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The PROGRESS of VICE.

BEING THE
SUBSTANCE
OF SOME
SERMONS

Preached in

CARTER-LANE.

On PSALM i. i.

By *THOMAS NEWMAN.*



L O N D O N :

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THE REPORT

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T H E
P R E F A C E.

*W*HEN there is such a number of treatises already extant, very strongly pleading the cause of Religion and Virtue, some may think that the world should not be troubled with more, without some special reason, or some particular Apology. But I declare I have no particular reason for the publication of this, and yet I shall not so much as attempt an Apology.

I have long, with great uneasiness and concern, beheld the waste and desolation that many younger minds of both sexes have sustained; which, when I have by conversation and enquiry traced to their cause, I have generally found hath been owing principally, if not entirely, to corrupting principles and

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wicked company. I have in the following pages therefore done my best, as briefly and plainly as I could, to expose the groundlessness and absurdity of the one, and to set the danger of the other to view: hoping, through the grace of God, in some degree to assist towards the disabusing those minds that have been merely deluded by the plausibility of the former, and the awakening the thoughtless who were in no apprehension of hazard from the latter.

The principles I have endeavoured to explode were not chosen out of others for their weakness, but their strength: I could recollect none that were more plausible, and I really laboured to give them all their strength, as far as expression would contribute. Whether they are confuted, the Reader must judge: I profess to design their confutation. If I have not under any of the heads suggested any new thoughts or arguments, to those of greater reading

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or of more extensive reach than myself, yet it will be a great satisfaction if I have set old ones in a more convincing light to any mind; or if, by the connection of things, what is here said carries any stronger conviction to any person, than what they have met with before.

I write with a particular view to the benefit of those who are entering, or have but a few years since entered, upon the world. I am very apprehensive of their great danger of being corrupted and led away to their present and final ruin, by those two sources of Vice which are here enlarged on, and which, as steps, most speedily and fatally prepare for the finished Character of the Scorners. I do not say from any personal discontent or disappointment, nor with any reflection upon Divine Providence "that former days were better than these:" though as to the fact in general I believe it might be asserted,
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more especially in respect of the Education of young persons, the Sobriety of the friends of Liberty, and the Religion of the Religious. But, I will venture to affirm "that these days are not better than former ones:" and if so, the wisest and best will smile upon every sincere and regular attempt, as I hope this will be accounted, towards the preservation or rescue of the rising generation from the deceptions and snares of vice; since those of that Character in former days have thought no time or pains better bestowed, nor a love to Religion and Mankind better evidenced, than in that way.

However defective this attempt may be towards its professed end in the judgment of any, I desire they would take no other revenge upon it, for the sake of the intention, than to employ their better parts and pens in the same work, and with the same view: and herein, the Author gives it under his hand, he
will

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will not only forgive, but thank them, though this should thereby be set aside. As for those into whose hands this may fall, I desire whenever they sit down to read, they would read a Chapter at once, in order to their having a fuller view of the Subject, and the forming a better judgment of the propriety of each part. And when they have read it once, if it will bear, I would desire them to give it a second reading; that they may have the answers and the arguments ready for use in an hour of danger and temptation.

The reasonings are the strongest, and the advices the best that I was master of: what the fruit of all may be, I know not. But if any one shall derive from hence a greater dread of the beginnings of vice, stronger and more effectual resolutions against the snares and temptations to it, and are more determined for holiness and Heaven--- God shall have the glory: whose influence

ence and blessing I most unfeignedly implore and depend upon for success, in this and all other like attempts of usefulness to Mankind. In the prospect of that blessing towards the rendering this useful to some, I am fully prepared for any thing I may meet with from any quarter, though it be ungrateful in itself; and but for the hopes of that blessing to that end, I would never preach or write more.



PSALM

P S A L M i. 1.

*Blessed is the Man that walketh not in
the Counsel of the Ungodly, nor
standeth in the Way of Sinners, nor
sitteth in the Seat of the Scornful.*

IF there be any thing in the Objection against Religion, That it is a *considerable time* before the difficulties of it are conquered, and before any *pleasure* is found in it, and that these can never be experienced without great labour and struggle; doubtless it is equally an Objection against Vice, that persons cannot *presently* be insensible of the *pains and miseries* that accompany it, nor *presently* subdue that Shame and Fear which the God of Nature hath implanted as guards against it, and as the punishment of it under a conviction of guilt. Insensibility and Hardness is a work of time, and, where there hath been the advantage of a good Education, the attainment thereof requires *more painful* labour, than the attainment of that habitual goodness from whence the pleasures and satisfactions of Religion are found. Sin gains its first admission more easily, and sometimes very suddenly; but no one arrives at any great heights of wickedness, but by degrees. Some steps are in order of nature before others; but e-

very one paves the way for the next: one thing leads on to another, and one Sin very often creates a necessity for more to disguise or to defend it, till the Creature dares not look back, but plunges as deep as he can to drown Reason and Conscience; by which his Character is finished for wickedness, his State for misery. Scripture very often prescribes our duty under the recommendation of it to us as our happiness: The reason of which is evidently this, "To assure us of the inseparable connection
 " between them, and to lead us always to look up-
 " on the articles of our duty as the means of our
 " felicity." The text runs in this manner; describing the religious Person under the Character of the blessed or happy one. It is well known, the two general articles of duty are, "The ceasing from
 " or avoiding evil, and the practising of what is
 " good:" The text immediately respects the former, pointing out a means peculiarly serviceable thereto; which is, the renouncing all converse, society, and friendship with the wicked as such, or as far as in our circumstances it can be avoided. This in the general is all that some learned persons will allow to be the Psalmist's design. Others think, and in my account more truly, that he intended a particular *gradation* in these words; that he rises from one degree of wickedness to another, and thereby describes different *ranks* of Sinners, or different *stages* of Vice. I infer not this from the bare terms of Ungodly, Sinners, and Scornful, because I know the two first at least are used promiscuously; but from the three expressions *taken entire*. They *first* walk in the counsel of the Ungodly, *then* stand in the
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ry, in opposition to necessity, which might have been avoided, and for the evil of which *we know we are answerable.*

If we would but attend to our minds, we should find that our uneasiness under a consciousness of a wicked act is altogether of *another kind*, from what attends any event we could not help. Supposing any event brought upon us purely by Providence, this may excite *Grief*; but it never did, it never will produce *Shame* and *Self-reproach*: and the reason is, because we could not prevent or avoid it. When we do find Self-accusations and Reproaches under some actions, which is more or less Universal, doth not every one see a direct imputation of those actions to ourselves, and a charging ourselves with them as free and voluntary, and which might have been forborn? Can any creature that is reasonable believe those actions to be fatal, for which they blame themselves as much as they could do were they ever so free, or ever so much the matter of choice? Our own Consciences then, if but attended to, sufficiently confute this principle of a fatality or necessity accompanying our actions: our own sense and feeling is altogether on the side of Liberty: if our sensations do not impose upon us, we are *sure* we are free; and since our own experience is sufficient to expose this principle, I hope we shall not be corrupted by it; for that would be to be argued out of our experience, against which no argument is allowed valid. And if the sense of our own minds may not be depended upon to ascertain our liberty or power of self-determination, we may be deceived as to our understandings themselves,
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since we have nothing but *that* to assure us we do understand, or have any perception of truths: And then all disputes about this and every thing else is quite idle. Let us but consult our own minds then, and see how it is with them under such actions, and if we are honest we may soon detect the delusion and fallacy. This wretched opinion may in time probably help us off with the shame and fear that our Vices occasion; but in the meantime, that very shame and fear which we feel from a vitious act, is a standing evidence of the falshood of the principle.

