a better witneſs, than we can uſually produce for other remote facts.

Such, and ſo numerous, are the witneſſes, on whoſe teſtimony we depend. And nothing has been objected to it, but, that the matters they relate are incredible; incredible, becauſe wholly unlike to every thing we experience. The objection was conſidered at large; but a ſhort anſwer to it is ſufficient. For, unleſs ſome example can be produced of a number of men, equal to the number of our witneſſes, and poſſeſſed of equal opportunities of knowing the truth, who have yet been deceived in plain facts, about which it was ſo much their intereſt not to be deceived; or who have concerted a fraud, from which they had ſo little to hope, and ſo much to apprehend: unleſs ſome ſuch miſtake, or deſign, has been diſcovered in ſome age or country: we may fairly conclude, that there is incomparably better evidence for the miracles of Chriſt and his apoſtles, from external teſtimony, than againſt them, from their unlikeneſs to other events. For the degree of external teſtimony, by which they are ſupported, has never miſled mankind,

mankind, but the principle of unlikeneſs does often, and muſt neceſſarily, deceive them.

2. The *truth* of the miracles being eſtabliſhed, our next buſineſs was to conſider their *uſe*; to enquire, with what deſign theſe changes were made in the fixt laws of nature. And that the deſign was, to reveal to mankind the will of their Creator, was fully ſhewn, from the declarations of thoſe, who performed theſe wonderful works; from the natural ſignification of the works themſelves; from their fitneſs for this purpoſe, their unfitneſs for any other; from the effects they produced; and, above all, from the expreſs teſtimony of God. The men, who worked theſe miracles, were furniſhed with extraordinary power and knowledge; and certainly it cannot appear more extraordinary, that they ſhould alſo know, for what purpoſe, ſuch power and knowledge were given them: eſpecially when their explication of it agrees with the natural impreſſions of theſe works upon the human mind. This conſtitution of our minds contains a declaration of God's

will; and the evidence, which we cannot reſiſt without violence, is ſuch as he commands us to receive. Some too of the miracles were peculiarly adapted to the purpoſe of teaching religion, and none of them to any other purpoſe worthy of a divine interpoſition. With what deſign were the apoſtles ſuddenly enabled to ſpeak in every language, but that they might ſpeak to every nation? And what had they of importance to ſpeak, but the truths revealed from heaven? We know too, that, in the works of the Almighty, every thing anſwers his intentions; ſo that the deſign of his interpoſitions may be diſcerned from their effect. And, ſince the effect was, that great numbers were converted to a firm belief of Chriſtianity, the deſign of them was certainly to prove it.—All theſe natural explications of miracles are confirmed by the expreſs teſtimony of God. Such a teſtimony is evidently given, when a miracle, which has been aſked of Him, as a ſign or proof of any doctrine, is performed. Any arbitrary meaning may be affixed by conſent to any action. And God declares his aſſent to the

the meaning, which the petitioner has choſen, by an immediate anſwer to the petition.

II. Theſe points, which were fully explained before, I now paſs over haſtily; and proceed to the ſecond argument, taken from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament.

The obſcurity of the prophetic writings occaſioned the only difficulty we met with in this part of our inquiry: a difficulty, which was found to vaniſh in two caſes; namely, when we can diſcover how the prophecies were underſtood before their accompliſhment, and when the accompliſhment brings with it a full explanation of them. Theſe ſolutions were ſeverally applied to the prophecies relating to the two great ſubjects of them, the *kingdom*, and the *perſon*, of the Meſſiah. 1. The meaning of ſome paſſages, which, before the coming of Chriſt, were believed by the Jews to relate to the kingdom of their promiſed Meſſiah, it may now be difficult to determine. But the expectations formed upon them, among that people, are clearly known. And, if theſe expectations were ſuch, as could not, in the ordinary courſe of human affairs, be fulfilled; then have we the ſame evidence of God's

interpoſition for their accompliſhment, whether the paſſages were rightly interpreted or not. We may judge indeed from the event, that they were rightly interpreted. For the ſum of the predictions was, that, at a time ſo deſcribed, as to limit our views to a certain age, a perſon ſhould ariſe in Judea, who, without any power but that of perſuaſion, ſhould prevail on all the kingdoms of the earth, the ſubjects and their governors, to own him for their ſovereign, and ſubmit to his laws; that he ſhould preſently form, and afterwards govern, by the ſame methods of gentleneſs and peace, a laſting empire, perpetually encreaſing, till it ſhould become univerſal; that he ſhould teach mankind the knowledge of the true God, and introduce among them righteouſneſs and concord; in ſhort, ſhould make them wiſe and virtuous and happy. No prediction could have appeared more incredible. But yet, when we obſerved, that Chriſtianity has far exceeded the greateſt and moſt flouriſhing empires, in its rapid progreſs, its extenſive dominion, and the length of its proſperity; that it has, of late ages, ſpread itſelf over many Heathen countries,

and ſeems, from the preſent ſtate of arts and commerce, likely to make gradual advances in others: and, when we compared the religious knowledge and the morals of Chriſtian nations with thoſe of any other profeſſion: we could not but confeſs, that every part of the prophecy is either fulfilled, or appears to be now going on towards its completion. 2. But there is another remarkable part of the predictions relating to the Meſſiah. With the glories of his reign, the prophets conſtantly join the miſeries of his life. It was foretold, that he ſhould meet with contempt and ſorrow; ſhould ſuffer ſtripes and impriſonment, and even a cruel and ignominious death: and that he ſhould ſubmit to all theſe calamities voluntarily, in order to obtain pardon and privileges for others. Theſe things were never underſtood, till they were fulfilled. It ſeemed impoſſible to reconcile ſuch diſcordant ſituations. But the ſtronger the inconſiſtency then appeared, the more convincing evidence do they now afford, that they were ſpoken by true prophets, and have been truely accompliſhed.

III. If

III. If, after an examination of both theſe kinds of evidence, any man ſhould entertain a doubt, whether the miracles are fairly related, or the prophecies rightly interpreted, yet the progreſs and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, whence our third argument was drawn, are events, which cannot be conteſted, and which ſeem wholly inexplicable, upon any other ſuppoſition. Let thoſe, who reject miracles and divine interpoſitions, attempt the ſolution. All hiſtory certainly cannot furniſh them with a parallel. For a few illiterate and deſpiſed mechanics to project the total extirpation of all the religions in the world, when they had nothing to ſubſtitute in their place, but what their own enthuſiaſm or hypocriſy might ſuggeſt, would ſurely have been an unaccountable deſign. Nor would their manner of executing it have appeared leſs extraordinary than the project itſelf. They not only ſet themſelves in oppoſition to all the rich and powerful and learned, but they advanced, at the very beginning, ſuch principles as were directly repugnant to the profeſſions and prejudices of

thoſe,

thoſe, whom they wanted to convert: they began with preaching a doctrine, which they knew would be *to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs.* That an attempt ſo extravagant in its deſign, and ſo prepoſterous in its execution, ſhould yet be ſucceſsful: that they ſhould preſently make innumerable proſelytes, and perſuade them to quit, for this new religion, friends and fortunes, liberty, and ſometimes even life itſelf; nay, what is ſtill more difficult, to pluck up rooted prejudices, and caſt away habitual vices; and to adhere to the inſtructions they had received, with ſuch firmneſs as is never mentioned, without aſtoniſhment, by their unbelieving neighbours; and that theſe doctrines ſhould continually prevail, in oppoſition to the power of the Roman emperors, till half at leaſt of their ſubjects were converted: all this, if the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament were not really performed, muſt be confeſſed to be itſelf miraculous.

There are ſome differences, which deſerve our notice, between theſe ſeveral proofs of

our

our religion. They all depend, in ſome degree, on teſtimonies; and the teſtimonies, which are very ſtrong in themſelves, receive additional force from their variety. In our firſt proof, the witneſſes are chiefly *Chriſtians*. In the difficult part of the ſecond, we have alſo the conſent of the ancient, and of many among the modern, *Jews*.—The facts referred to in the third, were all cited from *Heathen* authors.—The firſt of theſe methods of reaſoning would probably have the greateſt influence; whilſt the miraculous power continued, with all men, and afterwards with inquiſitive and rational Heathens. The ſecond, with learned Jews. The laſt, after a century or two, with many of the people, both Jews and Heathens, who would be rather guided by the number and character of Believers, than convinced by curious arguments, or by the hiſtory of remote facts.—The prophecies connect Chriſtianity with Judaiſm. The miracles, and the wonderful ſucceſs of its preachers, connect it with natural religion, and with our notions of a Moral Governor,

of

of the world. And thus, all the revelations, which God has made of himſelf, firſt by the law of nature, then by Moſes and the prophets, and laſtly by Jeſus Chriſt, are united, and each explains and ratifies the others.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIII.

INTEMPERANCE in the GRATIFICATION of our APPETITES not conſiſtent with SPIRITUAL IMPROVEMENT.

Preached on WHITSUNDAY.

EPHESIANS, v. 18.

Be not drunk with wine, wherein is exceſs; but be filled with the ſpirit.

THOUGH this verſe ſeems to contain only two ſhort precepts of morality and religion; one of which every man, and the other every Chriſtian, ought to underſtand and obſerve: yet none of the Commentators have, I think, rightly explained it. Neither the

the reaſon of the former precept, nor the meaning of the latter, nor the connexion of them with each other, is made ſufficiently clear. If the Apoſtle be ſuppoſed to caution us againſt drunkenneſs, *becauſe* it is exceſs; it muſt be acknowledged, that he gives us, inſtead of a reaſon, one of thoſe trifling propoſitions, which convey no inſtruction. And when he enjoins us to *be filled with the Spirit*, it will be natural to inquire, *How* are we to follow this direction? Is the matter within our own power? Is not the Spirit the free, the proper, gift of God? And if theſe difficulties be removed, and it appear, that the Apoſtle's reaſon is pertinent, and his advice practicable, yet it may ſtill be demanded, what connexion is there between theſe two precepts? Why are matters, ſo different in their nature, ſo cloſely *united*? United in ſuch a manner as ſeems to import, that, if we tranſgreſs one of theſe rules, it will not be poſſible for us to obſerve the other. The anſwers to theſe inquiries will afford ſubjects for your meditation, which perhaps may be neither uſeleſs, nor unſuitable to the preſent ſolemnity.

Our firſt difficulty ariſes from the word ἀσωτία, here rendered *exceſs*. St. Paul was not accuſtomed to write with ſo little meaning as appears in this tranſlation. Many paſſages in his Epiſtles are obſcure; but the obſcurity proceeds from an abundance, not from a want, of matter. His ideas ſeem ſometimes to crowd upon him faſter than he can expreſs them with regularity or eaſe. But we find not in his writings any of thoſe wiredrawn diſcourſes, in which a multitude of words is employed to conceal a deficiency of ſenſe. It is therefore reaſonable to believe, that the word here uſed has a proper meaning, and it well becomes us to ſearch for it. Its moſt uſual acceptation, for waſte, riot, or extravagance, does not agree with this paſſage. Some indeed of theſe faults often accompany the other. But they are not uſually the principal reaſons againſt it. Nor has the obſervation, thus underſtood, any evident connexion with what precedes or follows it. But there is another uſe of the word: which, though leſs common, would naturally occur to the Apoſtle; and which makes his ſentiment clear and important and connected.

St.

St. Paul was a Roman Citizen, and frequently borrowed both his notions and expreſſions from the laws of his country *. Now when a man's follies or vices were ſuch as rendered him either wholly inattentive to his own affairs, or incapable of conducting them, the Roman laws treated him as an infant or an idiot, and the Prætor appointed him a guardian with full authority to manage all buſineſs for him, and without whoſe conſent his actions had no legal efficacy. The Latin word by which the lawyers denoted a perſon of this character, was *prodigus*; and they who have written the Roman hiſtory in Greek, or have tranſlated the Roman laws into that language, conſtantly uſe for the perſon ἄσωτος, and for the character ἀσωτία. Its full import therefore is, ſuch a mixture of wickedneſs and folly, as makes a man unfit to conduct himſelf, and requires him to be put under the guidance and authority of another. And in this technical ſenſe, which, in the languages of people not accuſtomed to the ſame laws, cannot be expreſſed by any ſingle word, the term ſeems to be applied by

* See Diſcourſe XV.

the Apoſtle. An immoderate uſe of wine, he would ſay, deſtroys a man's underſtanding, degrades him from the rank of reaſonable Beings, and deprives him of the valuable privilege of *ſelf-government*. And theſe obſervations he might well make, whether he was conſidering the immediate effects of intemperance, or its more remote but more laſting influence upon the underſtanding and the paſſions. The paſſions become more violent by the unreſtrained exerciſe of them, which wine occaſions; whilſt the underſtanding, deſigned by nature to controul them, is gradually enfeebled, and all the rational faculties deſtroyed.

The ſecond precept in the text ſeems alſo to want explanation. In the language of Scripture, to be *filled with the Spirit*, means to poſſeſs ſuch excellent powers and qualities as are communicated by the Holy Ghoſt. And his aſſiſtance is deſcribed by the Sacred writers as being of two kinds: one peculiar and temporary and limited, imparted to thoſe only whom God had choſen for the meſſengers of his Goſpel, and not even to them but at certain ſeaſons, and for certain purpoſes;

poſes; the other general, and perpetual, and extending to all our wants, *the promiſe* of which (as St. Peter * told ſome of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity) was unto *them and to their children, and to all that* were *afar off*, their ſucceſſors however remote, *even* to *as many as the Lord their God ſhould call*. The effects of the extraordinary influence of the Spirit were immediate and aſtoniſhing; they who received it being preſently enabled either to heal diſeaſes, or to ſpeak new languages, or to foretell future events, or to perform other miraculous works. The fruits of his ordinary aſſiſtance are more gradual and natural, being good diſpoſitions of the head and heart, ſuch as faith, hope, joy, wiſdom, charity, temperance, devotion. The former † were like the *wind*, of which we know not *whence it cometh* or *whither it goeth*, ſudden, irreſiſtible, not to be excited or directed by human ſtrength or ſkill. The latter are alſo the gifts of God, but given, like our food and raiment, as the encouragements and rewards of our induſtry. "In his ordinary "operations the Spirit works with us, not

* Acts xi. 39. † John iii. 8.

" for us; offers us his aſſiſtance, but forces " it not upon us; accompanies, not ex- " cludes, our endeavours." Of this aſſiſtance, beſtowed on all who take the proper methods to obtain it, is the Apoſtle ſpeaking, when he charges the Epheſians to *be filled with the Spirit*. It was unneceſſary for him to explain here, what particular graces he intended chiefly to recommend to them. Several times in this ſhort epiſtle he had deſcribed the Spirit of God under one and the ſame character. He had ſtyled him * *the Spirit of wiſdom and revelation*, who teaches men *wiſdom and prudence* †, who ‡ *ſtrengthens* their *faith*, enables them *to comprehend the love of Chriſt*, and *fills* them *with* the knowledge *of God*. And that the precept we are conſidering relates to this influence of the Spirit in the improvement of our underſtandings, particularly of our religious knowledge, is evident from that exhortation to the purſuit of wiſdom, which introduces it: ‖ *be ye not unwiſe; but underſtanding what the will of the Lord is*.—It was equally unneceſſary for the Apoſtle to inſtruct his converts,

* Eph. i. 17. † i. 18. ‡ iii. 16, 17, 18. ‖ v. 17.

verts, that the ornaments of wiſdom, human or divine, would not ſpring up in their minds without care or culture. His preaching, his writing to them, upon the ſubject of their duty, were ſufficient indications, that the knowledge of it was not to be miraculouſly communicated; but to be learned, in the ordinary methods, by attention to his diſcourſes, by ſtudy of the Scriptures, and by ſuch other means of information, as God's Providence, whether natural or revealed, had appointed.

The laſt inquiry ſuggeſted by the text was, why matters, in appearance, ſo diſtant and incoherent, are brought together. But this appearance vaniſhes, as ſoon as we have diſcovered their true meaning. Their connection with each other, and with the whole paſſage, is cloſe, and every expreſſion pertinent. *Be ye * not unwiſe, but underſtanding what the will of the Lord is: and be not drunk with wine, wherein is exceſs; but be filled with the Spirit, ſpeaking to yourſelves in pſalms and*

* Eph. v. 15.

hymns and ſpiritual ſongs, ſinging, and making melody in your heart, to the Lord: which advice of the apoſtle may be thus paraphraſed. Neglect not to improve your minds by the ſtudy of true wiſdom; *that* eſpecially, which conſiſts in a clear and comprehenſive knowledge of the divine diſcoveries God has made of himſelf, and of the commands he has given to mankind; a ſtudy, which, for its difficulty, its importance, and its influence in practice, requires a cool head, and calm ſpirits. In this ſtudy you cannot hope to ſucceed, unleſs you avoid that intemperance, which weakens all the forces, and ſubverts the government, of the mind; which prevents men from forming any ſteady judgement, or from following it, conſiſtently; bringing them by degrees to the inattention of idiots, or the irreſolution of children. Reduce not yourſelves to this condition, in which you will continually want an earthly guardian, and governor: but implore the aid and protection of that Heavenly Viſitor, who has promiſed to make his abode with them that love God; prepare your whole ſouls for his reception,

reception, by exerting all your faculties in the ſearch of religious wiſdom, and he will improve and enlarge them all; he will give you quicker apprehenſions, clearer judgements, tempers more pliant in learning, and more firm in retaining, divine truths: open your minds to his inſtructions, and he will pour into them the treaſures of wiſdom; he will *fill* them (theſe are St. Paul's own expreſſions) *with* an abundant *knowledge* of the Divine *Will, in all wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding* *. You expect perhaps to find, in intemperance, eaſe and chearfulneſs. But juſt notions of religion will afford you truer comforts, more ſubſtantial joys; the Holy Spirit will breathe into you that heartfelt melody, which will conſtantly enliven your diſpoſition, and be ready, on all proper occaſions, to expreſs itſelf in praiſes and thankſgivings to God.