S E C T. III.

ANOTHER counsel or principle of the Ungodly is this, “ That it is not supposable so
 “ great and happy a Being as God is should take
 “ notice of any thing that we do. What is it
 “ to him what we are, or how we behave? It is
 “ not likely so perfect a Being should concern him-
 “ self with any thing without himself, much less
 “ interest himself in human affairs, or with what is
 “ done by the Children of Men.”

This principle, tho’ it in words acknowledges a Divine Being, *in deed* and *in effect* denies it. It lays the Ax to the root of all Religion; it takes off all restraints, all fear of punishment and all hope of reward; it renders all the expressions of Religion and all apprehensions of future Retribution, idle and ridiculous. For these two things are inseparably connected, “ If God hath no concern with us,
 “ we have none with him.”

That we may not be led to walk by this principle, let us consider, What is it that should render it unlikely or impossible for God to concern himself with our affairs, or that should render it absolutely indifferent to him how we behave? This must flow from something in his Nature or ours.—What is there *in his* Nature to render his regarding our behaviour as a Governour so very absurd a thing? Is it because it would break in upon his happiness, and interrupt his own Self-enjoyment? This is grounded on a most ridiculous notion of the Divine Felicity; as if it lay in indolence and inactivity: And also of the manner of exercising the Divine Perfections; as if regarding the actions of Mankind must be a toil, a care, and the cause of weariness. This is to measure the power of the Creator by the weakness of Creatures, and to conclude that of him who is absolutely perfect, which we find in ourselves because of our imperfections. Did he make the World? If we think in that absurd manner of him, that the Principle would lead us to do, must not such a complicated System of things, so various as to parts, so exact and various as to design, lead us to imagine it cost him great *labour* and *anxiety*, and was a great interruption to his repose? But is not this a very stupid whim? And is it not as silly to suppose he cannot regard our behaviour without interrupting his own happiness, or to impute so mean an imperfection as toil or trouble to God?

Nor is that notion of the Divine Greatness more just or wise, from whence Men would argue it to be unworthy or unbecoming God to concern him-

self with us, or to regard our conduct and behaviour. For, the Greatness that under this pretence is ascribed to God, is no better than a weak pride, a mean haughtiness, a supercilious disdain; which is one of the silliest and most contemptible dispositions that can belong to a poor elevated Mortal; which we most justly scorn and despise amongst ourselves. It's true, we are mean, we are nothing when compared with himself; but are we not in the rank of Beings wherein he placed us? It was not beneath his Excellency to produce such Beings as we are, why should it be so to regard and observe us? Especially since he hath capacitated us for regarding and observing him.

But what profit or detriment, saith the principle, can accrue to him from us? I answer, none at all. But, doth it therefore follow, "*That we have nothing to do with him or he with us?*" Here also I would appeal to the experience and practice of those who hold this principle, for a confutation of it.

And I would ask them if they ever pray to God? I don't suppose such do it as an expression of obedience or homage: but do they not as a meer *natural* act, without any *previous deliberation* implore the Divine Help in extream danger, and seek Divine Relief under oppressions and straits? Do they not in many cases which are desperate, and which seem remediless as to human power, address themselves to Heaven? And do they not constantly do this as from an impulse of Nature, without reflection, without a prompter? Now certainly, it is as vain and ridiculous for them to pray in their distress, as in a way of dutiful homage to God, if he is wholly

wholly regardless of their affairs and indifferent to their behaviour: if God hath forsaken the earth why have they recourse to him in their extremities any more than at other times? If he takes no notice of what we do, what signifies Prayer under one circumstance more than under another? — But let such answer this also: why should they feel that powerful *instinct* urging them to apply to Heaven, or why that *inwrought propension* in human nature to implore Divine Regards and to carry them to God, if it was not the design of him that implanted it to assure *that he could and did regard them?* Why should they *involuntarily* lift up their eyes to Heaven when they knew not what to do, and when they despise Prayer at all other times; but that their Maker designed this instinct in their very frame, as a testimony he *doth* concern himself with this world, and interest himself in their behaviour? And if by their prayers they allow of the Divine Regard in one respect, why not in another? If they allow that he regards those petitions extorted by distress, why should he not regard those which carry worship and homage in them? And if God takes notice of Prayer, why not of the good and evil actions of their lives in general? Since the one is no more inconsistent with his excellency and happiness than the other. However unwilling libertines may be to allow of a Divine Cognizance of their behaviour, as being a rub in their way and an unanswerable obligation to Religion, yet I affirm, nothing can be brought against it, but silly and mean representations of the Divine Perfections; and every one hath that in their own frame, which, if attended to, would confute any principle that denied it.

S E C T. IV.

ANOTHER principle or counsel of the Ungodly is this, “ How can it be thought that
 “ God should be displeas'd with us for taking *little*
 “ liberties; or a *little* pleasure? We don't hurt him
 “ by it: nay, we don't *intend* any offence to him,
 “ nor to do any thing in meer opposition to him, but
 “ only to please and gratify ourselves a little; at
 “ which such a Good Being as he is can never be
 “ angry.” I have express'd this as I have several
 times heard it. If it were put into plain *English*,
 I think it would run thus, “ How can we think that
 “ any thing is displeasing to God that is pleasing
 “ to us?” And when so put, it answers itself. But
 to be a little more particular.

These *little* liberties, gaieties, and pleasures, as they are styled, are Moral Iniquities: this is suppos'd in the principle that I am endeavouring to expose. Now nothing of this kind can be *little* or trifling, and from the perfect rectitude of the Divine Nature we can most certainly conclude, that every thing of that kind must be as hateful to God as his threat'nings intimate. Let inclination then dress them up in any terms of diminution it cannot alter their nature; tho' it may facilitate the practice of them to the Libertine, it can no way lessen the Divine Abhorrence of the actions, or of the persons who are chargeable with them: *That* is unchangeable. Such diminishing sentiments of Vice were never dictat'd by understanding or reason; they are the pure language and effects of Inclina-

Inclina-

Inclination. But there is not a more flagrant or more fatal delusion, “ Than for us to judge of our actions by one standard, whilst God will judge of them by another.” — As for our *hurting God* by our Vices, it is acknowledged we cannot; but we necessarily dishonour him by them: which from a Wise, Holy, and Righteous Governour, will as certainly be followed with his resentments, as actual hurt and damage sustained by another, can be supposed to be followed with the expressions of their displeasure where they have power. — As for the *not intending any immediate affront to God* in their actions, whereby such arguers would colour the liberties they take, and screen themselves from the Divine anger; I would reply by asking, whether they do not *engage* in such liberties *with full intention*, whether they do not *intend the acts* themselves, and also whether they do not know at the time, “ That God hath forbid them?” I believe this won’t be denied. Why then, there must be “ an intention of doing an act known to be displeasing to God;” which, with the help of all their distinctions, falls very little short of acting from an intended opposition to God. Those can never be justly stiled *little* liberties, which are intentionally at the expence of the Divine Honour and Regard: and no one that knows any thing of God, or of the difference between good and evil, can think to wash away the guilt thereof by saying, “ they only intended to gratify and please themselves.”

S E C T. V.

ANOTHER counsel of the Ungodly is this: “ The Mercy of God is infinite, and therefore tho’ they do take some liberties that he may not allow, yet they doubt not but that they shall find shelter and sanctuary in that Mercy at last. *Such* a Being cannot be so severe as to punish them; for how can that Mercy be *infinite* that doth not extend to them? Besides, can it ever be thought that God made any Creature to damn it?” By this many encourage themselves in a wicked way, and by such a principle many, young persons especially, are in danger of being profelyted to Vice, of becoming very free with it, and of contemning all the means of reclaiming them. For under the expectations of such a Mercy, let the measure of their Vices be what it will, there can be no apprehension of suffering, or fear of being called to an account.

If we meet with any such Counsellors, Let us ask them what they mean by *infinite* Mercy: the term is delusive. Do they mean by it an *unlimited*, a *boundless* mercy, or one that will include *all* at last, let them be what they will? If they had ever taken counsel of Reason, not to say of the Gospel of *Jesus*, they would have known *such* a Mercy cannot possibly be Divine or belong to God. Unless all our natural Ideas as well as the revealed account of the Divine Nature fail us, God’s and must be a *perfect* Mercy: that is, such a One as agrees to a Being, possessed of every other Perfection as well as Mercy.

cy. It is the Mercy of Wisdom, Justice, Truth, and Holiness, and accordingly is ever exercised in perfect harmony with them. They are all of them but his Simple Essence; he is one as truly and perfectly as the other. The absolute Rectitude of the Divine Nature then must necessarily *limit* this Mercy; the equally essential Attributes of Wisdom, Purity, and Justice must *set bounds* to the exercises of it. It is not a meer Good-nature; it is not a compassionate instinct which works as light flows from the Sun, necessarily, or without choice and freedom: if this was the case, what gratitude would be due to God from us for his Mercy? But, on the contrary, it is a Moral Perfection in him, the exercises of which are to be expected from him *only*, as Wisdom conducts and determines, as Purity admits, and as Justice, or the preservation of his own rights, agrees therewith. This Mercy is very great indeed, or as the Scripture assures us, it greatly transcends the most perfect mercy and compassion that is found amongst men: but of course it hath its *proper* objects, to the exclusion of those who are not so. And whether this is likely to be a Sanctuary or Refuge to those who go on in their iniquities upon the presumption of it, I think every one who can distinguish may be left to judge in a sober hour.

As for that other way of expressing this principle, “Can it be thought that God made any creature to damn it?” If the Question be, whether God hath made any creature with an *original intention or absolute design* finally to damn it; I answer, No: detested be the thought! I abhor it as blasphemy that

that nothing can exceed. * But if the Question be, whether any creature that God hath made, *will or can finally be damned*, or *not be the object of his Mercy at last*? I answer, yea; and all that hath been suggested under this head is a proof of it. Meer Mercy is no more a true Idea of God than meer Power. If his Mercy is a *perfection* it must be limited; if it is the Mercy of an holy, wise, and righteous Being it cannot be boundless: the Principle then that ensures Mercy to ALL at last must be as false, as that God is wise, holy, and just, is true.

* I cannot forbear here entering a solemn caution against any *such like* imputation or thought of God: and that not only from the blasphemy and injury which it carries in it to his All-perfect nature, but also from the terrible consequences which it naturally draws after it upon the mind that embraces it. The worship of God, if it be real, both supposes and encreases our veneration and esteem of him; and the foundation of our honour and admiration must be the Character that he bears *with us*, or the *perfections* which he is apprehended *by us* to possess. If now, arbitrariness, cruelty, unrighteousness, or any thing essentially evil be imagined by us, either to belong to the Divine Nature, or to be the subject-matter of God's will and pleasure, there is very great danger of our being reconciled to those evils, from the veneration we pay the Being in whom they are supposed to subsist, and of our deriving from thence dispositions of the same kind. From whatever *accidents* it may be sometimes otherwise, I am sure there is nothing more natural and therefore probable, than for persons to lose their just abhorrence of those evils, if not to come to esteem them as excellencies and virtues, when they have once clothed God with such qualities, represented him to themselves *as acting* with them, and worship him *as thus represented*: and what is still more, as their veneration of *such a Being* rises, the danger of their reconciliation to and imitation of *such evils* increases.

S E C T. VI.

I WILL add one thing more as a Counfel or Principle of the Ungodly, upon which they act, and by which they enfnare others: “ Tho’ we indulge at prefent, fay they, in finful liberties, we can leave them when we will: we can as eafily quit as we engage, and forfake them whenever we have a mind to it.” Hereupon, when fuch are in company with thofe of tenderer minds and better principles than their own, who from thence refufe to run with them to excefs, they argue with them upon this principle, as if they had proved the truth of it; “ It is but for once and away, you need not make a practice of it.” And by this many have been initiated in Vice, and their refolutions againft it have been undermined and ftolen from them. But

Let us remember there is not a greater deception in the world than this, “ That a perfon who in any degree hath followed vice can quit it at pleafure.” Experience lies directly againft it; and fo Univerfal is it, that I am perfuaded no *single fact* can be brought in favour of this principle. Let perfons pretend what they will, it is the difficulty of forfaking the practice that is the caufe of their perfifting in it. For, they are often exceeding uneasy with themfelves, fick and weary of their courfe: they find their Mafter is very hard, their wages very poor, and from a diffatisfaction with themfelves they often refolve very firmly and fincerely that

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they will engage no more. Now, under such circumstances why don't they do what they say is so very easy to do? What prevents them? Not an approbation of their practice, not a satisfaction in their course: what is it then, but the labour of reforming, the difficulty of quitting it? Every such person is a living confutation of his own principle, and one would think therefore it should carry its own antidote along with it. I must insist upon it as the *only* evidence they can give of the truth of this principle, that it is an easy thing to quit such practices, *that they do it*, when they know they should, and so frequently resolve within themselves that they will. Do they call the persisting in acts against strong and repeated determinations to the contrary, *a leaving them off at pleasure*? Language won't bear this; and what protestation is valid against constant fact?

The truth is, they know little of human nature or of themselves, who know not that every single deliberate act leaves some disposition in the mind towards a repetition, and that the disposition increases in proportion to a repetition. No one can tell what one compliance upon such a principle as this may introduce. The experiment is extremely hazardous: the bounds we may set to ourselves, it is great odds, will never be kept. Instead of being at liberty afterwards, there is a proportional entanglement, a bias towards a prosecution: every fresh engagement encreases the difficulty of a reformation, and leaves a person still less of a power of acting at pleasure. — This principle is equally dangerous as false: it is an artifice adapted to the service of

Vice:

Vice: it insinuates itself very powerfully from its plausibleness, being calculated to persuade us, we may give a loose to inclination, and follow our own gratification, and when we are satiated and sick of it, or have brought ourselves into the greatest hazard by it, that we may at once retrieve all, and be presently in as free and safe a state as before. But let us remember it is a *meer* artifice; and none will find themselves more wretchedly deceived than those who fancy themselves too cunning for their Sins.

S E C T. VII.

AS an improvement of this Subject, let us exercise the most Religious care what principles we embrace. It signifies nothing indeed how just and true our Religious sentiments are, if our practice is not conducted thereby; but yet it is of the utmost consequence with respect to practice that our principles are good; those I mean, which are at the foundation of practice, and have a direct influence upon its being good or bad. By means of the Gospel, those truths which are eminently at the foundation of a Religious course are very clear and plain, approving themselves to every honest mind; and would we but try every suggested principle thereby before we embraced it, if we would not be deceived, we need not. What the eye is to the body, that the Understanding is to a person's actions. If that be blinded or corrupted what wonder if we go astray. If the principles are loose, it is great odds but the actions are of a vicious kind: when they are

only *consistent* with wickedness; how likely is that to prevail? How much more when in their nature they directly *lead* thereto? Then, they give a seeming authority to our follies, uphold a looseness of manners, and strengthen us in our irregularities against all that Reason and Law, God and Conscience can say. I think to this subject that caution of our Blessed Lord relates. *Take heed that the light that is in thee be not darkness* *, for, as he adds in another place, *if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!* The meaning of which taken together may be this; “ Take great heed that
 “ those sentiments and principles which are to guide
 “ thy course be not corrupt and false ones : for by
 “ them thou wilt be much more in danger of being
 “ led astray than if thou hadst no light, no principles at all : if the light itself be darkness, if that
 “ which should guide, seduces, how much more
 “ *certainly* wilt thou go astray than if thou hadst no
 “ guide at all !” — For direction in this matter I would offer the following hints.