Such, I conceive, to be the deſign of the whole paſſage. But, concerning this influence of God's Spirit, men have fallen into two miſtakes: which, though founded on

* Col. i. 9.

the ſame falſe principle, are yet oppoſite to each other; and, though oppoſite, are equally dangerous: the one to religion, the other to morals. Some men, virtuous in their conduct, and ſerious in their faith, neither perceiving the operation of the Spirit within themſelves, nor hearing that others, of a ſober and rational piety, pretend to ſuch ſenſations, impute this whole notion to enthuſiaſm, and ſuppoſe, that the promiſes of the Scripture are either miſunderſtood, or extend not to theſe times. Others, having a temper more affected by religious ſubjects, and, being fully convinced, that good Chriſtians, in all ages, may expect the divine aſſiſtance, eaſily fancy that they perceive it, and are very apt to miſtake the ſuggeſtions of a warm imagination, for the dictates of the Holy Spirit. The two errors ſeem to be derived from this one principle, that, whenever our minds are influenced, we cannot be ignorant, by whom, and in what manner, they are influenced; a principle contradictory to conſtant experience. We are perpetually conſcious of changes in our ſentiments and inclinations, without knowing or attending to

the cauſes of thoſe changes. We even proceed to actions, the motives to which eſcape our obſervation. When the origin of any opinion is within our own minds, we frequently do not remark it. When it is without them, we are as frequently unable to diſcover it. The diſpoſitions of thoſe a man converſes with, the ſtudies he is engaged in, the amuſements he follows, imperceptibly alter his ſentiments upon ſubjects, with which they ſeem to have little connexion. The ſtate of his body, every external accident, even the weather, affects his mind more than he can believe, till repeated experience has convinced him. If all theſe trifles can influence us, and if the influence of cauſes ſo obvious is often unnoticed; can it be a queſtion, whether we may not be ſecretly guided by an omnipotent and ſpiritual director? It is equally irrational to conclude, either, becauſe we are not ſenſible of his aſſiſtance, that none is given, or becauſe we rely on God's promiſes, that the aſſiſtance given muſt neceſſarily be perceived. Difficulties of the ſame kind have been the occaſion of ſimilar miſtakes in natural religion.

gion. One of its cleareſt doctrines is, that the Providence of God extends to all his creatures. But, whilſt, among ſome men, the aſſured belief of this great truth turns almoſt every natural event into a divine judgement, and leads them to interpret, always preſumptuouſly, and often abſurdly, the myſteries of God's moral government; by others the truth itſelf is queſtioned, becauſe they cannot diſcern the particular marks of his interpoſition. It is not eaſy to determine, either in the doctrine of Providence or Grace, which is the more arrogant or more dangerous folly; to pretend to *diſcover* God's ſecret counſels, or to *deny* their efficacy. This breaks off ſome of the ſtrongeſt bonds of religion. That faſtens imaginary bonds, which often prove deſtructive to morality. Unleſs men believe, that the Supreme Governor of the world directs all events, that he teaches his ſervants true wiſdom, and conducts them to virtue and happineſs, they will offer him neither prayers nor thanks for theſe important benefits; they will not entertain a juſt ſenſe either of their dependence upon him, or his goodneſs

goodneſs towards them. If, on the contrary, they imagine, that they can penetrate the deſigns of God's providence, or that they feel his ſpirit ſenſibly conducting them, at particular ſeaſons, to particular purpoſes; theſe notices will be thought to releaſe them from all other obligations. And the experience of many ages has ſhewn, that none deviate ſo openly and boldly from the plain high road of moral virtue, as thoſe, who blaſphemouſly pretend to follow the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. He, who is really filled with ſpiritual wiſdom, avoids both theſe errors. He acknowledges, that every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Light; that the ſupport of true religion, both in knowledge and practice, is to be aſcribed to his influence, as much as the preſervation of order and beauty in the natural world to his continual providence; but as we are ignorant how the inſtincts of animals, the powers of vegetation, and even the forces of brute matter are communicated, ſo muſt we be content to be ignorant of the nature and particular effects of the divine illuminations.

illuminations. It is ſufficient for us to underſtand the means of obtaining them. Theſe are, humble prayers to God, ſerious attention to the importance of the bleſſings we aſk, and earneſt endeavours to prepare both our ſouls and bodies for their reception. Some neceſſary parts of this preparation, as we have ſeen, the apoſtle had in view, when he required temperance, and care to improve their underſtandings, of thoſe who would be *filled with the Spirit*. If this Divine Being comes to *make* his *abode* with us, he will expect to find his habitations, according to the deſcription in our Saviour's parable, *empty, ſwept, and garniſhed*; that is, free from any vicious inmates which may diſturb, from any pollutions which may offend, him; and adorned, as far as our natural faculties are able to adorn them, with wiſdom and virtue. Thus may our *bodies* become *the Temples of the Holy Ghoſt*. But whether they ſhall be conſecrated to him, or remain the ſinks of vice and corruption, is the ſubject of our free choice. If there be any difficulty in the determination, we may ſubmit it to the judgment of a ſenſible heathen.

In

In the reign of Alexander Severus, a diſpute aroſe at Rome, between ſome Chriſtians and a company of vintners, about a piece of waſte ground, upon which the Chriſtians wanted to build a church, and the others a tavern. The title was doubtful; the parties obſtinate; the cauſe came on at laſt before the emperor, who, when the grounds of juſtice could not be aſcertained, decided it upon a religious conſideration. Though little acquainted with Chriſtianity, he judged in favour of the Chriſtians. "It is better, ſaid he, "that the ground be employed for "the worſhip of God, in any manner, than "for luxury and exceſs." So did a Heathen determine, even of an unhallowed place. And ſurely a Chriſtian will think it an impious profanation to make that body, a receptacle for wine, which was choſen for a temple for the living God.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIV.

The PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11, 12.

And he ſaid, A certain man had two ſons: And the younger of them ſaid unto his father, Father, give me the portion of goods, that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

AMONG men, ſo little accuſtomed to reaſon upon religious ſubjects, and ſo much prejudiced againſt many of the doctrines, revealed by our Saviour, as his countrymen the Jews were; no method of inſtruction could ſeem to promiſe greater

ſucceſs, than the frequent uſe of parables. Theſe ſhort ſtories would be ſoon conceived and long remembered; and in moſt of them ſome moral and religious truths are ſo plainly *contained*, that they could ſcarce be overlooked even by an ignorant and inattentive people. But ſuch obvious truths are far from being the whole inſtruction contained in them. Theſe are often no more than preludes to the main deſigns; intended only to open the minds of the hearers, and to lead them gradually to thoſe important Chriſtian doctrines, which they were not at firſt able to receive. Matters too high for their mean conceptions were introduced to them in an humble dreſs; but one, which would certainly fall off, as the knowledge of religion advanced, and would then ſuffer the truths to appear in their genuine forms. When therefore our Saviour is ſaid by the Evangeliſt to have ſpoken to the Jews in parables, that ſeeing they might not perceive, and hearing they might not underſtand; it was not from a diſpoſition to diſpenſe his inſtructions penuriouſly: this would have ill ſuited with his repeated declarations, that he came to be

the light of the world: but from the neceſſity of veiling that light before eyes that were not accuſtomed to it, and would turn away from its unuſual brightneſs.

Thus, in the diſcourſe from which my text is taken, our Saviour's principal deſign was, as appears from the connexion of the ſeveral parts, to teach the doctrine of univerſal redemption. But the calling of the Gentiles to the knowledge of the true God, and their admiſſion into the kingdom of the Meſſiah, were things ſo oppoſite to the prejudices, and ſo offenſive to the pride, of the Iſraelites, that they would never have liſtened to a perſon, who, aſſuming the character of a divine meſſenger, had repreſented theſe as the leading points in his commiſſion. Their prejudices were firſt to be removed, before the doctrine could be propoſed openly. It was therefore of neceſſity to be wrapt in ſome parable; and ſuch a parable was choſen, as would anſwer both the purpoſes: would firſt furniſh reflexions the moſt proper to prepare the mind for receiving the myſtery, and to a mind rightly prepared, would infallibly unfold the myſtery itſelf. The hearers of

of the parable, how ignorant ſoever, could not but obſerve its ſtriking circumſtances: the miſeries which the vices of the younger Son bring upon him; the efficacy of his repentance; the willingneſs of his Father to pardon him; the murmurs of his Brother at the kind reception given. And when, by their attention to theſe circumſtances, they had learned to pity the wandering prodigal, and rejoice at his return, to love and admire the benevolence of his Father, and to hear with indignation the unreaſonable complaints of his Brother; they would then be properly qualified to look into the true meaning of the well-feigned tale: and the progreſs of Chriſtianity in every nation would help to open it. They would now conſider the parable, as ſhadowing out God's conduct towards mankind: the younger Son as the emblem of the Heathens, who, having ſeparated themſelves from the great Father of the world, and having loſt or corrupted that portion of religious knowledge which He had given to all his children, were become the ſervants of vice and error; but were now to be reſtored upon their repentance,

and received into the houſehold of God: and the elder Son as repreſenting the Jews, who boaſted that they had long ſerved the true God, repined that others ſhould partake of their privileges, and refuſed to enter into their Father's houſe, the Chriſtian church, when they ſaw that the Gentiles were admitted alſo. They who acknowledged this application of the parable to be proper, could not but confeſs, that all the complaints of the Jews were ſelfiſh and malevolent; and that the divine œconomy was, in this inſtance, like that of the good Father, who went out to a great diſtance to meet his returning Son, and replaced him in his family with expreſſions of more than ordinary pleaſure. And thus the parable before us, like many others in the Goſpel, did not only enable men to *comprehend* the important doctrines it was intended to convey; but afforded alſo conſiderable evidence of their *truth*. For ſuch conduct as nature recommends to good and wiſe men, Fathers or Magiſtrates, may well be expected from the Author of Nature: and that connexion between vice and miſery, repentance and the alleviations of that miſery, which

which individuals experience, might lead them to fear or hope, that there would be found ſomewhat correſponding to it in the more general plan of God's dealings with mankind.

But the advantages of this method of teaching could not all be received by the ſame perſons, or in the ſame age. To the firſt hearers the letter of the parables was familiar, the ſpirit impenetrable. The primary ſenſe would ſupply them with much uſeful knowledge; but the alluſions to the kingdom of God, to the condition of mankind in this world under the Chriſtian diſpenſation, or to the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments in another, were then obſcure. By us, on the contrary, theſe alluſions are often better underſtood, or more carefully obſerved, than the circumſtances of the parable itſelf, or the moral inſtructions or admonitions it ſuggeſts. And indeed the former we may purſue too far, when we fancy ſuch an exact reſemblance between the minute parts of the relation, and the doctrine which it covers, as was never deſigned either in our Saviour's, or in any other the moſt

celebrated apologues: but, in our inquiries for the moral truths contained in them, there is no danger of being miſled by too cloſe an attention to every part. I ſhall therefore here drop the myſterious ſenſe of the parable, and, conſidering it only as a plain domeſtic ſtory, ſhall confine myſelf to ſuch obſervations as may ariſe upon three points; namely, the behaviour of the prodigal, the wretched condition to which his vice reduced him, and the relief he obtained from his Father's kindneſs.

I. 1. Upon the firſt it may be obſerved, that the extravagance of the young man was not of the moſt criminal kind. Several circumſtances mentioned in the parable extenuate, though they do not excuſe, his offence. What he waſted was his own. There does not appear any degree of injuſtice mixed with his folly. His requeſt to his Father is: *Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me*, τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος τῆς οὐσίας, the portion that belongeth to me by the laws. This is the import of the expreſſion in other writers, and the moſt natural interpretation of it here. The reference may be to the laws

laws either of the Jews or of the Romans. For in this they agreed, that they did not allow to the Father of a family the voluntary diſtribution of his whole eſtate; but allotted a certain portion to every ſon. The young man therefore only deſires the immediate poſſeſſion of that fortune, which, according to the uſual courſe of things, muſt after a few years devolve to him. He eaſily obtains his requeſt from an indulgent Father, and is in as much haſte to diſſipate his riches, as he was to poſſeſs them. But, though common reaſon juſtly cenſures his imprudence, the ſame reaſon diſtinguiſhes it from the aggravated fault of thoſe, who run into riotous expences, greater than they are able to pay; or even of thoſe, who, having nothing that is properly their own, laviſh more than is given them willingly by their friends.

2. Another alleviation of the Prodigal's fault is the ſituation, in which he commits it. Having *gathered all together*, he removes, with his Father's conſent, it ſeems (for what purpoſe is not mentioned, perhaps to improve his fortune by trade) into a diſtant country. In that diſtant country, far from all the

friends, whoſe advice or admonitions might have checked his extravagant folly, he conſumes his ſubſtance. His own conſcience indeed ought to have checked it. But yet he is entitled to more lenity in our cenſure, than if he had continued in a courſe of vain and luxurious expence, unmoved by any of thoſe exhortations and remonſtrances to which nature and religion moſt obliged him to attend.

3. And, if the young man's behaviour thus far admits of ſome apology, all that follows deſerves praiſe. *When he has ſpent all*, ſtill ſteady to the principles of juſtice, he is willing to earn bread by any honeſt employment. He becomes a ſervant to a foreigner, and ſubmits to the meaneſt, and then the moſt deteſted, of all offices, that of *feeding ſwine*; animals by the Jewiſh law unclean, and not leſs ſo in the opinions of ſeveral neighbouring nations. Whoever touched them was looked upon as polluted, and with the keepers of them none, even among the dregs of the people, would intermarry or aſſociate themſelves. Yet ſo juſtly ſenſible is the prodigal of his former wickedneſs; ſo ſtrongly

ſtrongly does he feel the ſhame of appearing in his father's preſence: that he rather undertakes this haetful employment, than he will venture to approach him. But, being wholly unable to preſerve his life by any labour, he reſolves at laſt, with the fulleſt and moſt humble confeſſion of his crimes, to implore ſuch a degree of forgiveneſs, that he may be received in the loweſt ſtation in his father's family; conſenting to be placed, even below his ſlaves, in the rank of a *hired ſervant*. It may perhaps not be eaſily reconciled to our ideas, but it ſeems highly probable, that the condition of ſuch a ſervant, when not hired to exerciſe any art or ſkill, but merely to labour, was, in many reſpects, inferior to that of a houſehold ſlave. The maſter's intereſt in the preſervation of the life and health of his ſlave; humanity towards perſons, to whom nature had allotted (that was the doctrine of philoſophers and lawyers in thoſe times) a ſtation below the reſt of mankind; and the affection, which uſually grows up in a man's mind towards thoſe with whom he has a permanent connexion, and frequent intercourſe; would all contri-

bute to mitigate the rigours of domeſtic ſlavery. But, with the hired ſervant, the maſter had no farther concern than to pay him for his ſtated labour; and any tenderneſs to him would be, in a great degree, prevented by the contempt attending this condition, when it was not the moſt common, and rarely befel men, but through their own miſconduct.

II. While we behold a young man, born to better hopes, now looking up with eager deſire to ſuch a ſituation as this; we are led to reflect upon the wretched ſtate, to which his vices have reduced him; a ſtate of extreme want; the more ſeverely felt from a habit of expence, and aggravated by an uncommon and unforeſeen calamity; without any ability to ſupply that want by his own induſtry, or any expectation of relief from the compaſſion of others.—Each of theſe circumſtances is touched in the parable. 1. When, from a life of luxury and riot, he had been forced to deſcend to the meaneſt ſervitude, there ariſes an extraordinary *famine* in the country. Nor ought this to be conſidered as an unnatural

tural aggravation of the miſery which follows extravagance. For, though many prodigals may eſcape this particular calamity, and not fall into times of famine, there are few among them, who ſuffer thoſe evils only, which they had reaſon to expect; few, who do not find, together with the load of afflictions they have brought upon themſelves, ſome foreign and accidental weight to oppreſs them.—2. But the *obvious* conſequences of an expenſive courſe are ſufficiently grievous. The ſame vice, be it intemperance, vanity, or indolence, which ruins a man's fortunes, makes him *unable* to repair them. All, or any of theſe bad habits gradually deſtroy the beſt faculties of his mind, the health and activity of his body. Had not the Prodigal rendered himſelf unfit for any liberal or reputable employment, he would not have undertaken the meaneſt and moſt diſgraceful. Nor would a maſter have choſen any, but the weakeſt and worſt of his ſervants, for an office, which required neither ſtrength nor underſtanding.—3. If in this wretched condition, he met with *no pity*; if, when he is

compelled

compelled, by the ſharpneſs of his hunger, to partake with the ſwine in ſuch food, as can neither ſatisfy his appetite, nor preſerve his life, yet *no man* relieves *him*; this neglect has in it nothing to ſurprize us. The repreſentation is fully juſtified by the common behaviour of mankind. Their compaſſion does not riſe in proportion to the ſufferings which a man brings upon himſelf; or, if they feel the ſentiments of pity, they are reſtrained from the exerciſe of it, by deſpair of ſucceſs. For how can they hope to ſupport *him*, who has voluntarily caſt himſelf to the ground? Or, how make *him* happy with a little, who has been accuſtomed to laviſh much?

III. But there remains ſtill one gleam of comfort for the Prodigal. His father is tender, and benevolent; and might perhaps aſſuage his ſorrows, if he durſt diſcover them unto him. Neceſſity gives him confidence: he makes the trial; and ſucceeds beyond his utmoſt wiſhes. As ſoon as his approach is known, the kind father *runs* to meet him; *falls on his neck, and kiſſes him*; and orders immediately to be brought to him, a *robe*, a *ring*,

a *ring*, and *ſhoes*, the ſeveral parts of dreſs, which diſtinguiſhed a freeman from a ſlave, thereby ſhewing, that he receives him, not as a ſervant, but as a ſon; and he celebrates his return with unuſual feſtivity. But, amidſt all this tenderneſs and joy, the good man forgets not what reaſon and juſtice require of him. Mark what he ſays to his *elder ſon, All that I have is thine.* Imagine not, that your younger brother ſhall again divide the inheritance with you. What belonged to him, he has conſumed. All that I retained is for your uſe. We muſt relieve him from his preſent diſtreſs. We have great reaſon to rejoice at the amendment begun in him, and to encourage him in it, by expreſſions of ſatisfaction and kindneſs. But the chief evidence of this amendment is, that he ſeems content to bear, what I ſhall not attempt to remove by injuring you, the natural puniſhment of his crimes; and to paſs the remainder of his days in poverty and dependence. — In this ſituation, the parable leaves him; plainly intimating to us, that, notwithſtanding all, which may be juſtly alledged in extenuation of his guilt, and all

which

which he has already ſuffered for it, neither the ſincerity of his own repentance, nor the lenity of his father's temper, though they may indeed alleviate his misfortunes, can reſtore him to the condition from which he has fallen.