Let us judge of principles by their fruit and effect, or by their natural influence upon the Christian temper and life. Sure we are that the Gospel in general is a *Doctrine according to Godliness* †, that it is calculated entirely for the advancement of Piety and Holiness. Whatever principle is apparently subversive of this, can never be a principle of the Gospel. I acknowledge, sometimes tho’ it is but seldom, those of a vitious tendency may be held, whilst yet the goodness of the heart or some better corrective principle held with it, prevents its natural effect; but still this is a

* Luke xi. 35.

† 1 Tim. vi. 3.

good rule to try our principles by. Our Lord himself I think hath laid it down; when, speaking of false Prophets, and directing his hearers how to distinguish them from the preachers of truth and righteousness, he saith *by their fruits ye shall know them* *; by the corrupt influence and effects of their doctrines. Good principles we know may be *without good fruit*, for by far too many hold the truth of God in unrighteousness: but may we not also say, they cannot *produce* what is evil, or have any ill influence upon practice. If therefore we meet with any in the world which in their obvious direct tendency would abate our regards of the Great God, would lead us to question his veracity, to presume upon his mercy, to despise his grace, to be free with his laws, to mock at sin, to slight conscience, or render us fearless of temptation—in these cases, it is no venture to say, *they are vitious and wicked*.

Again; in receiving or holding principles, let us see to it that it is Reason and Truth, and not meer Inclination that influences. Every vitious person may truly be said to be governed by inclination, and in no particular are they more in danger from thence than in respect of principles. When inclination is strong on the side of Vice, it will naturally seek and suck in those principles that favour and support it: there is always a readiness to take sanctuary in such sentiments as render a sinful practice easy; that blunt the force of natural principles, and take off the edge of natural conscience. As to those I have mentioned, few, if any, of tolerable understanding and honesty can embrace them upon con-

* Mat. vii. 16,

viction but from inclination; they certainly captivate at first, not by their *truth* but their *comfortableness*; not because they are *believed* but because they are *liked*: tho' I don't say but sinful affections may in time bring over the Judgment to themselves; and indeed it is not presently to be imagined what corruptions and impositions the understanding may suffer from inclination, nor what bare-faced lies a Man may tell to himself, and swallow them too, if they are but *comfortable* ones, or as the Prophet speaks, when *they love and like to have* matters as they represent them.

Oh! the happiness of an honest heart, of a pious and virtuous mind! How safe its course! How good its guide! How bold its thoughts! How comfortable its reflections! How peaceful its progress! What a security hath it from itself and the Divine Grace under its liableness to mistakes and to be imposed upon! It carries an antidote within itself against the contagion of *others* poisonous principles, and may promise itself that from God, which shall be its preservation from the damage of any *of its own* too; those which it may possibly thro' weakness entertain.

Justly may we dread the *government* of a vicious inclination: nor let us ever admit *that* to dictate, judge, or determine for us. Tho' a stander-by may be ignorant when it is conviction, and when it is inclination that influences in the choice of principles, yet we must know it ourselves; and what is infinitely more, God knows it: the God from whom every one's sentence shall at last proceed, which shall be governed by his own perfect knowledge of our

conduct and character. When persons have a strong disposition to wickedness, they may find out principles sufficient for number and quality to countenance or encourage them, by taking off the restraints God hath provided, or by making them ineffectual: but they should remember withal, nothing but self-delusion can be proposed; they can only flatter and misguide them, and subject them to an overwhelming disappointment: they can be no Apology for their practice, but a distinct article of charge and punishment at an impartial tribunal.

Finally, let us take care we embrace not any principles for the sake of those things that have no concern with the truth of principles themselves. The counsels of the wicked are oftentimes embraced purely for the sake of a general character which those persons bear for ingenuity, wit, or something of that kind: these make them go down insensibly; and oftentimes others, young ones especially, imbibe them upon the reputation of those who hold them. But what hath wit, humour, or any thing of that kind to do with Religious principles, or truth and falsehood? Will any one that *hath understanding* sacrifice it to another in a most important affair, because that other is a good jester, can tell a story well, or is allowed to be an ingenuous person? Would it justify me before God, or relieve me on a dying-bed under a dreadful survey of a past life, that I took my principles of conduct from the most *ingeniously* wicked? Universal reason saith, No. Let us then hearken to a very wise man's advice, *Cease my son to bear the instruction that causeth to err from the*
words

words of knowledge *. The *pretence* may be instruction, a bright thought, a new or a free thought ; or it may be, an useful one ; such as, how to sin and not to be in fault, how to stop the mouth of conscience or shake off every restraint, how to be too cunning for sin and too hard for God too — but, lend not thine ear to such wretched principles : fly from the counsellors, abhor the counsel. — If our aim was but to please God, to approve ourselves to him, and get safe to Heaven, we should be safe. For then, truth would be always sought, duty always loved and studied, we should keep as far as we could from the brink of danger, and in cases that were really doubtful should determine on the safest side : we should have the best security from every principle prejudicial to the Christian life, and whatever errors of judgment we fell into they would never corrupt our hearts, or hurt us with respect to the Divine Acceptance. May we studiously aim at this disposition and Character and steadily maintain it ; then may we hope to be preserved from the error of the wicked, and to be conducted in the paths of righteousness unto eternal life ; for, “ if we would not leave God, he will not leave us.”

* Prov. xix. 27.

C H A P. II.

S E C T. I.

TH E next step or stage that the text mentions in the Progress of Vice is, *The standing in the way of sinners*. By this is understood in general a conforming to wicked practices; and this is the next step to and the natural consequence of wicked principles. When the understanding, which was originally designed as the directive faculty, is deluded and corrupted by false apprehension of things, it is but natural to expect the manners will be corrupt. When those principles are sucked in that assure us we may unrestrainedly follow our inclinations and be chargeable with no crime; that if we are but *prudent* in our vices we need fear no ill consequences; that we may violate the Divine commands with impunity amidst all the Divine threatenings, from an unlimited boundless Mercy to which we may fly at last.—When these principles, I say, and such as these are embraced, which lay the reins upon the neck of inclination, and at once deliver from all check and restraint, how boldly may persons engage and persist in a vitious course, and how absolutely are all commands, that they do not like, dispensed with? If we take this expression of the Psalmist in its general import, it is, as I said before, descriptive of habitually vitious practices: but as it here stands may it not also point to the more particular way, whereby such practices become most effectually

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tually and speedily habitual? I mean, *the seeking the company and acquaintance of Sinners*: putting ourselves in their way, associating with them, contracting intimacies and friendships. When once the understanding is corrupted by vitious principles, the mind naturally receives a bias to wicked company: the inclination to vice, that befriends such sentiments and makes way for their admission, disposes to such associates; and then our stated experience tells us, vice gains a surprizing ascendancy in a very little time.

I shall consider the expression in this view: but that I be not misunderstood it is necessary to observe: Whilst we are members of Society, and follow the several employments Providence hath fixed us in, it is impossible but we should be *thrown* into the way of the wicked, and led in some measure to converse with them: nay, even Relation and Kindred may render this unavoidable and necessary. But this is *endured* not *chosen* by a serious mind, and so far indeed it is to every one an unhappiness and not matter of crime. The standing in the way of sinners, which I am speaking of, is the *choice* of such company, throwing ourselves in their way, desirous of associating and herding with them. It is an old saying and a true one, That a person is known by his company, or by those he is most intimate with and takes most delight in: and it is as true, that this doth not only *discover* persons, but *moulds* and *forms* them.

In considering these words as one of the stages of wickedness, I shall endeavour, I. To shew the influence that this standing in the way of sinners hath
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upon a likeness of manners and practice. II. I would reply to some pleas that may be made for such intimacies and friendships to evade the force of reproof or reasonings with such. III. I would offer some advices.

S E C T. II.

FIRST. I would shew the influence that this standing in the way of sinners hath upon a likeness of manners and practice.

I. The being conversant with their ways and manners hath of *itself* an insensible influence upon the mind and practice. The all-wise God himself designing to preserve the people of *Israel* from idolatry takes this method, not to suffer the Canaanites to dwell in the land lest they made *Israel* to sin, or, lest they should infect *Israel* with Idolatry from their sojourning or being conversant with them *. The language and manners of those we stately converse with insensibly becomes our own, and what the eye and ear are accustomed to, makes deep impressions, and transforms before we are aware. How many have and daily do fall into vices to which they have *no* natural propension or no *peculiar* propensity, but meerly from imitation? Without dispute this is the way by which PROPHANE SWEARING is propagated; since there is nothing in any constitution to lead to it, since there is no pleasure or profit pleadable as a temptation to it: it is caught purely by Company, taken up meerly from its being the constant language of associates.

* Exod. xxiii. 33.

Nay further, were a person, sincerely or eminently pious, accidentally to fall into the company of those who derided the most awful things, who could scarce speak without throwing out some extravagant thing against Religion, or who allowed themselves all manner of liberties with what respected the Awful God and the Eternal world; this *at first* most probably would awaken his zeal, fill him with detestation, and rather *raise* his Piety than abate it: but let him *frequent* such society and be often with them, and you would see him soon as languid as before he was warm, and what at first quite discomposed him shall not at all move him. Daily experience tells us, use would reconcile thereto, and merely thro' a customary hearing of those things they would lose their horror without any expence of pains; the very familiarity would be sufficient: and when the horror of the thing is taken off, the foundation of a reconciliation and resemblance is lay'd. The methods and ways of the company that we keep are so insensibly slid into, without any design on our part, that oftentimes others discern the Copy before they do who wear it: it insinuates and gains like a contagion. 'Tis hazardous even for the best established in Piety and Virtue to be intimate with vice, or familiarly to intermingle with those of that cast. Such a Scene being continually before the eye and the mind accustomed to it, at last the things themselves are aped and the mind is reconciled to them: so that *meerly* by being in the way or company of sinners there is a resemblance of them surprizingly contracted.

S E C T.

S E C T. III.

2. **B**Y conversing familiarly with such we see vice set off to the best advantage; and thereby the practice of it is more powerfully recommended. Some inclined strongly to taste vicious pleasures may find a very considerable restraint from a natural *timorousness*: upon the presentment of an opportunity their fear is roused, and it may be hath hitherto been their preservative: but by associating with those who let no such opportunity slip, they are embold'ned. When so many venture before their eyes from time to time without hesitation, and without any apparent suffering by it, they are induced to venture too. This fear amidst these bold examples appears, as it never did before, like *Meanness* and a *Little-ness* of Spirit; probably it is so represented by their companions: from hence a conformity to them comes recommended under the notion of *courage* and *magnanimity*. Others, tho' they find a strong propensity to some vices are restrained by a native *Shame*, and from a sense of the reproachfulness and scandal of some iniquities, joined with the apprehension of being discovered, they have kept themselves free. But, when they come to herd from time to time with those who can glory in their shame, who can make a merit of their reproach, who can boast of their exploits, and probably affect to appear more vicious than they really are—in such circumstances, vice assumes

fumes the appearance of Glory ; a light in which they never before saw it : it seems to have changed its nature and to become an *ornament*, since it furnishes so much pleasantry for conversation, and seems such a qualification for it. The *sharing* in the laughter and jollity of such companions by mingling with them makes their way appear right, or at least renders their course engaging : their mirth transfers such an appearance of innocency on their course, or at least so far removes the deformity and malignity of it, that the former shame is beguiled and set aside, and from better thoughts of it they are induced to an imitation.

There are many also whose lives are very vicious, who yet have some amiable natural qualities : such as Civility, Wit, Good-nature, Cheerfulness, Beneficence, and Humanity. These qualities, by associating with the persons whose they are, appear in a very strong and engaging light. By this means these too often cover the deformity of their vices, throw a veil over them, and even secure a reconciliation with them. The softness of a behaviour, an agreeable courtesy when it is continually beheld, makes the poison of the Example in other respects go easily down : a natural goodness of temper often fatally recommends a very bad practice to an associate : from a pleasure taken in the Man how easily do we proceed to an approbation of his vices, and from approving to imitating. The approbation of vice in this case may not be formal and distinct, but there is such an undistinguishing liking taken in
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in general to the Man, that his very vices are recommended too. The tacking some Ideas together in discourse which surprize a little and annexing a laugh thereto, shall soften the great prophaneness and indecency of a discourse, and for the sake of the Wit it is much but we put up with the wickedness of it: nor is it unlikely, that from the pleasure conveyed by the one, we shall mimick the other. Vice, when it is thus set off and accompanied, borrows a lustre, at least hides its own deformity, and the natural qualifications of the company insensibly convey the contagion of their conversation.

Again ; many of the vitious pretend to be *advocates* for their practice, and they use great art and industry to recommend their way of life : they take a sort of pride and pleasure in making proselytes. They will rally the principles of Education, and endeavour to work upon a natural shame to throw them off. They will tell us, that a fear of vice is nothing but prejudice and prepossession, or that our ill opinion is entirely owing to our having never tryed it ; whilst at the same time they will boast of their hearts desire, and with an air bless themselves in their pleasures and advantages. They will draw some tempting scenes, and set off their course with great flourish, adorning it with the characters and ascribing to it all the present consequences of virtue. Hereby things are suggested that would never otherwise have been thought on in favour of vice ; a picture is given of it that would never have been seen in the transient view of it in the life : and

what person, especially young ones, with warm passions is qualified from Education, reading, or thought, to see through the sophistry or to detect the delusion? At least, how gladly will they catch at such a representation when held out to them in favour of what their inclination befriended too much before, and how much more resolutely are they likely to engage, when, as they apprehend, vice hath so much more to say for itself than they ever imagined.

Thus doth converse with the wicked set off vice to the best advantage, inducing favourable thoughts of it, in opposition to all that the word of God and the counsel of the best suggest, and very peculiarly by this means exposes a person to tread in their steps and walk in their way.

S E C T. IV.