Let us now take a ſhort view of the principal circumſtances of the Parable, and of the moral inſtructions it was deſigned to convey to us. Firſt, it plainly teaches us, what young perſons eſpecially often want to learn, that vice and folly, though not of the worſt kind, are yet followed by great miſery, even in this life. Thoſe, who have not had much experience are apt to commit faults, without thinking of the natural conſequences to be expected; or without believing that ſuch conſequences will befal them. But their want of attention, or diſbelief, is ſo far from a ſecurity, that it only expoſes them to greater dangers. The young man in the Parable, we may ſuppoſe, did not foreſee his own ruin. Certainly he did not foreſee the extraordinary famine, which followed it, and reduced him to a ſtarving condition.—The next thing, which the Parable

rable teaches us, is, that the evils we bring upon ourſelves are often more laſting than the vices or follies which occaſion them. We may preſently, and without deſign, make ourſelves miſerable; but it requires a long time, and ſtrong reſolutions, to reſtore us to happineſs. The Prodigal, when he was willing to provide for himſelf, was not qualified for any reputable or uſeful employment. He continued to ſuffer, after he ceaſed to be criminal. Nay, even his indulgent father did not attempt to raiſe him from that low eſtate, to which his vices had reduced him.—Laſtly, the behaviour of the father in the parable was plainly intended to give us right conceptions of God's compaſſion towards repenting ſinners, and thereby to encourage us to repentance and reformation. The happy father, running out to his ſon, kiſſing and embracing him, putting the beſt robe upon him, and receiving him with expreſſions of the greateſt joy, is a juſt repreſentation of the loving-kindneſs of God towards penitents. But that father makes a wide difference between the penitent ſon, and him who had never offended. And

there

there is reaſon to believe, that the Great Father of mankind, though he will receive with compaſſion and tenderneſs all thoſe wanderers, who ſhall at laſt return to his houſehold, will yet reſerve the chief manſions (and *in* his *houſe*, as his Son has declared, *are many manſions)* for thoſe dutiful children, who have never departed very far, nor for a long time, from their obedience.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XV.

The NATURE and EXTENT of INSPIRATION,

Illuſtrated from the WRITINGS of St. PAUL.

2 PET. v. 17.

Even as our beloved brother Paul alſo, according to the wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you.

CONCERNING the kind and degree of that wiſdom, which was given to the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity, many difficult queſtions have been propoſed. But how many and how difficult ſoever they be, there are found men hardy enough to offer anſwers to them all, out of their own preconceived

conceived opinions. The old philoſophers, ſtruck with admiration of their eminent maſters and teachers, uſed to ſay, that Jupiter, were he to ſpeak Greek, would imitate the copiouſneſs of Plato, and that the Muſes converſed in the ſweet language of Xenophon. And theſe Chriſtians, no leſs preſumptuous than the Heathens, fancy themſelves able to determine, of what kind the diſcourſes muſt be, which are written in heaven; or what degree of perfection we may expect to find in pieces dictated by the Holy Spirit, or compoſed under his direction. Having formed to themſelves an idea of excellency in writing, they preſume that the method, the ſentiments, and the language, of every inſpired book, muſt perfectly correſpond to it. But they, who agree in the theory, differ widely in the application of it. Some of them, men commendable rather for pious zeal, than for critical judgement or great learning, ſeriouſly maintain, that every part of the Sacred Volume is accurate, elegant, magnificent; that St. Paul, in particular, ſurpaſſes the wiſeſt philoſophers of Greece in abundance and weight of matter,

moſt eloquent of its orators in ſublimity of conception and expreſſion: and this ſuperiority, they ſuppoſe, cannot be diſputed, if the divine origin of the writings be allowed. Whilſt another, of a more refined taſte, who excels no leſs in an eaſy and poliſhed ſtyle, than he is deficient in juſt reaſoning, and ſound theology, repreſents the books of the New Teſtament, as abounding with barbarous idioms, and, upon the whole, ſo awkwardly put together, that they may eaſily be believed to be the productions of illiterate fiſhermen, or mean mechanics; but he cannot perſuade himſelf, that they are, in any degree, ſuitable to our notions of the Supreme Being, or to that abſolute perfection, which is eſſential to his nature, and evidently impreſſed on all his works: and hence he would infer, that the influence of the Holy Spirit, upon the minds of the apoſtles, was occaſional only; and that He did not conſtantly guide their judgement, or inſpire their language. Which of theſe opinions is more remote from the truth, is a queſtion of curioſity rather than of importance: ſince the errors, though they run to

oppoſite concluſions, ſpring from the ſame miſtaken method of reaſoning; and that a method, which, to whatever ſubject it is applied, is fruitful of falſehood. You know very well, into what difficulties and miſtakes men betrayed themſelves in the ſtudy of nature, when, inſtead of laying the foundations of their philoſophy in experience, they formed imaginary ſyſtems, and endeavoured to adapt the works of God to theſe fictions. Nor can it have eſcaped your notice, how vain would be an attempt to deduce from our ideas of God's attributes the plan of his moral government. But when, in theſe two great ſubjects of inquiry, we begin with experiments and obſervations, we ſoon diſcover, both in the natural and moral world, proofs of conſummate wiſdom; and, as our knowledge increaſes, theſe proofs become clearer, and more numerous. In the ſtudy of Revelation, men are liable to the like errors, and may avoid them by the like caution. When, from their own notions of propriety and rectitude, they preſume to decide, what ought to be the means uſed by the Deity, in the communication of his will to mankind; they

they decide queſtions, of which nature has not, in any degree, enabled them to judge: and therefore it is no wonder, that the expectations they form are ſeldom anſwered by the events.—They expect, that the commands of God ſhould be conveyed in none but the cleareſt and moſt elegant of all writings. With equal reaſon, might they ſuppoſe, that every one, originally commiſſioned to preach the Goſpel, muſt have had a fuller and ſweeter voice, a more commanding or more captivating preſence and aſpect, than ever graced any other orator, or forced the attention, and won the affections, of an audience. They expect, that the relations of our Saviour's life and miracles ſhould be the fulleſt and moſt preciſe of all narratives. Juſt as wiſely have others pretended, that the miracles themſelves ought all to have been performed, as ſome indeed were, in the moſt public places, at times of the greateſt concourſe, and with circumſtances that muſt command univerſal aſſent: and as reaſonably might it be alledged, that truths ſo momentous, as the doctrines of Chriſtianity, ought not to have been concealed from any in-

dividual of any age or nation. Thus may men frame numberleſs concluſions about divine revelation, all derived from the ſame kind of principles, every one of which is wholly unſupported, ſome evidently contradicted, by hiſtory and experience.

From theſe alone our inquiries ſhould all begin. By ſearching the Scriptures, we ſhould endeavour to diſcover what have been the methods of Providence, in promulgating and preſerving the knowledge of Chriſtianity. When our reaſoning is thus grounded on facts, not on ſpeculations, we ſhall be in no danger, either of miſtaking human workmanſhip for divine, or of queſtioning the authority of a divine meſſenger, becauſe his habit is of human texture.

As an example of this method of inquiry, I intend to conſider, at preſent, the Epiſtles of St. Paul, and to compare them, as far as the limits of this diſcourſe will allow, with the circumſtances of his education and converſion; from which compariſon, it will appear, I think, indiſputably, that the wiſdom contained in them was given him from above,

above, and very probably, that the ſtyle and compoſition was his own.

But, here let it be firſt obſerved, that every queſtion concerning the inſpiration of Scripture, is a queſtion among Chriſtians only, not between them and unbelievers. Till a man is convinced that our religion came originally from God, he is not concerned to inquire about the conveyance of it to after-ages. And in vain ſhould we attempt to prove to him that the books containing it were inſpired, before he has learned, by whom thoſe books were written, and admits the authors to be credible witneſſes of the facts they relate. We are therefore to preſume, as matters already eſtabliſhed, the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, the genuineneſs of the Scriptures, and the truth of the hiſtory delivered in them.—In this hiſtory, St. Paul appears, at firſt, a warm oppoſer of Chriſtianity, and an open perſecutor of all who profeſſed it. But he is ſuddenly and miraculouſly converted; and changed, at once, from a declared enemy, not, as might have been expected, to a diſciple, but to a teacher of our religion. He does not ſet

himſelf to inquire what this new doctrine is; he *conſers* not with any of thoſe who were apoſtles before him, nor condeſcends to be inſtructed by them in the way of ſalvation: but, before he ſees any one of them, or is known *by face* to the Chriſtians in *Judea*, he aſſumes the character and office of an apoſtle*. But how did he learn the doctrines, which he undertook to teach? Let him anſwer for himſelf. *I certify you, brethren, that the Goſpel which was preached of me, is not after men. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt* †. And again he ſtyles himſelf *an apoſtle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jeſus Chriſt and God the Father* ‡. The doctrines of Chriſtianity, and his appointment to be a preacher of it, were immediately revealed to him; or, as the ſame thing may be otherwiſe expreſſed, his knowledge of them was *inſpired*. For there ſeems to be no intelligible diſtinction between original revelation and inſpiration. That ſupernatural knowledge may be communicated

* Gal. i. 11. † Ver. 16, &c. ‡ Ver. 1.

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to the human mind in various manners, we have no reaſon to deny: but, the manners being all unknown to us, we can diſtinguiſh the gifts of the Spirit only by their effects. When one man was enabled to ſpeak many languages, another to prophecy, another to underſtand myſteries, or the obſcure paſſages of the Old Teſtament, the diverſity of the celeſtial gifts was evident; but, when the knowledge impreſſed was the ſame, we are able to conceive no difference in the impreſſion. Whether we ſay, that the new doctrines were *revealed* or *inſpired*, the meaning is exactly the ſame. They, whoſe underſtandings were furniſhed by the Holy Spirit with more than human knowledge, were *inſpired*. They, who committed ſuch knowledge to writing, made *inſpired books*. To St. Paul, as the account of his conduct upon his converſion, and his own expreſs declarations manifeſtly prove, were the doctrines of Chriſtianity revealed from heaven. This was the *wiſdom*, with which he wrote his Epiſtles. The word *wiſdom* is here uſed by St. Peter, as it is frequently by St. Paul himſelf, for *the knowledge of the Goſpel*.

The other apoſtles likewiſe were *taught of God.* For, though they converſed with our Saviour upon earth, yet he referred them to another inſtructor, whom he would ſend amongſt them; and it was not till after the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, that they fully comprehended their maſter's purpoſe, or the true nature of his religion. If then St. Paul did not learn the Chriſtian ſyſtem from the other apoſtles, nor they from Chriſt, but both he and they received it immediately by the operations of God's Spirit; it is evident, that the doctrines they preached, and the books they wrote, were inſpired.—But the author muſt have had ſome very different notion of inſpiration, if indeed he had any diſtinct notion of it, who has maintained, that its influence on the minds of the apoſtles was not permanent, but tranſitory; adapted only to ſpecial occaſions, and, when theſe were ſerved, preſently ſuſpended or withdrawn. The natural faculties of the human mind enable it to retain the knowledge it has once acquired; eſpecially if that knowledge be clear and important. None could be more important, or more juſtly claim attention,

attention, than the ſuggeſtions of the Holy Spirit; and there is no reaſon to believe, that they were either obſcure in themſelves, or deſtructive of a man's natural faculties. But, as long as the memory retained the divine communications, ſo long did the inſpiration continue: and this, we may preſume, was uſually as long as the apoſtle lived. It muſt indeed be acknowledged (and hence may have ariſen the error we are ſpeaking of) that they who were favoured with the illuminations of the Spirit, did not all *immediately* underſtand the whole ſcheme of Chriſtianity. We find them poſſeſſed of extraordinary gifts, and yet doubting about their ordinary proceeding; not agreeing, either who were to be admitted, or what were the terms of admiſſion, into the Goſpel covenant. For the Holy Ghoſt, imitating the courſe of God's natural Providence, and treating them, firſt like babes, gradually ſupplied their minds with wiſdom, till they came to the full ſtature of a perfect Chriſtian.

But this wiſdom conſiſted not in inticing words of human device. The buſineſs of Chriſtianity was, to inſtruct mankind in the myſteries

myſteries of their redemption; to teach them, what duties God requires of them, and what will be the conſequences of their obedience, or diſobedience, to his commands. And here the graces of human eloquence might ſurely be ſpared. The joys of heaven, and the terrors of future torments, may be allowed to have their influence, though ſet forth in plain and artleſs, or even in rude and uncouth, language. Of whatever kind the language be, it had probably no other ſource than the natural abilities of the writers. The form and character of St. Paul's Epiſtles we ſhall find to have been derived from the circumſtances of his early life. Tarſus, where he was born, and where his parents dwelt, was, in that age, a celebrated ſeat of learning. But, in every ſeat of ancient learning, eloquence held a principal rank; and each ſpecies of it was denominated from the place, where it was moſt practiſed, or in the greateſt perfection. Thus we read of the chaſte Attic eloquence, and of the florid Aſiatic; and Tarſus alſo gave name to its peculiar mode.

mode *. The laſt is indeed the leaſt known; becauſe, from the very nature of it, its productions were not likely to remain. The Tarſic eloquence was employed in ſudden and unpremeditated harangues. And St. Paul, long accuſtomed to compoſitions of this ſort, transferred the ſtyle and manner from ſpeaking to writing. He ſeems to have written his Epiſtles with the force of a ſpeaker; not opening the way to his ſubject, nor advancing gradually towards it, but ruſhing into it. Little ſolicitous about method, he is often drawn from his deſign by the accidental uſe of an expreſſion or a word; and neither when he quits his purpoſe, nor when he returns to it again, does he employ the uſual forms of tranſition. Sometimes he aſſumes another perſon, and introduces a kind of dialogue; in which it is not always eaſy to diſtinguiſh, who is ſpeaking, the objector or anſwerer. Laſtly, he abounds with broken ſentencs, bold figures, and hard, far-fetched, metaphors. Theſe peculiarities,

* Some account of the Schools, Exerciſes, &c. of Tarſus, may be ſeen in Strabo, lib. xiv. See alſo Blackwell's Memoirs of the Court of Auguſtus, vol. ii.

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in the apoſtle's manner, occaſion continual difficulties; and therefore could not eſcape the notice of his commentators; of whom the moſt rational * impute them to ſuch a warm temper, and a mind ſo full of religious knowledge, that his thoughts ſeem to ſtrive for utterance, and his zeal ſuffers him to attend to nothing, but the great myſteries revealed to him. But what they excuſe as the effect of fervent zeal, and plentiful knowledge, either neceſſarily belongs to unprepared diſcourſes, or may be admitted into them without blame. He, who ſpeaks on a ſudden, cannot make thoſe regular approaches to his principal deſign, nor diſpoſe his matter in that exact order, which we find in ſtudied compoſitions. He may ſafely paſs from one ſubject, or one perſon, to another, without the ceremonies, which a reader requires, but which a ſpeaker ſupplies the want of by his countenance, his voice, and every motion of his body. And thoſe agitations of mind, which, in numerous aſſemblies, are mutually excited by the ſpeaker and the hearers, excite

* See Locke's Introd. to his Paraph.

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in their turn, and, in the ſame meaſure, juſtify, a bolder and more vehement kind of oratory.

But St. Paul did not learn at Tarſus the general form only of his writings. He collected there alſo many of their minuter ornaments. In that city was one of the largeſt and moſt celebrated places of exerciſe then in Aſia. And there is no matter, from which the apoſtle borrows his words and images, in greater abundance, than from the public exerciſes. He frequently conſiders the life of a Chriſtian as a race, a wreſtling, or a boxing; the rewards, which good men expect hereafter, he calls the prize, the victor's crown; and, when he exhorts his diſciples to the practice of virtue, he does it uſually in the very ſame terms, in which he would have encouraged the combatants. But many of theſe alluſions, which occur in every page of the original, can hardly be preſerved in a tranſlation.

From the apoſtle's *country*, we deſcend to his *family*, and here we find another ſource of his figurative expreſſions. His parents were Roman citizens; and words or ſentiments,

ſentiments, derived from the laws of Rome, would eaſily creep into their converſation. No wonder then, that their ſon ſometimes uſes forms of ſpeech peculiar to the Roman lawyers; and applies many of the rules of adoption, manumiſſion, and teſtaments, to illuſtrate the counſels of God in our redemption.

Nor are there wanting in St. Paul's ſtyle ſome marks of his *occupation*. To a man employed in making tents, the ideas of camps, arms, armour, warfare, military pay, would be familiar. And he introduces theſe and their concomitants ſo frequently, that his language ſeems to be ſuch as might rather have been expected from a ſoldier, than from one who lived in quiet times, and was a preacher of the Goſpel of peace.

When we obſerve farther, that, being educated in the ſchool of Gamaliel, and inſtructed in all the learning of the Jewiſh doctors, he not only uſes the Hebrew idiom, but has many references to the Hebrew ſcriptures, and the received interpretations of them; there will remain little, that is peculiar, in his manner of writing, of which the origin may

may not be traced to one or other of the beforementioned circumſtances.

But now, if any man ſhall ſay (and ſomething like it, I believe, has been ſaid) that the Holy Spirit, though he ſuggeſted to the ſacred writers, not only the religious wiſdom, with which they abound, but every ſentence and word they delivered, yet directed them in ſuch a manner as to leave to each his own peculiar ſtyle, and that very form and method of teaching, to which his natural genius, or his education, would have inclined him; ſuch an opinion differs but little from his, who ſhould tell us, that God, by a miraculous exertion of his power, had made the winter winds to blow, or the vernal ſhowers to deſcend: which may indeed have been ſometimes true, but never can be proved. And could it be proved, that the Holy Scriptures were thus dictated, it does not appear, that any important concluſions would be deducible from it. That which is important, is alſo clear; that, whatever be thought of the colouring, the ſubſtance of theſe writings was from heaven.

DISCOURSE XVI.

The DIVERSITY of CHARACTER belonging to different PERIODS of LIFE.

1 COR. xiii. 11.

When I was a child, I ſpake as a child, I underſtood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childiſh things.

YOU may perhaps remember a remarkable paſſage in that work of Xenophon, in which he delineates the life and character of a Philoſophic Prince. Cyrus was going out of Perſia into Media, and was now approaching the confines of the two kingdoms; when he ſtopt with his attendants, and, turning round, took a ſolemn leave of the deities, whom

whom he ſuppoſed to preſide over his native country, and then immediately entering the other kingdom, he committed himſelf to the protection and guidance of its tutelary gods. The ceremony was decent; as correſponding to the notions then entertained of a number of gods, each the guardian and governor of a diſtinct region: and it may afford an uſeful leſſon to thoſe who are juſt paſſing from childhood to manhood; teaching them to attend to the different laws, which nature has appointed for theſe different ages; to conſider themſelves as diſmiſſed by the laws of the former age, and to ſubmit with reverence and chearfulneſs to thoſe of the latter. But, what might perhaps have been ſuggeſted by the philoſopher, is more plainly and diſtinctly repreſented by the apoſtle. *When I was a child, I ſpake as a child, I underſtood as a child, I thought as a child.* This ſentence may ſeem not very happily rendered by our tranſlators. They do not uſually paraphraſe: and the diſtinction expreſſed by the ſingle words *underſtood* and *thought*, is leſs obvious than in the original, where we may conceive St. Paul to ſay, I

ſpake as a child; I had the wiſhes, the taſtes, the enjoyments of a child; I judged and reaſoned like a child *. And we cannot get a clearer view of the diverſity of character belonging to each period of life, than by ſearching for the ſeveral marks here alluded to, in the *ſpeech*, the *inclinations*, and the *judgement*. This diviſion will furniſh a method for my diſcourſe, which ſhall be wholly employed in adviſing you to *put away childiſh things*.

I. The apoſtle, by placing the characteriſtic of childhood in the *ſpeech*, may poſſibly be underſtood to intimate, that a child ſpeaks *before* he thinks. Whether this be here particularly intended, or not; it is certainly a fault very obſervable, in ſuch children as are not reſtrained, but very unbecoming and inconvenient in men. We readily and fully excuſe a child, who ſpeaks without care or thought. Gaiety and inattention are

* Alius ſermo, alia *ſtudia*, alii rerum conceptus. Grot. in loc. See alſo Rom. viii. 5, &c. Phil. iii. 19. Col. iii. 2.

The words in the original are, ὡς νήπιος ἐλάλουν, ὡς νήπιος ΕΦΡΟΝΟΥΝ, ὡς νήπιος ἐλογιζόμην.

natural

natural to his age; and neither the ſubject, nor the matter of his prate, can be important. He talks of trifles only, and as they appear to his puerile conception. But, when the mind is employed upon many ſubjects, the ſpeech will of courſe be deliberate; ſome degree of ſlowneſs and gravity will ſtill prevail in it; and a greater degree, when the points under conſideration are more difficult or more intereſting. A mature underſtanding has conſtant, gentle, exerciſe in the government of the tongue; and either remiſſneſs on the one hand, or eagerneſs on the other, will certainly betray itſelf in the diſcourſe. Faults of theſe oppoſite kinds are to be found in young men of different diſpoſitions; but both are to be referred to the ſame childiſh folly, of ſpeaking before they think. One of a lively imagination, and a chearful temper, is apt to pour forth, without attention, a multitude of unmeaning words. But, *in the multitude of words, there wanteth not ſin*. It can ſcarce happen, that, amidſt much diſcourſe, thus indiſcreetly and wantonly uttered, nothing ſhould eſcape detrimental or dangerous to the ſpeaker, no-

thing offenſive to modeſt or pious hearers, no groundleſs accuſation, or ſevere cenſure, of others. Some, or all of theſe tranſgreſſions, may commonly be obſerved in him, who talks much, thinks little, and cares not at all. Whilſt a perſon of a graver diſpoſition, whoſe mind is properly engaged in inquiries after knowledge, will often bring inconvenience upon himſelf, in another way; I mean, by too much eagerneſs to ſpeak of matters, which he does not yet fully underſtand: expoſing himſelf to the contempt and ridicule of thoſe, who underſtand them better. But this is not the worſt conſequence of his haſty ſpeeches. For, when the ſubjects of converſation are controverted points of importance, ſuch as thoſe which relate to religion or government, he, who leads the diſcourſe, can hardly avoid taking part with one ſide or the other: from which, though determined by accident, rather than judgement, it may be to himſelf difficult, and may appear to others diſhonourable, to recede. And thus a young man, by declaring opinions before he has well conſidered them, becomes afterwards unable

unable ever to conſider them without prejudice; and his thoughts, which ſhould have governed his ſpeech, are enſlaved by it.

Another part of the character of a child is, that he ſpeaks *all* he thinks. Intending no ill, and ſuſpecting none, he communicates all his ſentiments and deſigns, without reſerve or caution. He believes every one, with whom he converſes, to be his friend: and he is ſeldom miſtaken; almoſt every one wiſhes him well. But the ſame unlimited openneſs is not ſuitable to the tranſactions among men. Their views are often inconſiſtent, their attempts unfriendly to each other. *He* cannot expect any ſucceſs, nor indeed any reputation among them, who has not ſome degree of diſcretion and reſerve, and habitual ſecrecy. Nor is it only in the conduct of buſineſs, and to guard his own intereſts, that a prudent man will be often ſilent. He will not too freely diſcuſs the characters of other men, nor ſpeak too much of himſelf; leſt he incur the reproach, in one caſe, of envy or ill-nature; in the other, of ſelf-conceit or arrogance. Nay, even in converſation upon general topics, or

matters of ſcience, the ſame caution is uſeful: ſince it has been obſerved, that more perſons gain the reputation of wiſdom, by ſelecting prudently from their various thoughts, ſuch as are proper to be declared, than can claim it by any real ſuperiority of their inward conceptions. And ſo much for the *ſpeech*.

II. The next note, by which the apoſtle diſtinguiſhes the characters of a man and a child, is taken from the difference of their *inclinations*.—Thoſe of a child are always governed by trifles. The things, which ſtrike his fancy, which offer him immediate pleaſure, how minute, how momentary ſoever, are the objects of his purſuit. Of the chief enjoyments, which human life affords, he cannot form a notion. Or, if he could, yet theſe enjoyments, being clearly far out of his reach, would not excite his deſires. A ſmall number of ſlight amuſements fill up his capacity for happineſs. He has no wiſh, no taſte, for any thing more important.—But manly prudence includes in it, attention to the different kinds of good; the power of comparing them, with regard both to

to their intenſeneſs and duration; and the habit of reſiſting the allurements of trifling, ſhort-lived, pleaſures; and of being directed by views of greater and more laſting happineſs. He who ſuffers his mind to be continually engaged by mere amuſements, and drawn away by them from every ſerious employment, worthy of a rational being, whether of furniſhing himſelf with uſeful knowledge and virtuous habits at one period of life, or at another of providing for the intereſts of a family, a neighbourhood, or the public; though his years may not be few, nor his amuſements the ſame as in his childhood, is yet in the eye of reaſon ſtill a child: not indeed in innocence, for a conſtant attachment to things of little value is not a little criminal; but in folly and perverſeneſs.

Nor ought we to wonder that a child's inclinations for theſe trifles are vehement; that he catches at them impetuouſly, whenever they fall in his way. All his happineſs is collected in them; all his wiſhes lead to the ſame point. He has no interfering in-

tereſts to divide his thoughts; no oppoſite motives to balance each other, and keep his mind in ſuſpenſe. With theſe ardent deſires, and with no foreſight of any conſequences, which might deter him from gratifying them, he applies all the little powers of his mind and body to gain the object of his preſent inclination. But his endeavours, though earneſt, are not laſting. He ſoon finds, that the pleaſure, which he purſued ſo eagerly, is not ſatisfactory. He waits with impatience, till another object of a ſimilar kind appears, which he is equally earneſt to obtain, which when obtained preſently becomes indifferent or diſguſting, and is in its turn quitted for a new one; till at length ſome friend inſinuates, or experience teaches him, that theſe are not the things in which happineſs conſiſts, and he begins by degrees to reliſh the enjoyments and form the inclinations of a man. When theſe are well formed, they differ, in both the qualities here remarked, from thoſe of a child. They are neither vehement, nor fickle. A man's views of happineſs are not confined to one acquiſition.

acquiſition. The many kinds of good, which he has any hope of poſſeſſing, all ſhare his deſires, and, by thus dividing, ſubject them to control. Amidſt the variety of his wiſhes, whether for near or diſtant proſperity, whether for wealth or power, knowledge or pleaſure, reputation or retirement, each is uſually checked by its opponent, and none of them engroſs his whole attention. The diſappointments too, which every man has experienced, no leſs in the accompliſhment than in the miſcarriage of his deſires, muſt help to abate their force; eſpecially if he obſerves, as he frequently may, that the violence of them itſelf occaſions the diſappointment; ſometimes by raiſing too high expectations, ſometimes by fruſtrating the deſigns it means to advance, and ſometimes by depriving him of other bleſſings greater in value than thoſe he covets ſo earneſtly. Even the beſt endeavours are liable to be thus defeated. The purſuit of Knowledge may be more aſſiduous, than is conſiſtent with the health of the body or the improvement of the mind. And Religion itſelf, when it takes

takes poſſeſſion of our whole thoughts, excluding other uſeful ſubjects, either ſinks to ſuperſtition, or ſoars to enthuſiaſm. On all theſe accounts, the deſires of a wiſe man are moderate. But they are not unſteady. He ſuffers them not to vary with the ſhifting ſcene of preſent gratifications; but keeps them fixed and ſettled by the conſtant view of real happineſs. For, having obſerved the ſeveral paths of human life, ſome ſmooth and flowery, others ſteep and rugged; and having conſidered too, through what regions each of them paſſes, and where it terminates; he makes a deliberate choice: and the wiſeſt choice ſoon becomes the moſt pleaſing. His inclinations are ſteady, becauſe they follow his judgement; whereas thoſe of children, and weak people, lead it.

III. In the *judgement* conſiſts the third great diſtinction between the characters of a man and child. With little experience, and leſs exerciſe of his rational faculties, a *child* cannot have formed for himſelf any principles, on which he may build real knowledge. Whatever general truths firſt gain admiſſion into his mind, muſt be received on the au-

thority of others: not from any defect in education, or from the miſmanagement of Parents and Inſtructors, as ſome have fancied; but from the inſtitution of nature, unalterable by any human care. He muſt of neceſſity learn many truths without the proper evidence of them, which yet he may afterwards by ſlow degrees diſcover. Nor are they the principles of knowledge only, which he receives implicitly. Rules of conduct alſo he gathers from examples, before he is able to underſtand their foundations. But the truths and rules thus learned are not unſuitable to his age. The former, though improperly called knowledge, will yet bring him to it, by exerciſing and ſtrengthening his feeble faculties; and the latter, though fallible and ſometimes deceitful guides, are yet neceſſary to preſerve him from the immediate dangers to which he would otherwiſe be expoſed. But it becomes a *man* to judge and act for himſelf: to examine as a critic, not receive as a diſciple, all the reaſoning propoſed to him; and to direct his conduct by his own judgment, not by a blind ſubmiſſion to examples. He who takes

his

his opinions without inquiry, though from the moſt accurate Philoſopher, has no more real knowledge than the child who takes them from his nurſe. For in ſcience that only is our own, which we have earned by our attention and labour. What is caſt upon us from the ſtores of others, without our claim or merit, loſes its value in paſſing, and cannot enrich us. And he who in the regulation of his life is influenced by foolish faſhions of which he has formed no judgement, or can give no approbation, may be juſtly charged with the negligence or the weakneſs of a child.

It is remarkable, that opinions received upon the ſlighteſt evidence, are often held with the ſtrongeſt confidence. It is alſo remarkable, that thoſe, which are held for a time with ſtrong confidence, are yet reſigned without reluctance. Both theſe apparent inconſiſtencies may be obſerved in the judgments of children, and of ſuch men as think like children. A child's principles, as we have ſeen, are early inſtilled by his teachers. Their authority is the evidence, on which he admits them. But this is the only kind of

of evidence, to which he has been accuſtomed. He has never found any difficulties oppoſed to it. He has never entertained a doubt concerning its force; but has conſidered it always as irreſiſtible. What wonder then, that opinions, thus fixed in the mind, ſhould be miſtaken for knowledge, and ſhould grow by degrees to perfect aſſurance? But this ill-formed aſſurance is eaſily diſſolved. The mind that has not been exerciſed with difficulties cannot withſtand them. Produce but the appearance of a doubt, and you deſtroy its utmoſt confidence. Preſent a new, a contradictory opinion; and it ſhall be admitted on the ſame poor proof, and retained with the ſame poſitive zeal, as the former. Very different is the proceſs of a manly underſtanding; which, before it yields to the poſitions of any ſect or maſter, endeavours to ſurvey them on every part, carefully to weigh the arguments for and againſt every diſputable queſtion, and to proportion its aſſent to the exceſs on that ſide which preponderates. But, becauſe this care and labour cannot be beſtowed on every ſubject, nor employed at

all times, and yet the mind does not patiently withhold its judgements, nor human affairs allow of perpetual delay; a wise man will generally so regulate his assent, as not to exclude farther inquiry. Being accustomed to see things in many different views, he is not hastily convinced that he has seen them in all. He is therefore not peremptory in his determinations, nor unwilling to hear what may be objected to his tenets or practice. The same habit of calm investigation will also prevent mutability in his judgements or counsels. He must often have encountered difficulties in the pursuit of truth and happiness; and must know, that nothing in science is so clear, nothing in manners so important, as to leave no place for doubts. But such doubts cannot affect his steady mind. His deliberate judgements are not shaken by sudden blasts of vain doctrine, nor his settled purposes overruled by the baleful influence of bad examples.

These are the differences generally observed in the behaviour of men and children. But such observations are not universal. Some few, whose years would require us to consider

sider them as children; yet, either by the early maturity of their minds, or by a happy education, are men in understanding, and temper, and prudent conversation: whilst others, through every period of life, continue, where they began, in a state of childhood.

In treating of the distinctions between the two ages, I have not been solicitous to recount them all. Such only have been mentioned, as seemed most proper for your notice. Endeavour therefore to fix them in your memories; and henceforth to maintain a character worthy of the state to which you are now advanced. It has been shewn to consist chiefly, in not speaking before you have thought; and in not speaking all your thoughts: in restraining your appetites for trifling and transient pleasures, and strengthening your desires of those attainments which will produce real and durable happiness; and in keeping even these useful and laudable desires under such government, that they may be neither vehement, nor wavering: in not relying for your progress in science or your measures in life upon authority or examples, but forming for yourselves just principles of thought and action, and reasoning from them

ſedately and carefully; not with that fixt aſſurance, which would exclude all improvements of your knowledge or conduct, but with ſuch a firm and manly confidence, as may ſecure you againſt the dangerous attacks of falſe reaſoners or wicked leaders. And if you thus increaſe in Wiſdom as in Age, like the Great Pattern of all Excellence, which our religion ſets before us, you will, like Him alſo, *increaſe in favour with God and man.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE XVII.

On Public Virtue.

Preached before the University, Nov. 5, 1765.

1 Pet. ii. part of ver. 17.

Love the Brotherhood.

LOVE to each other is the characteriſtic, by which our Saviour tell us *his* diſciples are to be diſtinguiſhed. And we find, through the whole New Teſtament, that the converts to his religion were conſtantly exhorted to treat all men with decency and reſpect, but to *love their brethren.* Their agreement in the ſame faith; their obedience to the ſame Maſter; their common intereſt;

 their

their common ſufferings; their want of mutual aſſiſtance, to lighten thoſe ſufferings, to ſtrengthen that intereſt, to confirm each other in faith and obedience; were all ſtrong cords of affection to their fellow Chriſtians. Had they been farther ſeparated from the heathen world, and united under one civil government, and had that government been conſtituted on ſuch principles of liberty, that all or many of them might have had ſome influence in it, ſome power of promoting the general welfare; theſe would have been additional bonds of love, and the peculiar regard, which they were taught to ſhew to their *fellow Chriſtians*, had then been directed to their *fellow citizens*. We might then have expected to find in the writings of the Apoſtles as warm exhortations to *love our country*, as high praiſes of public virtue, as in any Greek panegyriſt, or among the boaſts of the arrogant Roman.

It is agreeable to nature and reaſon, that we ſhould cultivate in ourſelves thoſe affections, which we are able to gratify. We love *them* moſt, who are neareſt to us, to whom it is in our power to do the greateſt good;

good; our families, relations, friends. They too, who are aſſociated with us under the ſame government, are placed within the reach of our beneficence: our affections correſpond to our powers, and we love our countrymen. But the Apoſtles were too well acquainted with the human mind, to recommend ſuch affections, as the condition of their diſciples would not ſuffer them to exerciſe; and to preach to ſlaves of public virtue. Our ſituation is in this reſpect much happier than that of the firſt Chriſtians; and when *we* read in the Scriptures this precept, *love your brethren*, we may well underſtand it, *love your country*. For though we may wiſh happineſs to the whole Chriſtian world; yet, towards the greateſt part of it, it can be but a fruitleſs wiſh; which the ſenſe of its inefficacy muſt render cold and languid. But our ſtations enable, and our obligations require us, to labour and contend for the proſperity of our country, and for the common good of all who are united with us in the ſame civil and religious ſocieties. Permit me therefore to bring to your thoughts ſome of the praiſes due to this virtue; whilſt we are

commemorating events, which will ſupply abundant proofs of its uſefulneſs and excellence.

It has been ſometimes ſaid, that in the preſent age, diſtinguiſhed by many private virtues, the love of our country is no more. Perhaps the complaint has no other origin, than that the ſharper trials of it are taken away. But this, which conceals it from the careleſs obſerver, diſcovers to men of more attention, that it every where abounds. Perſecution, oppreſſion, and ſeverity, are baniſhed, either by the wiſdom of our laws, or the mildneſs of our manners. Humanity and civility are ſpread through the land. The love of liberty, which among Britons is cloſely connected with the love of their country, watches, with a jealous eye, the moſt minute deviations from the rules of our excellent conſtitution; and promiſes to tranſmit it unimpaired to our poſterity. We owe it to the virtues of our anceſtors; and, as long as we retain thoſe virtues, we ſhall preſerve it for our children.