3. **T**H E rules and terms of friendship, which are generally thought decent to observe, influence greatly towards a resemblance of minds and manners. It is a term of friendship, in general thought reasonable, “ That we accommodate and “ suit our selves to our friends, that we endeavour to “ be as civil and agreeable as we can.” And when any are picked out as associates, 'tis but natural to suppose there will be a *desire* of appearing as agreeable to them as they are to us. From hence is that saying of one of the Fathers verified, “ If persons good and bad be joined together

“ together in a special bond of Society, they
 “ either quickly part, or they become alike.”
 Now, supposing an intimacy with the vicious,
 how is it possible that the terms expected to be
 observed in friendships should be kept to, with-
 out conforming to their general subjects of con-
 versation, and to the practices of such a Society?
 and what doth Experience tell us they are?

How often hath an *inward abhorrence* of some
 conversation and behaviour been smothered and
 suppressed for fear of becoming disagreeable, or of
 being charged with a breach of good manners?
 This hath paved the way for something further;
 and hereupon I may justly add, how frequent-
 ly have some, of better minds and greater remains
 of virtue than the rest, been led actually to join in those
 things, at the commission of which their hands
 have even trembled and their hearts aked? and
 this purely thro' fear of being accounted unfoci-
 able, of breaking company, or of being despised
 by their associates. Demands of conformity are
 made upon the foot of Good-breeding and Civi-
 lity, and whatever the discourse or the practice
 on foot be, it is expected that all sink to the
 level of the majority, upon pain of being charged
 with rudeness and ill-manners. And Oh! how
 hath reason, conscience, fine sense, and strong
 Religious sentiments yielded and been sacrificed
 hereto! To dissent, is interpreted to set up for being
 wiser and better than the company: this is accounted
 a *Reflection*, and is treated as such: infomuch
 that if any persons, how different soever in mind,
 taste, and manners from the worst, will associate
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with them, they must by the rules of such Societies not only suppress their better thoughts and more virtuous conduct, but must sink into a conformity to others, that they may be qualified for their company.

It may be said indeed, that *no* rules of friendship oblige a person to run *all lengths* with his company. This is very true in it self, and will be allowed in the case of *virtuous* friendships. But it is in vain to dissemble it, That a desire of the good opinion of our company is in a great degree inseparable from our choice of it: and when this company is of a vicious kind, by what can we think to procure their good-liking, but by at least an appearing resemblance of minds and manners? Where there is not this, but a person shall remonstrate and protest from time to time, what can he expect less than to be the **BUT** of their jests, and the object of their common scorn, which is not easy to bear, nor indeed is likely to be ventured when it is their good-liking that we seek. And tho' some who have associated with the wicked have rationally and religiously protested and dissented from some of their practices, yet this hath been seldom or never but *at first*: if they have continued their intimacy with such, their remonstrances and dissent have soon been over; either from the torrent of sneer and satyr they have been born down with, from the fear of being charged with ill-manners and spoiling company, or their own reconciliation to it. The usual ground of such intimacies will scarcely admit of a dissent from their vices: for
vice

vice itself in one shape or other is the general cement of such a friendship; *conformity* therefore must be its maintenance and support.

S E C T. V.

4 **T**H E standing in the way of sinners or associating with them hath a very considerable influence upon our minds and manners as God is concerned in the matter. I am fully satisfied in my own mind, That there is not only a natural Providence which maintains and supports the general system of Nature, and a Providence that directs and conducts temporal events amongst Mankind, but that there is, if I may be allowed the term, a *Moral Providence* by which I mean interpositions, influences, and assistances from God towards our improving our moral advantages, and our escaping the influence of those snares to which we are unavoidably exposed. I see nothing in this to clash with any Divine perfection, nothing inconsistent with God's Government of reasonable Beings, as free and accountable creatures; nor can I understand many passages of Scripture but upon the supposition of this as truth.

Now if we allow there are Divine interpositions and influences subservient to our preservation from the evils of unavoidable snares and temptations, then there is a foundation for this head, "That the customary associating with

" sinners will most probably introduce a con-

“ formity to them, as God may be concerned
 “ in the matter.” For, such have no just ground
 to expect any Divine interposition in their favour,
 because it is *running* into the very mouth of
 temptation and danger: it is a wilful exposing
 of themselves to hazard, and God may justly
 leave them to the immediate consequences of it.
 Their behaviour is a great provocation: hopes
 and expectations of safety from any thing on
 God’s part, in such cases, are not only vain but
 criminal, and may most righteously be answered
 by leaving them to themselves. And how much
 good then may one wicked companion destroy ?
 * How soon will a mind, however before fur-
 nished, be layed waste and in ruins, when a per-
 son lies under the continual droppings of such
 instructions, examples, and various sollicitations,
 with the help of its own inclinations, and all
 Divine interpositions are withheld ? ’Tis fond pre-
 sumption to expect any divine succours when
 we knowingly and of choice go out of God’s
 way ; and as to such company we may say,
 God is no otherwise there than *by his observing
 eye and displeased look*. And if those influences,
 ministring by our own minds, or by any inci-
 dents towards our restraint and preservation,
 are withheld, as indeed they are thereby *forfeited*,
 will not the evil Spirit that worketh in the
 children of disobedience soon gain an established
 Dominion ? especially where the means them-
 selves with which persons are conversant, are in
 their nature adapted to hurry on to the utmost

* Eccles. ix. 18.

lengths of wickedness, as the standing in the way of sinners is adapted to do. These things considered, I apprehend the wise man will be thought to speak like himself when he declares, *That a companion of fools shall be destroyed* *.

S E C T. VI.

BEFORE the Reader proceeds any farther, I would request him to make a pause and seriously to reflect on the nature and consequences of the thing I have been treating of. The thing I have been aiming at is to excite a Religious care as to the intimacies we contract, and the company that we keep. This, as far as I can judge, is of general use, and of as great importance in respect of our present and future happiness as any thing we can employ our care about.

Experience and observation give sufficient testimony, what waste and desolation in minds Company makes. What vice and vanity, which are terms pretty near akin, have by this means taken the place of very blooming promising excellencies? What hath been suggested already in this chapter, was designed to convince of the *peculiar* influence that friendships with the wicked have upon our minds and manners. I appeal to every ones reason, or experience, or observation, as they are qualified to judge by one or more of these ways, whether there is any one article to

* Prov. xiii. 20.

which more vice and misery may be imputed than to this? All the ways of judging of the nature and tendency of things must fail us I think, or we must have lived in a very unthinking state, if it is not matter of certainty with us, "That nothing more effectually lays the Ax to the root of all the goodnes that Education or other advantages may lay the foundation of; nothing makes a *quicker* dispatch both of principle and conscience, or more *speedily* finishes an abandon'd miserable creature." Let any foundation of Piety and Virtue be laid, I fear not to affirm, such a friendship destroys it all, and in a very short time too. And it is a standing confirmation of this, that when the principles of Education or early impressions have sat uneasy upon persons through the strength of vitious inclinations, or have recoiled upon their gratifying them, they have immediately run to such company as the most effectual expedient to rid themselves of those restraints, and to divest themselves of *bated* truths.