The importance of them to the public happineſs will fully appear, if we look back ſome ages,

ages, and behold the Engliſh nation the moſt abject minions of ſuperſtition: tamely yielding to an uſurped authority, what no lawful governor can claim, the dominion of their minds; drudging under the burthen of penances, or bribing the infallible Church with that ſubſtance, which ſhould have been the ſupport of their families, and the bleſſing of their poſterity: even in a literal ſenſe performing that hideous expiation, by which men gave the fruit of their bodies for the ſin of their ſouls; inaſmuch as they devoted their ſons and daughters to cells and ſolitudes, where they became unhappy in themſelves, and uſeleſs to the world. Or, if we bring our thoughts lower down, we ſhall perceive, that the removal of this foreign yoke, on which, in the conteſts between the king and people, the balance had often hung, gave our monarchs ſuch an exceſs of power, as long threatened a change of our legal government for perfect deſpotiſm. And what relieved us from theſe miſeries and theſe dangers, but the patriot ſpirit of our countrymen, their generous concern for the common good, for the ſecurity of the preſent and

future ages? Had not the reformers of religion, influenced by a ſenſe of their duty to God and man, reſolved to deliver out of darkneſs and error their deluded brethren, we might now perhaps have been groaning under the tyranny of an inquiſition. Had not the danger of loſing the eſtabliſhed religion and laws animated ſome of the laſt age with a zeal which deſpiſed all other dangers; inſtead of living under a well-conſtituted government, mild and regular beyond the example of any age or kingdom, we ſhould either have been ſubject to an arbitrary and illegal dominion at home, or, which is more probable, have long ago ſubmitted, with all the nations round us, to thoſe powerful enemies, who for a century paſt have been attempting to enſlave the world. And what other human bleſſings can be compared with that, which is the ſecurity and preſervation of them all, the liberty of *laws*? What other, except that, which ſecures to us more than human bleſſings, the liberty of *religion*? What praiſe and eſteem, and veneration, are due to thoſe, who obtained them for us!

And

And let it not be imagined that this merit is confined to the great. Every Briton may deſerve well of his country. A ſpark of public virtue, ſcarce diſcerned, among men in obſcure ſtations, will ſometimes ſpread, and enlighten the whole kingdom. Who were the firſt, the chief, inſtruments of the Reformation? Poor begging ſcholars. Who opened the way for the Revolution? The clergy. The univerſities. Nay, a ſingle college of honeſt and reſolute men carried more force than an army.

Nor is it only in times of confuſion, that our public conduct is important. In quiet ſeaſons, ſuch as thoſe in which we have the happineſs to live, this virtue aſſumes a more amiable form; and ſhews itſelf in ſubmiſſion to magiſtrates, in honour to the king, in an uniform and ſteady obedience to the laws, in a faithful exerciſe of the truſts committed to us by the conſtitution, in a conſtant endeavour to advance and ſupport in authority good men, true friends to religion and liberty. And the performance or neglect of this duty, by a private man, on a ſingle occaſion, and that perhaps unnoticed, may riſe higher

in the account of univerſal happineſs or miſery, than all the other actions of his life. His good offices are uſually confined within the ſmall circle of his domeſtics and neighbours. But a right conduct towards the public conveys bleſſings to whole nations and diſtant ages. On the other hand, the greateſt miſchiefs are political miſchiefs. When men, by cabals and clamours, draw the nation into an unjuſt or unneceſſary war, is each of them guilty of leſs than robbery and murder? And yet even theſe particular and temporary evils are not to be compared with the wide and laſting grievances of an eſtabliſhed tyranny. And of this our danger was much increaſed by pernicious doctrine, taught in times of eaſe and ſecurity, which the teachers themſelves were afterwards too honeſt to practiſe.

But the good effects of public virtue are often remote, and always uncertain. And theſe conſiderations make it the more difficult and the more meritorious. When a man perceives that great benefits will immediately flow from his uncorrupt conduct, a moderate degree of goodneſs will engage him in it. But it requires uncommon ſpirit and reſolution

reſolution to plant and nouriſh thoſe tender ſhoots of public happineſs, which every little ſtorm is able to deſtroy; and which muſt grow for ages, before their ſpreading branches will ſhade the nation. And yet this is uſually the whole, that the moſt ſteady patriotiſm can effect. Great works can ſeldom be accompliſhed at once. The minds of men are to be prepared for them; favourable ſeaſons to be watched. And he who can look forward to remote times for the completion of his toils, not diſcouraged by that variety of incidents, which may deſtroy the unfiniſhed fabric, muſt be poſſeſſed of many noble qualities; of great patience and perſeverance, of an intrepid courage, of an unaffected and diſintereſted complacence in acts of kindneſs. To a mind thus diſpoſed the pleaſure of beholding, even at a diſtance, and promoting univerſal peace and order will well repay its generous labours.

But whatever *inward* pleaſure the true patriot may enjoy, *without* he is uſually ſurrounded by dangers and inevitable miſeries. When he oppoſes authority, either eſtabliſhed by long uſage or uſurped by ſtrong hands, the perils are evident. The men

poſſeſſed of power are his declared enemies: whilſt the bulk of the people attend but little to remote conſequences. Attacked by one party, unaſſiſted by the other, what can an honeſt man expect, but oppreſſion, and every imaginable evil? They who firſt dared to preach in this kingdom againſt the errors of Rome, and the corruption of her clergy, and to ſupport the cauſe of morality and evangelical truth, expoſed themſelves to baniſhment, to priſons, to flames. And when they had opened the ſcriptures, and with them the underſtandings of the people, and had at length obtained the protection of government; even this protection afforded them no ſecurity. Superſtition had taught her ſons to ſupport her falling empire by both treachery and violence; and they practiſed both with ſuch deſperate hardineſs, that, compared with *their* attempts, the boldeſt enterprizes of temporal ambition may ſeem almoſt innocent. When their hopes were revived at a later period, thoſe honeſt patriots, who invited the prince of Orange to their defence, or joined him ſoon after his arrival, were not ignorant, that, if one hazardous

zardous attack ſhould fail of ſucceſs, their lives and fortunes muſt depend on the tenderneſs of a bigot, and the compaſſion of a coward. Thus does the firm patriot purſue the track of public happineſs, unſhaken by the ſtorms and tempeſts that beat around him.

It is not indeed the lot of every man, who loves his country, to be expoſed to theſe extreme dangers. But ſome dangers and diſcouragements always attend the practice of this virtue. Even in the beſt times there will be differences of judgement, conteſts for power, and deſigns not perfectly conſiſtent with the general good. And he, whoſe ſituation obliges him frequently to take a part in the public diviſions, muſt be very fortunate, if his ſentiments conſtantly coincide with his intereſt; or very generous, if he never purſues his intereſt in contradiction to his ſentiments.

But they are not only *real* intereſts, which are oppoſed to the love of our country. Many, which are *imaginary*, rank themſelves on the ſame ſide. The extravagant deſire of riches, of power, of pre-eminence, and the uneaſineſs ariſing from the diſappointment of

theſe deſires are equally its enemies. And we may be confident, that he, who ſteadily perſiſts in his duty to the public, is not much governed by avarice or ambition, by pride or reſentment.

Since then the love of our country denotes a freedom from ſo many great vices, and the poſſeſſion of ſo many excellent virtues; ſince it is ſo difficult in the practice, and ſo important in the conſequences: it may ſeem an extraordinary hardſhip, that it meets not uſually with the approbation liberally beſtowed on many inferior qualities. Whether it be, that the mixture of motives, which are eaſily ſpread over a man's public conduct, prevents us from diſcerning its true colour; or that the beneficial effects are either ſo remote, or the connexion of them with their cauſes ſo refined, as to eſcape common obſervation; or that the falſe pretences often made to this virtue, raiſe clouds of ſuſpicion before every claim: whatever be the reaſon, the fact is certain, that it ſeldom obtains ſuch admiration as its native luſtre might demand. Make the love of our country part of a character you would extol,

tol, and it is well if your encomium be not treated with contempt. But this contempt ought to raiſe it higher in our eſteem. *He* merits the greateſt praiſe, who, whilſt he merits, has no expectation of receiving it. And, if he receives it not in his own time, yet, after-ages, ſenſible of the kind legacies he has left them, and diſtinguiſhing the real friend of mankind from the intereſted or ambitious hypocrite, will own and warrant his title.

A ſet of ſuch hypocrites in the laſt century had very nearly entailed ſlavery upon us. For, to what cauſe can we impute the inactivity of the people during the reign of the ſecond Charles, and the quiet ſurrender of three kingdoms to the extravagant bigotry of his ſucceſſor; unleſs to this, that, in the preceding wars, ſome bad men, catching hold of that authority which the true lovers of liberty had gained among the people, and covering their wicked deſigns with a feigned or real enthuſiaſm, had brought diſgrace upon the very name of patriot? Tired with the efforts it had exerted, and diſpirited by the

the fatal cataſtrophe, the genius of Britain ſeemed to have ſunk into a lethargy, from which it was with difficulty awakened by the fury of its foes.

But there is another ſort of men, who diſgrace public virtue, as much as the falſe pretenders to it; men equally wicked, and more fooliſh: who, in their writings and converſation, maintain, that this boaſted virtue is but an empty name; that a wiſe man ſhould take care of himſelf only; or, if he regard his private connexions, ſhould conſider himſelf as unconnected with the public. And this falſe doctrine they ground on as falſe a fact: that in this nation the common ties are diſſolved, that no man has any concern for his country; but, whatever diſguiſes he may put on, each purſues a ſeparate intereſt, and ſells, though in different forms, and with different ſucceſs, that ſhare of power, with which the community has entruſted him. It is not true. The thought is a reproach to human nature. Let it fall on thoſe only, who confeſs, that they know no exception to it.

But

But let us turn our thoughts from theſe men, and view the nobleſt ſpectacle the world affords; a true lover of his country, who, for the ſake of its eſſential intereſts, ſubjects himſelf to oppreſſion and reproach, and, in imitation of his great Maſter, endures hardſhips, deſpiſes ſhame, and enjoys a diſtant proſpect of the glorious advantages he is labouring to procure for the preſent, and tranſmit to future ages. Or let us contemplate one acting in a lower ſphere, who, uninfluenced by fear or hope, aiming only at the general good, performs with integrity all thoſe truſts, which either the ſtate, or any leſs ſociety, has committed to him. He too will be entitled to our warmeſt approbation, if we can diſcern his ſentiments and motives. But, whether we can diſcern them or not, he will certainly obtain, what are of infinitely more value, the approbation of his own conſcience, and the approbation of his Maker.

The great Father of nature cannot but be favourable to views thus benignant, thus directly pointed to the advantage of his creatures. And it were ingratitude not to aſcribe

to

to him the two ſignal preſervations of our country, which gave occaſion to the preſent ſolemnity. We aſcribe them to him on this foundation, that they were accompliſhed in conformity to his will for the protection of truth and juſtice. The heroes of antiquity were proud to have their conqueſts imputed to the patronage of ſome tutelary deity, whoſe favor they conſidered as a ſure mark of their merit. But it is more reaſonable, as well as more pious, to reverſe the argument; and then only to claim the ſuccour of heaven, when the cauſe, in which we have proſpered, is worthy of that ſuccour. And if we may preſume to judge, that any cauſe is worthy of it, none appears more ſo, than the ſupport of liberty, civil and religious. It is therefore with propriety that, in the public ſervice of this day, we adore the wiſdom and juſtice of that Providence, which interpoſed in our extreme dangers, and protected our religion and laws. But it were a profane mockery of God to thank him for theſe bleſſings, and not endeavour ourſelves to preſerve them; to acknowledge that they have obtained his ſpecial favor and protection, and not think them

them worthy of our regard. He who is ſincere in theſe acknowledgements will perceive, that gratitude to God, as well as love to men, requires his attention to the duties of a good citizen and a good ſubject; for to enjoy and to perpetuate the gifts of heaven is to thank the giver.

THREE CHARGES

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY of the ARCHDEACONRY of COLCHESTER,

In the YEARS 1769, 1771, and 1772.

CHARGE I.

On Religious Controversies.

My Reverend Brethren,

THEY who repreſent human learning as uncertain in itſelf, and pernicious in its conſequences, have been able to ſupport their opinion by no arguments, which carry with them more appearance of ſolidity, than thoſe they have taken from the diſagreements of philoſophers with each other. Theſe, they tell us, are ſo numerous and glaring, even on ſubjects the moſt open to examination, that philoſophy, which profeſſes itſelf the diſcoverer of truth, ought rather to be looked upon as the parent of error. And it would have been well, if the occaſion of this reproach had been confined to the leſs intereſting parts of ſcience. But it has ſpread itſelf through all its branches; even thoſe, which

are of the higheſt importance both to our preſent and future happineſs. Morals and religion, we know, have been wantonly made the themes of many diſcordant paradoxes; and theſe have given birth to the moſt violent conteſts.

Soon after the firſt appearance of Chriſtianity, its followers divided themſelves into various ſects, and engaged in continual controverſies. As we carry our view lower, their diſputes increaſed upon us. Every queſtion produced a number of new opinions, and almoſt every opinion conſtituted a new party. And both the one and the other became ſo many, that he among us would be eſteemed no mean divine, who ſhould be able to enumerate all the diſtinct ſects of Chriſtians, and to explain the doctrines which each of them has maintained.

1. The miſchiefs of theſe diſputes are obvious. Among the enemies of our religion they are often the pretended, ſometimes the real, occaſion of infidelity. Among ſuch Chriſtians as want either abilities or inclination to examine theſe intricate queſtions, they give offence to thoſe who are firm in the faith;

faith; and, in the weaker, they create doubts and perplexity concerning points of the greateſt moment. But the maſters of the polemic art are themſelves the chief ſufferers by it: their paſſions are inflamed, their prejudices heightened; religion ſeems to paſs with them rather for a matter of curioſity than practice; and a zeal for opinions ſupplies the place of mutual forbearance and charity. To theſe may be added miſchiefs, which equally affect all perſons and parties; the breaches of our civil peace, the private animoſities and open perſecutions, which have often ariſen from religious controverſies. Such a number of evils, and thoſe ſo malignant, might incline us to condemn, without heſitation, all theſe controverſies, as pernicious to religion, and dangerous to the preſent welfare of mankind.

2. But examine them in another light, and they appear exceedingly beneficial. To them principally are we indebted for full views of the evidences, and clear explanations of the doctrines, of Chriſtianity. When the city is in ſecurity, the watchman ſlumbers. When an univerſal agreement removes all apprehenſions of danger to religion, its

guardians are often inattentive or indolent. Some oppoſition is neceſſary to rouſe their ſpirits, ſome difficulties to engage their induſtry. Few inquire, where all aſſent. But aſſent without inquiry is very different from that rational belief, which is founded on information and conviction. And the inquiry is never ſo diligent, the information ſo full, the conviction ſo ſteady, as when the ſubject is laid open by a free debate. Truth always appears in the greateſt luſtre, when its adverſaries have caſt a ſhade around it. And, if the objections of infidels have called forth the beſt defences of religion, the errors of Chriſtians have produced the beſt explications of it. Whilſt its doctrines are variouſly interpreted, every interpretation is curiouſly examined. Thus a ſtrict ſearch into the genuine ſenſe of Holy Writ has ariſen from our diviſions and conteſts. Negligence and folly may ſometimes have admitted, and authority have confirmed, opinions not well founded. And which of us would be able, when ſingle and unaſſiſted, to break off the fetters of riveted ſuperſtition? How few will venture, when calm and unmoved,

moved, to oppoſe popular and eſtabliſhed errors? Reflexion and ſtudy will ſcarce furniſh a man with ſufficient ſtrength of judgement. Zeal for truth, even the moſt important truth, will ſcarce inſpire him with ſufficient courage. But that, which is beyond the ſtrength of a ſingle inquirer, may yet ſubmit to the united labours of a party. And that, which in his cooler hours he dares not attempt, he may nevertheleſs execute, when warmed by oppoſition and animated by a proſpect of victory. *Proteſtants*, at leaſt, have reaſon to acknowledge the beneficial tendency of religious controverſies. Had not a freedom of debate extended itſelf to every ſubject, we might probably have been, at this day, as little acquainted with the evidences or principles of Chriſtianity, as our anceſtors were before the reformation; or as many now are, who have devoted themſelves to what *they* call religion in the monaſteries of Italy and Portugal. Our faith, perhaps, certainly that of the people, would have reſted on ſome impious juggle, or uſurped authority: our devotions have been paid before the relicts of a ſaint, or the tomb of a martyr. Such

Such are the advantages, which attend diſputes about religion. It may be difficult to compare them with the miſchiefs before mentioned; and to determine, which has the greater or more extenſive influence. Nor does it ſeem poſſible to remove the miſchiefs, and at the ſame time preſerve the advantages. They grow up, and are entwined together. We muſt therefore be content to inquire only, by what methods the good may be increaſed and the evil leſſened. And there is reaſon to expect that ſuch an inquiry may not be fruitleſs; ſince the advantages ariſe naturally from the debates themſelves, the evils wholly or principally from the faults of thoſe who conduct them: from a wrong choice of ſubjects; from the uſe of falſe reaſoning; and from the improper manner, in which the reaſons are propoſed.

I. 1. Concerning the *ſubjects* it may be firſt obſerved, that thoſe cannot be religious controverſies, which are really no controverſies at all. Of theſe we have in appearance a numerous train; where the whole difference is in expreſſions, not in ſentiments: the parties having often, either one or both, no meaning; and as often both the ſame. When men,

men, aſpiring to know more than God has revealed, attempt to explain ſuch doctrines, as the holy Scriptures have left myſterious; what can we expect from them but obſcure terms, which may conceal, from themſelves perhaps as well as others, that they have no real information to convey? And, when ſeveral make the ſame attempt, it muſt be by extraordinary good fortune, if they all hit upon the ſame language, without ideas to which they might refer it.—But it is not only upon ſuch points as are above their *comprehenſion*, that men diſpute without meaning. Want of *care* frequently produces the ſame fault. In the laſt age a neighbouring kingdom was divided, and the controverſy carried on with great eagerneſs; upon high and important ſubjects indeed, the freedom of man's actions, and the influence of God's ſpirit, but where the difference of their conceptions was ſcarce diſcernible. Both parties agreed, that every man has power to fulfill God's commandments; but diſputed, whether this power be *immediate*: both agreed, that God's grace is given to all Chriſtians, but differed concerning the *ſufficiency* of it.

Many queſtions, not unlike theſe, were once warmly debated in our own country. The philoſophy of the Schoolmen, abounding in unuſual and unintelligible phraſes, introduced them into our ſyſtems of divinity. And, though an affected uſe of obſcure terms is now baniſhed from the ſciences, and ſeems to be wearing off apace from religious ſpeculations, yet we ſtill find it difficult to fix the preciſe meaning of every expreſſion. But how difficult ſoever the taſk be, they who ſtudy to inform themſelves, and not to puzzle others, muſt labor in it. And the profeſſed champions of religion are particularly bound to this attention; ſince they will otherwiſe often attack thoſe, who have only aſſumed indeed a different habit, but are nevertheleſs engaged on the ſame ſide with themſelves.

2. Again, every *real* controverſy is not a *religious* one. It is either the folly or the art of our polemic writers, to conſider or repreſent every diſputable queſtion, as of the utmoſt importance to religion, as a point, upon which the very being of Chriſtianity depends. Habits, geſtures, days; matters, of

of which the Scriptures are totally ſilent; and which, in whatever manner they are uſed, can add little either to the ſtrength or ornament of religion, have been made the ſubjects of repeated conteſts. Every practice of the Church in the earlier ages, every minute circumſtance of Eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, has been diſputed as ſtrenuouſly, as if it were the very place of the ark itſelf, the only ſpot of ground on which we ſhould not deſpair of maintaining the cauſe of our Saviour. When theſe inquiries ſerve to confirm the authority, or to explain the ſenſe, of the Scriptures, they demand our attention. When they only inſtruct us in the cuſtoms and opinions of ancient times, they may engage our curioſity. But we muſt always remember, that Holy Scripture contains the whole rule of our faith, and that ſuch queſtions only, as relate to this rule, are truly ſubjects of religious controverſies.

3. But theſe ſubjects, which ſometimes are unreaſonably enlarged, are at other times confined within too narrow limits. Some have been ſelected from the doctrines of Chriſt, and ſtyled *fundamentals*; points which every

with him for oppoſing any doctrine, that it was advanced by his adverſary; and truth, when thus recommended, is repulſed with diſdain. Thus the good judgement of one man ſhall occaſion the miſtakes of another, and the cauſe of error be promoted by reaſon itſelf.

2. Another kind of falſe reaſoning proceeds not from *miſtake*, but *deſign*. To ſupport this aſſertion, we need not refer to the notorious forgeries of miracles, or of falſe and ridiculous legends, formerly not unuſual in the church of Rome; nor to the unfair quotations of ancient writers, and other indirect arts, which, though often practiſed, are always diſavowed; nor need we ſuppoſe, what ſometimes we cannot but ſuſpect, that men engage in the defence of religious opinions either without examination or againſt their judgement. One thing is certain, and ſufficient for our purpoſe, that many, whilſt they are defending their real ſentiments, ſcruple not to allege *reaſons*, which they know to be inconclufive. But vainly do they hope to eſtabliſh truth by the aid of falſhood. Such incoherent parts will fall together; and

and their ruin may prove dangerous to the whole building. Falſe reaſoning is often prejudicial to the very cauſe it endeavours to maintain; but it is always ſo to the common cauſe of religion. For none of its principles are ſo intirely unconnected, that an error will ſtop at its firſt entrance, and not extend itſelf beyond thoſe juſt limits, within which it is imagined to be uſeful.—It may perhaps be ſaid, it has indeed been ſaid, that this practice is warranted by the example of our Saviour; who ſometimes adapted his diſcourſe rather to the prejudices of his hearers, than to the rules and maxims of ſtrict reaſoning. But his example cannot be properly urged by thoſe, who pretend not to infallibility. He knew certainly and intuitively that his doctrine was true. We can only be convinced by attention and ſtudy, and are always liableto miſtakes. He, being intimately acquainted with the hearts of men, knew how far his perſuaſions would prevail. We can never foreſee, if men are led into the paths of error, through what mazes they will purſue them.

III. 1. In the manner of carrying on religious controverſies, the moſt remarkable faults are want of ſeriouſneſs and want of candour. The uſefulneſs of ridicule for the diſcovery of truth has been defended upon what are called philoſophical principles. But the feelings of every good man are ſufficient to confute this vain and deceitful philoſophy. For what friend to religion can without indignation ſee any of its doctrines ſo far debaſed, as to become the ſubject of contempt and deriſion? What friend to mankind can without concern find their higheſt intereſts treated as trifles unworthy of a ſerious debate?—But if the nature of the *ſubject* did not, yet the nature of *controverſy* itſelf ſhould, preclude the uſe of this dangerous weapon: which ought to be employed there only, where an abſurdity is too evident to admit a confutation; where the buſineſs is not to convince men, but to make them aſhamed of their folly. For the proper province of ridicule is reproof, not inſtruction.

2. Want of candor is a fault no leſs obſervable in our polemic writers. The faireſt among them, more ſolicitous that their ſkill

in the management of it, than that the juſtice of the cauſe, ſhould appear, make uſe of every advantage, which the weakneſs of an adverſary gives them: dwelling upon ſuch paſſages in his writings as are open to any exceptions, however unconnected with the debate; and ſliding over thoſe in which its ſtrength is compriſed. Others will miſinterpret ambiguous expreſſions; or invidiouſly annex ſome remote and uncertain conſequences to the doctrines they condemn. Some will even ſuggeſt that the perſons who oppoſe them, muſt have bad principles; perhaps principles directly contrary to their profeſſions. And all this to what purpoſe? For reaſons calmly and clearly propoſed, in modeſt and friendly language, would be much more effectual. They would be more eaſily perceived, and more readily embraced. They would convince us at leaſt, that the propoſer's temper was ſuch as would not pervert his judgement; and that he had confidence in the goodneſs of his cauſe.

Upon the whole, if thoſe who enter into theological controverſies, delivered their ſentiments in a ſerious and candid manner; if they did not ſet themſelves to oppoſe every opinion

of their adverſaries, nor to defend their own by every ſpecies of fallacious reaſoning; if they confined themſelves to ſuch queſtions, as have a real meaning, and may be decided from the holy Scriptures: the miſchiefs of our diſſentions would be greatly leſſened, and many of the diſſentions themſelves ſoon forgotten. For he, who ſearches for his religion in the Scriptures, will find more points indeed wholly undetermined, of which therefore he muſt be content to be wholly ignorant; but fewer doubtful, fewer in which the reaſons on each ſide are nearly equivalent, than in the ſyſtems of the moſt able Divines.

CHARGE II.

Of the connexion between MERIT and the REWARD of Merit in the Profeſſion of a CLERGYMAN.

Reverend Brethren,

THE number of perſons, who enter into our profeſſion, has of late years ſo much decreaſed; that many, who want aſſiſtance in their parochial duty, already feel the inconvenience; and that the ſmaller pariſhes, in ſome parts of the kingdom, ſeem in danger of being left in a ſhort time without Miniſters. Some of the principal cauſes of this decreaſe are obvious. The general proſperity of the nation, the increaſe of its colonies and wealth, the improvements in trade and agriculture, draw men off to other,

more lucrative, employments. But theſe happy circumſtances, which may produce ſome temporary difficulties, will alſo enable the nation to remove them. And we have little reaſon to doubt, but they would be removed, by an augmentation of the maintenance of the inferior Clergy; if the grievance ſhould extend ſo far as to become an object of public concern.

Perhaps indeed there is another cauſe, which not only leſſens our numbers, but our weight; and which chiefly excludes thoſe, whoſe ſervice would be the moſt valuable. For men, conſcious of their own abilities, and determined to exert them, uſually hope, when they make choice of a profeſſion, for ſomething beyond a mere maintenance; and therefore will come into ours with reluctance, if they admit the common opinion, that able, and diligent, and worthy, Clergymen are not ſecure of obtaining the juſt rewards of their wiſdom and virtue; that they cannot advance themſelves by their merits in the Church, as men may do in the other learned profeſſions. The diſtinction between ours and the other profeſſions is founded on ſome obſervations of

of this kind. All, who want advice for the recovery of their health, or the protection of their fortune, will certainly apply to thoſe, in whoſe care and judgement they place the greateſt confidence. Nor do they ever approach them without offerings in their hands. So that the general opinion of their abilities and diligence is that, which meaſures out to them their rewards. And the great offices, belonging to one of theſe profeſſions, are not ſcattered promiſcuouſly; but uſually confined within a ſmall number, whom the public voice has marked out, as the moſt able to execute them. But in the Church, it is alleged, our emoluments are not proportioned to our ſervices; they depend on a variety of foreign circumſtances, not on our merits or characters; and the fulleſt confidence of the people, the moſt acknowledged integrity and wiſdom, are not ſufficient to advance a man to a ſtation of honour and authority. He who aſpires to ſuch a ſtation, and can rely on his own ſtrength and perſeverance, ought to take another courſe.

If theſe obſervations are confirmed by experience, in that degree, and to that extent,

which is here ſuppoſed, the matter is greatly to be lamented. And it is almoſt as much to be lamented, if, though they be not true, they are univerſally believed. A general opinion, that wiſdom and virtue are neglected, is no leſs pernicious to their intereſts, than the neglect itſelf. It is the expectation, that they will be rewarded, which is of public uſe. The rewards, in a public view, are only neceſſary to preſerve the expectation. And certainly it ought, as much as poſſible, to be preſerved; and all the advantages, which men may acquire to themſelves, ſhould be laid fairly before them. For the long and painful labours, requiſite in the purſuit of wiſdom, will not be ſubmitted to without ſome powerful inducement; and the ſame inducement will not prevail with men of different diſpoſitions. A foreſight of the contempt and miſery, which muſt inevitably fall upon thoſe, who, having undertaken to teach others, neglect to teach themſelves, is perhaps the ſtrongeſt incitement to men of prudence and ſenſibility. Active and inquiſitive minds court wiſdom for its own ſake: the pleaſure ariſing from every new acquiſition

acquiſition of knowledge is to them a ſufficient recompence for all their pains. In others, ſuch refined perceptions raiſe no deſire. Were wiſdom unendowed and unadorned, they would hardly think her worth their care. But when they behold her bringing in her hands riches and honours, they are eager to meet and embrace her.

It requires indeed ſome attention, to diſcern theſe ornaments of wiſdom. For as they are not, like the other advantages attending her, invariable, but ſubject to many croſs accidents; and as they are ſometimes found without her aſſiſtance; it is not always eaſy to diſcover, how many of them belong to her. But thoſe, who value them, will not decline the inquiry. Permit me to ſuppoſe, that ſome, to whom I am now addreſſing myſelf, may not wholly reject theſe motives. This I may do without offence. For ambition, when directed and reſtrained by reaſon and religion, is certainly not a fault. It is often the genuine offspring of a benevolent heart, and the parent of noble and uſeful attainments. Men poſſeſſed of theſe ſentiments I ſhould hope to convince, that

that the objection made to our profeſſion, as not giving ſufficient ſcope to a commendable ambition, has little weight: that the difficulties are always ſurmounted by eminent wiſdom, often by a lower degree of it, ſometimes, and, in ſome meaſure, by ſuch kinds of merit as would probably fail in other profeſſions; that every kind of it has a tendency to promote a man's intereſt, though it may poſſibly be counteracted by other cauſes, probably by faults of his own; and that, upon the whole, there is no reaſon to think it leſs effectual among us, than in any other purſuit; or in our age, than in any former period.

I. The natural and conſtant effect of *ſuperior* wiſdom is admiration; and where ſuch wiſdom is applied, as it always ſhould be, to promote the good of others, as well as of the poſſeſſor himſelf, admiration is ſure to be followed by eſteem and good-will. Name but a man, whoſe ſtrength of genius has enabled him, to invent or improve any of the arts of life, to ſcatter the miſts of prejudice which had long darkened the underſtanding, or to lead us through new and untried regions of

of ſcience; and theſe various affections are all of them inſtantly excited. We no longer indeed fall down upon our knees before his ſtatues or his altars; but he is ſtill the idol of our hearts, to which we willingly conſecrate the richeſt offerings of love and gratitude. And what fairer claim can any man have to a ſtation of eminence, than an univerſal acknowledgment, that he has acquired the eminence, before he is advanced to the ſtation? What clearer title to public rewards, than public ſervices? Or how can he be more ſecure that his title will be allowed, than by poſſeſſing the eſteem and regard of all his countrymen? But, to quit ſpeculations, and have recourſe to facts, are any examples to be found of churchmen, who, with the extraordinary abilities here ſuppoſed, have not been advanced, as far as the other parts of their characters and their ſituations would allow? If we would ſearch for ſome rare inſtance of this ſort, we muſt go back to thoſe remote times, when a general ignorance left the few proficients in learning without any judges of their merits.

II. But

II. But new diſcoveries and great improvements in knowledge are within the reach of ſo ſmall a part of mankind, that the rewards, which await them, however certain, can have no extenſive influence. Has not wiſdom then its *degrees* of eminence? Is it in the number of thoſe amuſements, which perfection only can prevail with us to endure? This ſurely is not the nature of wiſdom. Of all its various kinds and infinite degrees, each has its uſe and value, where it is ſuited to the ſtation and employment of the poſſeſſor. For, by theſe, as well as by nature and inclination, ſhould our inquiries after knowledge be directed and circumſcribed. Knowledge miſplaced little deſerves the name of wiſdom. It is often uſeleſs to the world, and hurtful to the owner. But, adapted to his profeſſion, and guided by the virtues of a man and a citizen, it is true wiſdom, and will ſeldom fail of its reward. It raiſes numbers, and with general approbation, from obſcurity to eminence, from penury to abundance, from ſubjection to authority. It ſupplies the place of birth and intereſt and, what *they* are not able to do, covers thoſe it has raiſed from the poiſonous breath of envy and detraction.

III. But the whole merit of a clergyman does not conſiſt in abilities, either natural or acquired. For the diſcharge of many important offices, belonging to his profeſſion, *moderate talents* will ſuffice. Some of his duties require little more than ſerioufneſs and attention. One, therefore, who would never have been admired as an orator, or conſulted as a deep lawyer; one, whoſe ſagacity would never have penetrated the myſteries of the human frame; may yet be well qualified to trace out the great lines of our duty towards God and man, and to enforce the practice of it by exhortation and example. A good heart will, in ſome meaſure, ſupply the place of an able head. And he who conſtantly employs ſuch moderate talents with diſcretion and benevolence, muſt be acknowledged to be highly uſeful, and can hardly fail to meet with a ſuitable reward. It may be greater or leſs, it may come ſooner or later in life; but the later it comes, the more apparent uſually it is, that his own merit only,

or, which is of the ſame amount, friendſhip, obtained by his merit, procured it for him.

IV. They who are diſpoſed to raiſe objections, and expect more certainty in human affairs than their nature will allow, may be ready to aſk, whether, among the numberleſs candidates for preferments, they are *always* allotted to ſuch as beſt deſerve them: whether the ignorance or intereſted views of thoſe, who have them to beſtow, may not overlook true merit; or the art and aſſiduity of thoſe who ſeek them ſupplant it. It will be a ſufficient anſwer to theſe queſtions, which can proceed from nothing but inattention to the point here maintained, to repreſent the matter more diſtinctly. It has not been aſſerted, that riches and honours are the portion of wiſdom *alone*; or that every man's ſtate is regulated by the ſingle conſideration of his merit. Such a conformity between the minds and fortunes of men, can never take place, either in our profeſſion or in any other. The notion of it would be viſionary, and inconſiſtent with the condition of human affairs. To effect it, every prejudice and affection muſt be rooted out of the hearts, and

and more than natural diſcernment be implanted in the minds, of thoſe who diſtribute the rewards of wiſdom. Nothing that approaches to ſuch perfection is to be thought of or expected. The purport of what has been offered to your reflexions is only this: that merit has *very conſiderable* influence in the promotion of the clergy; different indeed, as it ought to have, according to its different degrees, but in every degree ſo much, as leaves no room to doubt of it's *general tendency*. Whoever wiſhes to advance himſelf, looks upon a good reputation as uſeful at leaſt, if not neceſſary, for that end; and is as anxious to preſerve it, as the miſer to preſerve his gold. If the vices or follies of which he is conſcious, be expoſed without cauſe; or if he be accuſed of others, of which he knows himſelf innocent: he complains of the injury to his character, as an injury to his fortune. But what foundation could there be for ſuch anxiety, or complaint, unleſs the facts, which have been preſumed, were true? A man might have pleaſure or pride in the good opinion of the world; but he could not conſider it as riches, if

if experience did not ſhew, that the wiſe and good are oftener promoted, than the weak and wicked. The generality of mankind, how wrong ſoever their own conduct may be, yet approve what is right in the conduct of each other. And, unleſs ſome paſſion or intereſt interferes, their good offices commonly follow, where their approbation has gone before. Not that the mere approbation of worth has with moſt men ſo much force, as to extort acts of extraordinary kindneſs. But it may be powerful enough, when a favour is to be conferred on ſomebody, and no ſpecial claimant appears, to determine the choice. So that to one, whoſe ſituation depends wholly on the good-will of others, it cannot be of little importance to have their good opinion. Nor is he much miſtaken, who looks upon reputation as ſecurity for preferment.

Such indeed is the condition of human life, that the faireſt expectations fade away, and the ſtrongeſt claims are ſometimes defeated. Yet this does not prevent us from forming again the ſame expectations, and being again ſubject to the ſame diſappointments. In our

juſteſt and moſt important reaſoning we meet with ſimilar uncertainty. We prove, that the ſupreme Governor of the World is a moral Governor, from a variety of circumſtances in the conſtitution of it, by which virtue is rewarded and vice puniſhed. And, having diſcovered the natural and general tendency of this conſtitution, we reſt there. Our confidence, in the argument drawn from it, is not ſhaken by the inſtances, though they be numerous, in which the Good ſuffer, and the Bad triumph. In like manner, to return to our preſent far inferior ſubject, if our laws have placed the diſpoſal of preferments in ſuch hands, that they are uſually, and in a good meaſure, beſtowed on thoſe, who deſerve them; more is hardly to be expected from any human polity, nor ought we to repine at the few examples, which may be found, of neglected wiſdom or of proſperous folly.

I venture to call theſe examples few, becauſe they are certainly much leſs frequent than is commonly imagined; as appears from the indignation, with which they are always beheld. For things, that are rare

(ſuch is the temper of mankind) affect us more ſtrongly, than thoſe which are important. Vices the moſt deſtructive to individuals and to ſociety, when they are become familiar, we can conſider with indifference: whilſt we loudly complain of others, though of no great moment to either, which want the authority of cuſtom to ſupport them. Complaints therefore on this, as on many other ſubjects, confute themſelves, and carry impreſſed upon them marks of their own falſehood.

V. 1. But allowing them to be *true*, we may ſtill doubt, whether they are *juſt*: whether the ſons of wiſdom are not often anſwerable for their own miſcarriages. What the Stoics maintained was only fanciful, that there is a neceſſary alliance between all the virtues. Of ſome it might be ſaid, with more colour of reaſon, that they are naturally at variance. The virtues of the head and heart, far from being always united, are ſometimes directly oppoſed. Superior knowledge is apt to beget pride and inſolence: they, who can make themſelves uſeful, are often not ſolicitous to be agreeable; poſ-

ſeſſing great talents, which may demand reverence, they neglect to cultivate thoſe good affections, which would find a readier and a ſurer way to favour. Sometimes, too great a confidence in their own merits makes them conſider as a debt, what the Patron calls a gift; and he will naturally incline to give the preference to another, whoſe gratitude is leſs ſuſpected. But are theſe diſappointments owing to Wiſdom or themſelves? Shall *ſhe* be thought unable to reward her votaries, becauſe ſome of them, expecting more of her than they deſerve, receive leſs than ſhe would otherwiſe have given them? Where is the wonder, that expectations, formed without experience, and contrary to the unalterable principles of human nature, ſhould meet with diſappointments?