It is certain, Man is a sociable creature as he is a rational one, and it may be, the mind seldom unbends its self with so much pleasure as in the conversation of a suitable friend. Perfect solitude to such a Being would turn a Paradise into a Desert. But, might we not expect to find such a Being using his reason in the choice of friendships and intimacies as faithfully as in any other affairs of life? Was it ever intended Mankind should engage as the brutes run into herds, that is, associate with the first they meet, if they

are but of the same species with themselves? Or can this be reasonable, wise, or safe? The Gospel also requires Civility and Courtesy to all as a branch of its lovely temper; but can we not exercise this consistently with a wise and rational distinction of persons in our choice of intimates? Persons may be over-run with and at last lost by vices, which, we may say, are of their own growth, or which are not caught or copied from others; and these may haunt and rule them tho' they should betake themselves to a wilderness or cloyster: But how great is the majority of those who may and do lay their ruin upon their company? The broken hearts of wise and good Parents, the bitter lamentations of relatives, the bleeding sympathy of friends over the multitude that are destroyed this way, setting out in the most promising manner, are a continual and pathetick plea for the greatest care in this respect. Of the many unhappy creatures who die at a Gallows, most of whom thro' their vices are but a degree above the brutes in point of reflection, yet how few of these go out of the world, without declaring that their *company* hath had the principal influence in rendring them what they are, and in bringing them to their untimely end: and those of them who have had the best education, and are of the best understanding, are most free and open in this acknowledgment. I see not, I confess, wherein it would be a reflection upon the wisest and the best to admit their evidence, and to take their caution. Surely we ought to believe there is a Rock, and
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to dread it too, where we see so many wrecks! Amidst the many scriptural warnings against iniquity, do we not in all of them hear a voice saying, *stand not in the way of Sinners?* For, we should always remember, that a warning against the *end* is a warning against the *means*; and the obligation to regard the one infers equal obligation to regard the other. An indifferency or an undistinguishing behaviour in respect of our company, betrays great ignorance or great contempt of God and our immortal Souls, which by associating with the wicked will infallibly grow. Wherever the fear of God is in any degree, and there is a sincere desire of having a conversation becoming the Gospel, that is, where there is the lowest degree of sincerity, the congregation of evil doers will be hated*. And this which is an *evidence* of our goodness would be a considerable means to preserve it. In short, where the standing in the way of Sinners is matter of *choice*, be the pretension what it will, farewell to wisdom, peace, and safety, so far as Eternity is concerned in them: but, so far as we are *cast* upon dangers of this kind by Providence in our situation, employment, or alliances, so far we may hope for preservation, whilst it is our governing ambition to be true to God, and to be faithful unto death. Whilst we keep in his way, which is the way of duty, we may expect he will keep with us: and since herein lies a considerable part of our security, let us exercise that watchfulness as to this and every other snare as may

* Psalm xxvi. 4, 5.

engage our God with us, so as to preserve us from the evil influence of every temptation in every state, and lead us thro' life under the smiles of conscience, and the joyful prospect of a better world ; where all are **ONE** as to friendship with God, and from thence, perfectly secure and happy one in another.

C H A P. III.

HOW obvious soever a little consideration would render it, how certain soever constant experience proves it a truth, “ That associating with “ sinners hath a very great influence upon our re- “ sembling them in mind and manners ; ” yet inclination hath invented several pleas to countenance and defend the practice ; which may also seem at first sight to justify the running the hazard. From their plausible appearance it is requisite to take notice of them, and under each I shall endeavour to shew their fallacy and weakness.

S E C T. I.

First Plea. **S**OME may say, by conversing freely with such they have an opportunity of doing them good, of reproofing them for and correcting those things in them which are faulty and sinful, and the stricter the friendship is, the more likely, say they, are we to prevail upon them.

Reply. It must be acknowledged, that doing good is one of the noblest ends that reasonable crea-

tures can propose to themselves: it is an end in perfect agreement with the general design of the most Perfect Being; and the doing it in that way which the Plea proposes is in the truest manner to concur with the Saviour of the world, the great pattern our Religion proposes to us, who went about rescuing souls from the bondage of sin and Satan, and therein from present and everlasting misery. And tho' we may not be finally successful, yet when our fellow-creatures appear posting to ruin, it is no small service to *check* them in their course.

But the Question is, Whether the way to effect this or any further degree of good upon them is *by becoming companions and intimates of such*. I apprehend it much otherwise. We may have sufficient opportunity for this, if we are really disposed to it, upon the foot of an *acquaintance* only. It is fit indeed they should be convinced of our good will towards them, in order to the influence of what we say; and this they may be by a general concern to serve them in lower matters as we have opportunity. A refusing an intimacy with them, instead of lessening our capacity of serving them in the way the plea proposes, will rather be a qualifying us for it. For, thereby they will see themselves continually reproved, and our not associating with them as *chosen* companions is in its nature adapted to work shame and confusion in them. This is according to the Apostles rule, *If any man obey not our word, note that man. How? have no company with him that he may be ashamed.* But to prevent extremes he adds, *Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish*

nish him as a brother *. He would not have them *fly all* converse, or withhold civil regards which might lead him into prejudice against them ; but he at the same time remonstrates against *an intimacy*, the refusing which was likely to bring him to shame and amendment.

Indeed, they must be great strangers to themselves and to human nature, who know not that by intimacies with the licentious the best morals are greatly endangered ; and that let a person commence a familiarity with ever so good a disposition or view towards them, the sober are far more likely to become converts to the licentious, than the licentious to become converts to Piety and Virtue. And when the virtuous are once gone over to their practice, the disposition to do them good, as well as capacity for it is at a full end : there will be no heart to it ; there can be no grace or propriety in it. So that by intimacies with such, the opportunity for doing them good is more likely to be lost than gained, and by the strictness of the friendship there will be less disposition to reprove from a familiarity with their extravagancies, or if they are rebuked they will less regard it, from one who hath rendered himself cheap and mean from *some* unjustifiable compliances with them, which he can hardly avoid.

* 2 Thef. iii. 14.

S E C T. II.

Second Plea. **T**H E R E are none, say others, so bad but I may get some good by them. I may improve my understanding, may learn a great deal of wisdom, refine my way of thinking, or be better qualified for my own particular business and profession. These are universally allowed very commendable views; and is not a person justified in the prosecuting them?

Reply. Doubtless these are very laudable ends in themselves, and a person is to be commended highly who hath proposed them deliberately to himself; nay, 'tis very probable that some, whose lives are the most licentious, may be peculiarly capable of assisting herein.

But let us consider; are these things so valuable as to be purchased at *any rate*? If sensuality of mind and practice accompany learning, ingenuity, and a good understanding in our acquaintance, those accomplishments render them the more dangerous companions. We are not at first sight aware what such engaging qualities may serve to introduce or reconcile us to, when they are resident with immoralities. It is very difficult for a person to frequent the Society of such, or to chuse an intimacy with great knowledge and great wickedness, and not to take down the one with the other. And what, I pray, can a person receive that shall be a compensation for the loss of his Piety and Virtue? Surely, more depends upon them than upon any thing else. And when they are gone, natural or acquired accomplishments

complishments do but the more expose the sinners unreasonable course, and aggravate a final account? That person must have a very great value indeed for thoughts and words, who can risque his Religion and Heaven for them; who can surrender them for the pleasure of a fluent tongue, or exchange them for the entertainment or possession of ingenuity. Would not reason bear us out if we should say, “ it is madness to sacrifice innocency for any tree of knowledge, or to give up a virtuous mind in exchange for any science or skill in the world.” The odds between these are so great, that the person who risques the former for the sake of the latter may truly be said, “ to stake all against Nothing.”