2. But whilſt the rewards of merit are refuſed to ſome, who demand them too *confidently*; others forfeit their title to them, by *neglecting* to aſſert it. And that they ſhould ſo forfeit it, is not only reaſonable, but unavoidable. True merit indeed cannot be hid. For nothing properly deſerves that name, which is not uſeful; and its uſeful-

neſs, if important or extenſive, muſt neceſſarily make it known. But they, who, being poſſeſſed of ſuch natural or acquired abilities, as might be of public ſervice, yet retire from the world, and conceal their talents, cannot blame the world for not diſturbing their retirement, or endeavouring to pry into their ſecrets. It would be wholly unreaſonable to complain, that the ſtations, they might have adorned, are withheld from them: the fault is their own; they have withdrawn themſelves from thoſe ſtations.

3. There is another, and a more frequent, occaſion of the complaint we are ſpeaking of, but which has yet leſs appearance of juſtice. The diſappointment of a worthy man is often owing to the advancement of *another* of the *ſame character*. When there are more perſons both able and willing to deſerve well of the public, than there are employments adapted to their merits; ſome of them *muſt* remain, for a time, unprovided. They, who are acquainted with the virtues and abilities of one, that thus miſſes his reward, are ready to lament the misfortune, and to blame the world for it; without knowing or attending to the equal or,

or, perhaps, fairer claim of the more ſucceſsful competitor. Compaſſion too inclines men to raiſe the character of the depreſſed: Envy to depreſs that of the elevated. But complaints thus founded in paſſion, not in reaſon, muſt be frivolous and tranſitory. If well conſidered, they are ſo far from weakening our main poſition, that, by pointing out particular exceptions, they confirm the general principle, and leave no room to doubt of the *uſual* effects of wiſdom and virtue.

VI. Some, perhaps, may ſtill urge, for the opinion ſeems to have taken ſtrong hold of their minds, that, though merit has generally met with its proper rewards, yet the neglect of it is the peculiar diſgrace of the *preſent age*. Men, we know, have always complained of their own times; and always, as has been obſerved, with too much reaſon. Private affections, intereſts, and paſſions, ever have been, and ever will be, too powerful to be effectually and uniformly controlled by regard to the moſt eſſential intereſts of the public, the intereſts of religion and learning. But whether the former be more violent

lent, or the latter less able to restrain them, now than formerly, seems very difficult to determine. If we compare the present state of our church and nation, with the state of them at the distance of some centuries, such differences will be found, as may, on a cursory and superficial view, have given occasion to mistakes; but, when attentively considered, will teach us to judge more favourably of the present times.

1. We may first observe, that the characters of clergymen are far less *different* from each other now, than they were formerly. Learning is become so general among them, that the blindest choice could scarce raise, to stations of eminence, any considerable number, very deficient in this kind of merit. And it seems to be universally acknowledged, that regularity and decency of behaviour are still more general. If any man denies these praises to the clergy of our times, let him look back to the ages, when, to be able to *read* the public service, was a sufficient qualification for a priest; and a better than many of them had: when many in every year (we have the testimony of contemporary

contemporary historians for this otherwise incredible fact) were obliged to allege this qualification in courts of justice, to save themselves from infamous deaths. No wonder, that, in those times, the few, who were in any degree learned and moral, were called forth to public notice; nor that vast numbers, much superior to them in abilities and character, now remain undistinguished from their brethren in very private stations. Perhaps too (I speak it with diffidence, and should not have spoken it at all, were I not supported by the judgement of a great prelate, whose candor was equal to his learning) perhaps few of the clergy have of late years become eminent by their writings, especially by such writings as properly belong to their profession, Defences of Christianity and Morals, and the Doctrines of the Established Church. If then the body of the clergy be good and learned, and not many have stepped forth before the rest, and produced proofs of their superior talents; this may, in some measure, account for the notion, that their merits are little regarded.

2. We may farther obſerve, to the ſame purpoſe, that, were the difference in their abilities as great, yet it would not be ſo eaſily *diſcerned*, as in former times. The higher their qualifications riſe, the more ſkill and knowledge is requiſite to diſtinguiſh and meaſure them. And, when the difference is evident, yet it cannot be ſo ſtriking, if all the perſons compared be reſpectable, as if ſome might challenge reſpect, and others could not be conſidered without contempt. But neither the uniformity of the clerical character, nor the dignity of it, affords any juſt grounds to ſuſpect, that extraordinary merits ſhould be overlooked. The former ſeems rather to ſuggeſt, that, on ſuch level ground, nothing that is elevated can be hid. The latter, that, as the level is itſelf elevated, whatever riſes above it muſt be conſpicuous.

But it muſt be confeſſed, that the clergy have loſt, by the change of cuſtoms, ſome opportunities of diſplaying their abilities. Of theſe the chief was, the practice of preaching, either, from ſhort notes of the principal topics, in unprepared language, or without any

any written materials at all. This was an exerciſe, to which, even in times of conſiderable learning, not many were equal. And, had it continued, probably as ſmall a number might have been diſtinguiſhed from the reſt in the pulpit as at the bar. But, when the increaſe of books, and of perſons accuſtomed to reading, who could not but be offended at crude and indigeſted effuſions, obliged the clergy to lay them aſide; the ſame circumſtance furniſhed them with another, and a more extenſive, method of making known to the world, what they can contribute towards its improvement.

Other opportunities of advancing themſelves they have loſt by the diſperſion of learning among the laity; who now fill, with reputation, many offices which were once peculiar to clerks. And we have reaſon to thank God that they have loſt them. Political merit is not the merit which one would wiſh to ſee encouraged among clergymen.—In the days of our forefathers, few others were able to read and interpret the laws; fewer had any notion of the univerſal principles

principles of right and wrong, by which the rigour of written laws is often to be mitigated; to correſpond or negotiate with foreign ſtates, was a taſk ſeldom undertaken by any but Churchmen. Chancellors, Judges, Secretaries, Ambaſſadors, with moſt of their aſſiſtants and officers, were therefore commonly choſen out of that body. But now, happily for both the civil and religious intereſts of the nation, knowledge is not confined to one claſs of men; many among the laity are better qualified for the higheſt public ſtations, than thoſe could be, who were engaged in ſtudies and buſineſs of another kind; and the clergy, on the other hand, are at leiſure to exert their talents in their own function only; or we may add, perhaps, what is nearly allied to it, the care of a learned and virtuous education.

Upon the whole then we conclude, that Wiſdom and Virtue, however they may ſometimes fail of their effect from a variety of accidental circumſtances, have not leſs influence among *us*, then in other ranks of men; not in *our age*, than in any former period.

But,

But, amidſt theſe reflexions, let us not forget, that a wiſe and good man, when he makes choice of our profeſſion, and when he applies himſelf to the ſtudy and buſineſs of it, is influenced by far higher motives than thoſe hitherto mentioned; by the deſire of improving his own mind, and of promoting virtue and happineſs. He conſiders, that he ſhall be engaged in ſuch contemplations, as will regulate his paſſions, ſtrengthen his rational faculties, and lead them to the heights of Chriſtian philoſophy. When he compares his ſtudies with thoſe of the other learned profeſſions, he finds that the value of his knowledge will not periſh with any ſhort-lived human inſtitutions, or with this mortal frame; but, receiving abundant increaſe from the Fountain of all Wiſdom, will fill him with wonder and tranſport to all eternity. He conſiders, that his buſineſs will be the nobleſt and the moſt delightful, that of leading men, by mild and perſuaſive reaſoning, to their true happineſs. He is not inattentive to the uſefulneſs of Law and Medicine: and he is willing to believe, that, by attending to

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the duties of his profeſſion, He too ſhall be inſtrumental in promoting Peace and Health. But at the ſame time he is firmly perſuaded, that even theſe, though the greateſt of earthly bleſſings, muſt yield the palm to Religion. And, whilſt he reflects on the benefits which others receive from his labours, he proceeds with unremitted ardor; little concerned about the ſucceſs of any reaſonable expectations he may have formed for himſelf in the preſent life, but well aſſured, that his main hope, which is fixed on a life to come, can never fail.

CHARGE III.

On the Uſe and Abuſe of PHILOSOPHY in the Study of RELIGION.

Reverend Brethren,

IT may be juſtly reckoned among the happy circumſtances of the times, in which we live; that, having had few occaſions to engage in, or attend to, controverſies, about curious and ſpeculative queſtions; we have been uſually at liberty to inculcate ſuch doctrines only, as might inform the underſtanding, and influence the conduct, of our hearers: without turning their thoughts, or our own, to thoſe diſputed points, which, if not placed quite beyond the reach of human faculties, are yet far

far removed from life and manners. But this happineſs ſeems at preſent to be in ſome degree interrupted. Errors, which we thought buried in oblivion, are now again called forth; and, though relating only to ſome nice and difficult ſubjects, which require the utmoſt attention of the learned and contemplative, are induſtriouſly ſpread in ſmall treatiſes among the common people: whilſt we, the Clergy, are urged to examine anew matters, which we have long conſidered as certain; and are told, that our ſyſtem of Chriſtianity, tranſmitted to us, it ſeems, from ages of ignorance and bigotry, may and ought to receive improvements, correſponding to thoſe, which the preſent enlightened age has made in every other Science. The reputation of modern Philoſophers is turned to the diſgrace of modern Divines; as neither emulating the example, nor accepting the aſſiſtance, which the diſcoveries of thoſe ſtrict reaſoners might afford them.

If this complaint againſt us has any foundation, we ſhould all unite our endeavours to remove it. If none, yet it may be proper to

to inquire, whence the miſtake has ariſen. Were we to collect a ſcheme of Chriſtian knowledge from the ableſt modern writers, to compare it with the doctrines of former ages, and to obſerve the gradual improvements it has received; the review would furniſh us with a direct anſwer to the whole objection. But ſo extenſive an undertaking is not at all ſuited to the preſent occaſion. And it will be ſufficient to remove the principal grounds of the complaint, if we can ſhew, that in one part of our ſtudies we have taken the full benefit of the advanced ſtate of Philoſophy; and that in the other parts no benefit is to be expected from it.

The Engliſh Divines cannot be juſtly reproached with the extravagant zeal of thoſe, who, diſclaiming the uſe of reaſon in religious inquiries, would ſubſtitute in its room faith uninformed. They own indeed the ſovereignty of Religion; but are ſenſible, that her throne can no where be fixed ſecurely, except in the underſtanding. They have never ſpared any pains to eſtabliſh it on this firm baſis. And, when new diſcoveries in philoſophy have offered it any new ſup-

ports,

ports, they have not failed to apply them. This could hardly be otherwiſe: ſince the ſame men, who have gained our admiration by a fertile invention, or clear judgement, in the various kinds of human learning, have been, many of them, equally eminent for their proficiency in ſacred ſcience. But, when in the ſtudy of Religion they uſed the aſſiſtance of philoſophy, they uſed it with great caution: well knowing, that though its guidance may be ſafely truſted, while it has full light, and keeps within its own territories; yet when it ventures to conduct us in the dark, or wanders beyond its proper limits, it will often miſlead us more fatally than ignorance itſelf. For there is a chain, which connects the different branches of error, as well as of truth.—Yet this juſt and neceſſary caution ſeems to have given occaſion to the complaint before mentioned. No other grounds for it have ever been pretended. It was never objected to us, that the evidences for religion are not fully ſtated, or that any kind of fair reaſoning is neglected, which might ſerve to enforce them. On the contrary, it is univerſally acknowledged, that more

more rational, more truly philoſophical, defences of Chriſtianity have appeared, within a century, in our language, than were ever produced in any other age or country. In theſe defences, whatever aid could be borrowed from morals, or phyſic, or natural theology, have been employed, and ſometimes even with profuſion. Philoſophy has furniſhed us with abundance of inconteſtable evidence; and has rendered that evidence the more convincing, by rejecting all ſuch proofs, as were either falſe or frivolous. Thus far it has acted within its own province; and has been a good witneſs in behalf of Chriſtianity. But here its office ends. If a witneſs ſhould be allowed to take the ſeat of the Judge, we could expect nothing but a haſty and partial deciſion. And ſuch has been the event, when philoſophy has preſumed to interpret revealed doctrines, or to examine the reaſonableneſs of revealed diſpenſations. Theſe are the uſes which we have forborn to make of it; and which we ſhall ſtill forbear, if we form our judgement, either from the nature of the attempt, or from the bad ſucceſs of thoſe, who have engaged in it.

I. First then, philosophical notions can never lead us to the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures. The right interpretation of any book is the discovery of the thoughts, which the Author intended to convey. But an Author cannot intend to convey thoughts, which were never in his own mind. And the first preachers of Christianity, being no philosophers, could not entertain notions peculiar to philosophers. The one among them, who had some acquaintance with Grecian literature, and might therefore have been suspected of an attachment to this study, expressly disavows, in the names both of himself, and his fellow labourers, all human wisdom. But had they been versed in the learning of their own times, still every later discovery must be foreign from their ideas, and useless in explaining them.—What has been said of the teachers of Christianity, is true also of their disciples. Few of them were called from the portico of Chrysippus, or the groves of Academus. St. Paul complains, that the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world, knew not God, nor received his messengers; that men, whose profession

profession was wisdom, perished through folly; and that the arguments, the artifices, of those, who were reputed learned, and Masters of reason, when applied to religious subjects, were found to be weakness and deceit. He would therefore never instruct his disciples out of the maxims, or principles, of that science, which he knew they did not, and wished they might not, understand.—Nay, he repeatedly cautions them not to be misled by these principles: a caution then necessary against infidelity, when each of the prevailing sects was founded in some error unfavourable to the reception of Christianity; and no less necessary afterwards against heresy, when the philosophers became Christians, and brought, out of the schools into the Church, many useless and dangerous refinements. And what has been the consequence of these refinements; whether introduced, as in the early ages, by the fantastical followers of Plato, or as in our times, by the lovers of metaphysical subtilty; but to turn a religion, whose principal aim was to render men kind and friendly to each other, into a perpetual source of divisions and animosities? One

ſingle article of faith would furniſh us with examples of this miſchievous folly, both early and recent. The paſt I omit, as of leſs concern to us; and ſhall content myſelf with ſuggeſting to your thoughts, that the difficulties, which are *now* urged againſt us, concerning the divinity of our Saviour, are not derived from the ſcriptures, but from the mixture, of what is called philoſophical reaſoning, in the interpretation of them.

When the ſacred Writers ſtyle the Son *God*, it is doubted, in what ſenſe we are to underſtand the appellation. May not the word, it is aſked, ſometimes fall, from its proper and primary meaning, to one leſs exact, and leſs exalted? We ſhall readily anſwer, that the only proper uſe of any word is that, in which it is generally underſtood; and that this uſe, in the preſent inſtance, is not difficult to be diſcovered, or to be reconciled with the other declarations of holy ſcripture. The principal notions, which have ever been annexed to the name of God by plain men, who have not puzzled themſelves with abſtract ſpeculations, are thoſe of Creator, Preſerver, and Governor of the World. Now

Now the paſſages of the New Teſtament, which deſcribe the Son under theſe characters, are ſuch, as could hardly have been miſinterpreted, had not the obvious ſenſe of them appeared to be inconſiſtent with certain imaginary principles of Science. With the ideas of Creator, Preſerver, and Governor of the World, thoſe of unlimited power and knowledge are neceſſarily connected. But the Scriptures have not left us to infer theſe attributes from his nature. All power and all knowledge are expreſſly aſcribed to the Son of God, in ſeveral plain paſſages. It might have ſeemed unneceſſary to tell us, but yet we are told, that He, who created all things, was before all things. The terms, Father and Son, convey to us no meaning, if they do not imply that the one derived his being from the other. And this is confirmed, when we read, that the Son's power and glory and dominion were all given him by the Father. Thus far the doctrine ſeems clear. Few ſober interpreters of the New Teſtament diſagree about theſe parts of it. But here the Metaphyſician comes in, and tells us, that ſelf-exiſtence, and neceſſary

 exiſtence,

exiſtence, and abſolute independency, are eſſential attributes of the Deity; and that he has ſearched the ſcriptures in vain to find them aſcribed to the Son. He might have added, or to the Father. Neither theſe terms, nor others of a like import, occur in the New Teſtament. If they expreſs any ideas, (other than the negative one of Being not derived,) they are the ideas of Philoſophers, not of Apoſtles; and the logical or metaphyſical controverſies, which have been ſpun out of them, are not connected, or but by the ſlighteſt clue, with the doctrines of Chriſt. The ſame miſplaced curioſity, the ſame vain hope of improving, by our diſcoveries, the revelations of God, has introduced into this ſubject numberleſs queſtions, which may ever be diſputed, becauſe they can never be decided; unleſs men ſhould at laſt be ſo wiſe, as to perceive, that this is a reaſon, why they ſhould not be diſputed at all.

II. But if our philoſophers have had little ſucceſs in ſearching for recondite ſenſes of ſcripture, their miſtakes are more ſhameful and more dangerous, when they preſume to judge of the divine œconomy; when they

determine a revealed diſpenſation to be credible, or not, from preconceived notions of fitneſs and propriety, of juſtice and impartiality, which they boldly apply to the government of the ſupreme Being. He cannot, they tell us, act in this manner; it would be contrary to his wiſdom: nor in that; it would be inconſiſtent with his juſtice: one kind or degree of happineſs he muſt be diſpoſed to grant; another his creatures have a right to demand. But, whilſt they throw out theſe peremptory aſſertions, not warranted by the obſervable courſe of God's moral government, nor by any known declarations of his will; they ſhew themſelves to be unacquainted with the fundamental rule of their own ſcience; and with the origin of all its late improvements. They argue like men, who lived two centuries ago, inattentive to the difference between hypotheſis and experiment. If, from a ſuppoſed character of the Deity, they undertake to derive his acts, and to trace the order of his providence; however ingeniouſly the ſyſtem may be formed, and by whatever demonſtrations the ſeveral parts

of it may be connected; yet the whole, having no foundation, but a precarious and arbitrary hypotheſis, is eaſily overthrown. True philoſophy would have taught them to proceed the other way: to begin with obſerving the preſent conſtitution of the world; with conſidering attentively, how God has made us, and in what circumſtances placed us; and then to form a ſure judgement, from what He has done, what it is agreeable to infinite wiſdom, and the other divine perfections, that He ſhould do. They might thus have learned the inviſible things of God, from thoſe which are clearly ſeen; the things which are not yet accompliſhed, from thoſe which are.

How little we can advance in this part of our ſtudies by merely abſtract reaſoning, one inſtance will be ſufficient to prove. Nothing in the Chriſtian ſcheme has been more ſtrongly agitated by theſe philoſophizing divines, than the doctrine of an atonement, made by Jeſus Chriſt, for the ſins of mankind. And their arguments are ſo plauſible, that ſome of the miſtaken friends have joined with

with the more artful enemies of religion, in repreſenting ſuch atonement, as unneceſſary, ineffectual, and unworthy of the righteous governor of the world.—God's laws, it is alleged, are productive of happineſs; and, to ſecure this happineſs, penalties are annexed to the breach of them. But when they, who have tranſgreſſed, repent and amend, no good remains to be obtained by the puniſhment; it has anſwered its ends, is now become uſeleſs, and cannot therefore be inflicted by a wiſe and merciful Governor. To offer redemption to a reformed penitent, is to offer him, what he does not want. He has redeemed himſelf. He has made all the ſatisfaction for his offences, that he is able to make; and more cannot be required of him without manifeſt abſurdity.—But, ſuppoſing that ſome farther ſatisfaction might be required, the objectors ſtill urge, that it cannot be made effectually by any but the ſinner himſelf; that the ſufferings of one perſon, eſpecially of an innocent one, can never be a reaſon for the pardon of another; and that God's juſtice, which is impartial and univerſal,

univerſal, will ſtill hang over the unpuniſhed offender, and his mercy provide a recompence for the innocent ſufferer.—They obſerve farther, that the Governor of the world uſually accompliſhes his deſigns by regular, eſtabliſhed, methods; and that there ſeems to be no connexion between the ſufferings and death of Chriſt, and the future happineſs of mankind; or, if there be any connexion, that it muſt be, becauſe his ſufferings and death were means of reforming ſinners, not becauſe they were an expiation or atonement for ſin.

Theſe objections, it muſt be acknowledged, have in them ſome truths. But with theſe truths are mixed many things that want proof, and more that are evidently falſe.—Thus it is undoubtedly true, that we can diſcover ſo many benefits ariſing even from the puniſhments, by which the laws of God's moral government are enforced, as clearly ſhew the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Governor. But that the uſes we can diſcover, are the only uſes of thoſe puniſhments, is uncertain. And that the puniſhments muſt always ceaſe, when the criminals are reformed,

ed, is certainly falſe. The miſeries which, in the regular courſe of nature, are the conſequences of wickedneſs, are properly conſidered as the natural puniſhments of it. Some of them follow it with a ſwifter, others with a ſlower, pace; ſome are tranſitory, others of longer continuance: but the penitence of a criminal, even before their arrival, affords him no ſecurity againſt the ſloweſt of them; and, when either his fears or his feelings have worked a reformation, ſuch as are naturally of longer continuance are not by that reformation preſently removed. Whatever then can be alleged, concerning the ends of puniſhment, or the ſatisfaction made by a reformed penitent, when applied to this ſubject, muſt be trifling. All argumentation is here precluded. We have fact and experience to convince us, that God does not always pardon the repenting ſinner.—But it is thought incredible, that God ſhould be moved, by the ſufferings of the innocent, to abſolve the guilty. Yet has He not ſo conſtituted the world, that the miſeries, which a man brings upon himſelf by wickedneſs and folly, are often mitigated, ſometimes

ſometimes wholly taken away, by the goodneſs and prudence of his parents or friends; who, in their endeavours to relieve him, ſubmit to labour, and pain, and vexation, ſuch vexation, perhaps, as ends in ſickneſs or in death? Thus a man's diſcharge from puniſhment may be owing to the miſery of perſons better than himſelf; and that which is objected to, as incredible, appears to be what often happens in the natural courſe of human events, that is, by God's appointment.—When it is farther inſinuated, againſt the uſefulneſs of a redemption, that we ſee no connexion between the cauſe and the effect, the doubt is wholly unphiloſophical. The notion of that connexion is raiſed in our minds by a frequent repetition of like events, one after the other; and therefore it can have no place between two events, however inſeparable in their nature, when one of them appears to be ſingle in its kind, and of the other we have yet had no experience.

We have ſeen then, how weak, and yet how dangerous, all our reaſoning is, when it would correct the doctrines of revelation; and how unjuſt the cenſure thrown upon the Engliſh

Engliſh clergy for not making uſe of the preſent improved ſtate of ſcience. They have uſed it, and to the greateſt advantage, there, where only it could be uſed for the ſervice of religion; in providing evidence, in examining it, in ſelecting the ſounder and weightier parts of it, and in caſting away thoſe which are light or corrupt. But they have wiſely avoided the application of it, where ſuch application is impertinent, or profane: impertinent, as in interpretation of ſcripture; profane, as in the judging of God's decrees. Neither can it be employed to the former purpoſe, by thoſe who are acquainted with the characters of the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity, or of their converts; nor to the latter, by thoſe who attend to the general grounds of all ſcience, or to the means, by which we diſcover the perfections of the Deity. We have ſeen alſo examples of the errors, into which philoſophy has led its votaries, taken from two of the great and diſtinguiſhing doctrines of Chriſtianity. The examples were not of my choice. I had many others in view. But theſe ſeemed to be particularly pointed out.

out. They, who are calling upon us to amend our faith, reckon them among the parts, which chiefly want amendment. If ſome of our predeceſſors have written obſcurely, or perhaps unintelligibly, concerning them, it was not through neglect of the philoſophy, which prevailed in their times, but through too much attention to it. And though we may think our knowledge much advanced, we find it equally unable to reach the gates of heaven. Such gigantic attempts have always proved the ruin, as well as the diſgrace, of human ſcience. A fruitleſs deſire to underſtand myſteries, that is, to underſtand the whole of what God has revealed in part only, is ſure to turn the mind from real knowledge to metaphyſical jargon. The great leader of all our modern diſcoveries, the ſagacious and comprehenſive Lord Bacon, formed no expectations in the behalf of religion, or philoſophy, of any improvements to be made in either, by the aſſiſtance of the other: on the contrary, he foreſaw the miſchiefs they would mutually receive from an improper alliance. When he is taking a review of all the parts of learning, and

and obſerving the defects of each, he has a remarkable paſſage, which I wiſh to leave impreſſed upon your minds: "In this part "of knowledge, ſays he, touching divine "philoſophy, I am ſo far from noting any "deficience, as I rather note an exceſs: "whereunto I have digreſſed, becauſe of the "extreme prejudice, which both religion "and philoſophy have received, and may "receive, by being commixed together; as "that, which undoubtedly will make an "heretical religion, and an imaginary and "fabulous philoſophy."

DIS-

DISPUTATIO,

HABITA

IN SCHOLIS PUBLICIS,

ANNO 1756.

Eccleſiaſtici regiminis, in Angliâ et in Scotiâ conſtituti, neutra forma aut juri hominum naturali aut verbo Dei repugnat.

CUM, per ſecula aliquot, jam acta, oculos referentes, tam Civitatis noſtræ quam Eccleſiæ, regimen contemplemur; utrum nobis præſens Reipublicæ ſtatus voluptatem majorem, an præteritus admirationem, excitare debeat, licebit dubitare. Hanc ſanè gentem, ſervitutis ſemper impatientem, et circumfuſo mari munitam, crudeli tamen dominatu, et

 domeſticos,

domeſticos, et externos, tyrannos diu tenuiſſe, vix poſſumus ſatis mirari. Patres autem noſtros in integerrimam et firmiſſimam libertatem ſe tandem vindicaſſe, non gaudemus modo, ſed etiam planè triumphamus. Eccleſia quidem prior jugum ſervile dejecit; at, laxata ipſa, onus civitati demere non curavit. Civitas generoſior, cum ſuperſtitio, ſolium regale iterum tenens, religioni perniciem minabatur, indignata, et ad opem ferendam impetu quodam ruens, ſe ipſam, vix opinantem, e vinculis exemit. Quæ vero improviſa acceſſerat libertas, benigniſſimo excepta eſt hoſpitio. Principia, quibus eſt fundata, in mentes hominum facillime irrepſerunt. De Rerumpublicarum origine, de Regis auctoritate, de Civium jure, nihil fere quæri poteſt, de quo inter omnes non convenit. At tyrannis ex Eccleſiâ licet jamdiu exulaverit, tenebræ tamen, quas illa templis ſuis offundere ſolet, nondum omnes ſunt diſcuſſæ: vel quod in ipſâ caligine ſanctum aliquod et religioſum ineſſe videatur; vel quod lux, ex aliâ parte orta, animos hominum ab hujus contemplatione avocaverit. Poterat ſanè argumentis, ex naturâ regiminis eccleſiaſtici petitis,

titis, libertas noſtra abundè confirmari. Sed homines, id quod non raro accidit, ad alia remotiora et difficiliora attenti, hæc propiora et certiora negligunt. Hinc eſt, quod ſint etiam nunc dierum, poſt ducentos annos, qui ſeparationem noſtram ab Eccleſiâ Romanâ nullâ, niſi *neceſſitatis*, excuſatione defendi poſſe exiſtimant; qui, cum ſchiſmatis crimen effugere velint, id omni arte atque induſtriâ agunt, ut ejus doctrinam erroribus, diſciplinam fraudibus, cultum Dei, ab eâ inſtitutum, ſuperſtitione refertum eſſe oſtendant. At hæc, utcunque vera, in defenſione noſtrâ ſupervacanea ſunt; ſi neque jus naturale neque leges divinæ id requirunt, ut omnes Eccleſiæ uni imperio ſubjiciantur. Quæ enim ſine nexu conjunctæ ſunt, poſſunt ſine violentiâ ſecerni.

Liceat itaque mihi, patria inſtituta defendere volenti, prius quærere, Eccleſiæ auctoritas unde orta ſit, quomodo derivata, quas regulas habeat, quos fines. Si enim, his fundamentis cautè poſitis, firmum libertatis eccleſiaſticæ propugnaculum comparetur, ictus hoſtium validiſſimi vel inermi manu repelli poſſunt.

Præcipuæ religionis externæ partes in publico Dei cultu et piâ populi inſtitutione continentur. At nec *Cultus* iſte ſine ritubus, nec ritus ſine hominum miniſterio, celebrari poſſunt. Ut loca itaque, tempora, cæremoniæ, præſcribantur; et, hæc omnia qui curent, eligantur; neceſſe eſt. *Doctrina* etiam popularis, niſi certos homines ad hujus curam leges accerſant, et accerſitos dirigant, vel negligetur, vel corrumpetur. Neglecta vero religionem, corrupta civitatem perdet. Auctoritas igitur Eccleſiæ, cum in electione et gubernatione eorum qui ſacris publicis præſunt et populum docent, præcipuè verſetur; ex ipſâ naturâ externæ religionis, et rei neceſſitate, orta eſt. Regimen autem, quod ad religionis, non minus quam illud quod ad vitæ, uſus ſpectat, a Deo profectum eſſe oportet arbitrari.

Neque hæc publica quorundam rituum cura, quæ univerſo populo tantum prodeſt, cuiquam injuriam infert. Quibus ſacra iſta placent, grata eſt atque utilis; quibus diſplicent, vel leviter vel nihil nocet. Id enim ad regimen eccleſiaſticum non neceſſario pertinet, ut unus ſolummodo ſit in unâ gente rituum

rituum aut inſtitutionum ordo. Si populus de rebus ſacris in varias opiniones diſtrahatur, poſſunt variæ rituum et religionum formulæ vel ſanciri vel permitti. Quæ a magnâ gentis parte approbantur, ſancire civitatem oportet; quæ paucis tantum, ſi tamen utilitati publicæ nihil repugnant, permittere.

Cum verò juri naturali conſentaneum eſſe videatur, ut aliquid de his rebus conſtituatur, id poſtea quærendum eſt, quâ auctoritate poſſit confirmari. Atque iſta omnis auctoritas, quâ in Eccleſia pollent ſeu magiſtratus ſeu miniſtri, vel a Principe derivata eſt, permittente Deo, vel a conſenſu populi, permittente Principe. Principem voco, qui in quâvis natione ſupremam habet poteſtatem, ſive unus ſit, ſive plurium cœtus. Illum verò in ſacra imperium habere ex rerum-publicarum origine manifeſtum eſt. Homines enim, (ut cum iis qui de jure naturali ſcripſerunt, quamvis forſan minus accuratè, loquar,) hâc mente in civitates coierunt, ut legibus uterentur: legibus autem non de re tantum unâ atque alterâ ferendis, ſed de cunctis, quæ Reipublicæ intereſt ut conſenſu omnium definiantur. Nec quærimus ſoliciti, quid

non prohibente Principe, consensus iste eandem vim habet, ac aliud quodvis pactum legitimum. Atque id interest inter Ecclesiam quam civitas amplectitur, et eam quam sibi propinquam tolerat; quod hæc auctoritatem a suo populo donatam, illa a legislatore fidei commissam, acceperit.

Ex his fontibus in hortos Ecclesiæ jus omne derivatum est; quæ, si ullam potestatis partem nacta sit, cujus ortus non est ab uno vel altero horum repetendus, illam contra jus naturale usurpavit. Regimen enim a civitate non permissum instituere, aut totum populum voluisse, aut partem potuisse, res est absurda. Totius certè paci et emolumento multum conducit, ut unum sit in unâ regione imperium; parti vero non conceditur, se a totius legibus distrahere.

At quamvis *nihil* cuiquam in sacris liceat sine assensu Principis, huic tamen *omnia* licere non dico. Certi reperiri possunt terminini, quibus ejus auctoritas septa tenetur. Istos vero ex utilitate publicâ petere oportet. Cum in pace civitatis vel conservandâ vel evertendâ maxima sit religionis vis, et Princeps huic paci unicè inserviat; opinionibus quæ

quæ videntur ei esse nocituræ, obsistet. Errores autem, qui nihil detrimenti Reipublicæ afferunt, utcunque sint discordes, fidei absoni, et Deo indigni, ab imperio suo liberos permittet. Singuli enim hâc mercede sibi leges imponi sinunt, ut cæteris quoque imponantur. Sed nemini utile est, in rebus a vita semotis, alios reprimi. Nemo igitur consensit, ut ipse reprimeretur. Neque est ea Magistratibus Ecclesiæ vis committenda, ut omnes rituum suorum et sententiarum participes esse cogant. Suos veluti liberos fide et pudore, non metu retinere debent; et volentes per populos jura dare.

Si ea quæ dixi vera sint, videntur juri hominum naturali repugnare, et isti, qui negant esse ullum Ecclesiæ regimen terrestre, et qui affirmant illud omne unum episcopum penes esse; et qui in rebus sacris nos vetant Principi, et qui jubent alteri, obedire; pœnas opinionibus, et qui falsis irrogant, et qui a malis avertunt. Sed ab his criminibus Ecclesiæ nostræ longissimè absunt. Neutra ex iis aut auctoritatis, quâ rerum sacrarum ordo conservetur, indiget, aut eam, quâ civilium perturbetur, possidet, Neutra Legislatoris domestici

obſcuras, acclives, multiplices; ubi veſtigia, quod modo oſtendi, cæca ſunt, et in locis arduis, et per varios tramites, errabunda, et per vacuum libera. Nobis autem ſatis ſit, ſi illi, qui Eccleſias Britannicas fundavere, licet diverſo itinere, eandem tamen metam contigerint; et ſacrum codicem variè interpretantes, nihil conſtituerint, niſi id quod, jure gentium uſi, Deo nec jubente nec vetante, conſtituere potuerunt.

Ex his quæ generatim ſunt expoſita totam defenſionem noſtram comparare facillimum eſt: ſed ſi ſingula utriuſque Eccleſiæ inſtituta ſuſcipiam, in dicendo nimius ſim. Ea ſolummodo, quæ unam ab altera præcipue diſtinguunt, breviter attingam.

Regem ſupremum eccleſiæ gubernatorem eſſe, nos Angli confitemur, Scoti negant: et utrique rectè. Cum enim omnis regum noſtrorum poteſtas legibus deſcripta ſit atque definita, nihil prohibet, ne major in hâc, quam in illâ, regni parte, quemadmodum alii cuilibet magiſtratui, ita regi ipſi permittatur. Scio equidem Scotis hoc firmiſſimum juris ſui fundamentum non placere. Eccleſiam ab omni imperio humano liberam, et Chriſto

Chriſto ſoli ſubjectam eſſe prædicant. Quæ autem verbis ponunt, niſi re tollerent, plane is non eſſem, qui illos defenderem. Nullum eſt in regiminis totius ortu, aut progreſſu, aut conditionibus, fictæ illius, in quâ gloriantur, libertatis indicium. Univerſa eorum jura haud ita pridem a Senatu ſunt conceſſa; quædam autem, nec ſemel, ab eodem mutata vel imminuta; et omnia hâc lege tenentur, ut uno verſiculo deleri poſſint, atque penitus obliterari.

In Angliâ Synodus abſque Regis mandato non convocatur; convocata de re nullâ, niſi referente Rege, deliberat; nec quicquam eorum quæ jubet, niſi illo aſſentiente, legis nomen attingit. In Scotiâ conventus Eccleſiæ quotannis agitur; cujus eſt de cunctis quod religionem ſpectant, cum quærere, tum ſtatuere. Hoc autem legum de rebus ſuis ferendarum jus, non Sacerdotum modò ſed ſtudentium literis, mercatorum, aliorumque Collegiis, ſæpe traditum fuiſſe novimus: atque omnibus ſub eadem conditione, ut privatas iſtas leges publico civitatis juri in nullâ cauſâ opponerent.

Nec minorem cum noſtrâ diſſimilitudinem habet, quæ inter Scotos eſt, rerum ſacrarum adminiſtratio. Conſeſſus quidam, juris eccleſiaſtici cuſtodes et interpretes, ea omnia gerunt ac moderantur, quæ inter nos Epiſcopi. Quanto forma noſtra ſit antiquior, quanto utilior, non eſt hujus inſtituti oſtendere. Id tantum cenſeo; neque adeo antiquam eſſe, ut a Chriſto orta, neque adeo univerſis utilem, ut a jure naturali profecta, videatur.

FINIS.