But besides; are knowledge and other qualifications that entertain and improve so *confined*, that we can attain them no where but amongst the licentious, and amongst them no otherwise than by associating continually with them? Cannot they be compassed more safely? Will not Religion and Ingenuity grow in the same soil; that persons must needs herd with the Irreligious in order to their improvement and entertainment? Certainly *others* may be found out, from whom as much might be got one way without paying so dear for it another? But were it otherwise, as I am sure it is not, if my advice were asked in that case, it should be this; “ let all go rather than the wisdom and pleasures of Piety, the peace and entertainment of a conscious virtue: live in ignorance rather than live and die in wickedness.” We may adhere to it as a truth of equal evidence and importance with any we can learn from the most knowing, “ That all the improvements, the
“ in-

“ intellectual or civil advantages we can compass in
 “ an whole life, are bought by far too dear when
 “ purchas'd with the loss of Religion and Virtue.”
 Were the advantages from such company a thousand
 times more than they are fancied to be, the time is
 near at hand, when they would all chearfully be
 given up for the recovery of that possession and en-
 joyment of ourselves that was bartered away for
 them. In truth, they are no way *fit* to be made in-
 timates of by one who understands the dignity of his
 own nature, who demand the renouncing of present
 peace and future prospects as the price of their ac-
 quaintance: for, what can they communicate that
 can be an equivalent? After all; the fear of the
 Lord *that* is wisdom, and the departing from evil
that is understanding*.

S E C T. III.

Third Plea. **T**HAT which is a snare to ano-
 ther may not be so to me: every
 person is not alike: there is a great variety and dif-
 ference in the natural turn and disposition of the
 mind, which renders that a temptation to one that
 is not so to another. For my part, may some say, I
 have conversed long with some of the worst and
 have found no damage from it; and therefore in
 this case every one must judge for themselves, and
 act as they find it with themselves.

Reply. I readily allow this difference between
 some and others as to disposition and the cast of the
 mind, from whence some find little or no present
 inclination to, or present danger from being conver-

* Job xxviii. 28.

fant with some vices, by which others at the same time are carried away : outward circumstances also may make this difference. But, have we not many instances of persons being insensibly corrupted and drawn away, to length of converse, into those very vices against which they seemed strongly guarded by nature, by which they seemed to have no disposition, and to which, according to the plea, they for some time found no temptation ? Have we not seen the natural disposition strangely alter ? How hath a native modesty been conquered, and a very unexpected boldness been introduced ? How hath a native sweetness and gentleness of mind been lost, and an obstinate stiffness and stubbornness taken its place ? And this purely from the influence of company. Now as these dispositions belonging to the natural frame were considerable preservations from many vices, so they being lost and their contraries taking place, a way is made for the admission of those vices, however opposite they might have been to the former turn of their minds : and from hence, those things become temptations which before were none. — But if any should still persist in it as fact, that they have kept up an intimacy with the vicious, and have found no damage from it, I have these two things to say in reply, which I think deserve to be considered.

I. It is very probable such are not so sensible of hurt or damage in this respect as they ought, nor have been so careful in their observation of themselves as they should. The point is, “ What do they call damage ? ” I here suppose the person thus pleading to desire the Character of a Religious person. And upon this supposition I would entreat

such impartially to reflect and observe, whether this company of theirs from whence, as they say, they have sustained *no hurt*, hath not greatly impaired their seriousness and their regard to God and Religion? Hath it not brought them to a great indifferency about their duty, whether they discharge or omit it, and introduced a general neglect of their conduct, as far as the laws of God are concerned? Have they not by that means lost much of the tenderness of their consciences, and become reconciled to many things that they once *justly* startled at? Do not these now live very much by rote and custom who once lived by rule; consulting the pleasant and unpleasant, the profitable and unprofitable for this world in their actions, instead of the good and evil of them as once they did? Once more; is not the Religion that they have, just of that form which the *chance* of conversation and company gives it, and just to the degree which that permits. If the case be thus, I must beg leave to say, whatever *their* sentiments are, they have sustained great damage; and tho' they may not yet have been partners with others in their *disgraceful* vices, they are in a fair way for it. To hint a parallel case as to this world. Every wise and thinking person will allow, *that* company had done a man a great deal of mischief, that had made him idle and quite indifferent to his business, or whether he went forward or backward in the world, tho' it had not yet brought him into any of the *expensive* vices. For every one I believe can see the natural connection between these, and that tho' the person was not yet *extravagant* in common estimate, he could not be long otherwise. In like

like manner, a very slender regard to a Divine Being, indifferency and carelessness as to our behaviour, the loss of fear as to sin and temptation are as truly a degeneracy from a state of Religion, and the high-road to scandalous vices, as a neglect to business is the road to poverty, and to the expensive vices of lewdness and drunkenness. If persons therefore will not account these alterations in themselves, a considerable damage in their Religious Character, which I think are *inseparable* from vitious company, they must excuse those who impute it to the impairment of their understandings, as well as to the loss of their heart and affections.

II. If such have stood in the way of sinners, and have not been really injured by being drawn to an imitation of their vices, they ought to look upon themselves much indebted to the divine interposal and influence. I think it would be just and beneficial to look upon it in this light. Now what is the lesson that this teaches? Surely this, "Do not trespass too far, nor plead your safety hitherto as an argument for proceeding." If God hath, as our Blessed Lord hath taught us all to pray that we might be, delivered from the evil, from the mischiefs and sins that such company would lead to, yet their security may most righteously be withdrawn by their *continuing to run* into temptation. For in such a case, that petition "to be delivered from the evil," is downright mockery. Whatever inclination may plead, we are not at liberty in this matter. For, if we have not, under intimacies with the vicious been yet led to an imitation of their *enormities*, we must have sustained considerable damage,

and contracted that which paves the way to them, or which, if not remedied, will issue in something as fatal for Eternity: and we have the greatest reason to believe, that whatever was our security hitherto from their scandalous vices, will by the *continuance* of such an intimacy fail us, and that we shall resemble them in those articles which we at present detest.

S E C T. IV.

Fourth Plea. **I**F I converse not equally with all as they fall in my way, they will say I am morose and sour; and if I pretend Religion or plead that against such a friendship, Religion will sadly suffer; for they will impute all the moroseness and churlishness to that.

Reply. In order to shew the weakness of this let what I have already said be recollected; that I am not speaking against civility, courtesy, nor a beneficence towards the worst, as opportunity offers, nor consequently against that easiness and freedom in conversation which these imply, as we accidentally fall into the company of the vicious; but only against *chosen friendships* and *indulged intimacies*. It is also a very laudable care to do what we can that Religion be not evil spoken of by our means, and particularly that it be not brought under that unjust brand of unsociableness, sourness, and ill-nature, to which its nature and influence is as opposite as light to darkness. But, this can be no further our duty than is consistent with other branches of duty: for, we have this standing rule, “Not to do evil

“ that good may come.” Now, none can walk circumspectly or by the rules of the Gospel, but their behaviour is liable to be branded with some term of reproach, and thereby their Christianity exposed to a reflection by those who walk in the way of their own hearts, and as seemeth good in their own eyes. The question therefore is, whether the reproaches are *just*; and if they be unjust, whether we should run an apparent hazard of our eternal happiness to avoid them. Put the case before us, of a person professing great regard to Religion becoming an intimate associate of the vicious. It is not supposable but some things would be started or proposed, that must be very abhorrent and shocking to his better sentiments and more tender mind, if he is what he pretends to be. Should he express his dislike and enter his protest against this. it is great odds but his Conscience and his Religion will have some hard name given it: what way then hath he left to avoid these reproaches both of himself and Religion, but an *entire* conformity to such company: but would this do? No, far from it: for if those who profess a great regard to Religion should run the lengths of those who have discarded it, it is well known, Religion would soon have a worse brand than moroseness, and they a worse Character than sour or churlish. From constant experience it is found, that the compliances of the professedly Religious with the vicious practices of others, which from intimacies can hardly be avoided, have, as by authority, subjected all pretensions to Religion to the brand of hypocrisy, and have led their very Solicitors and Tempters to evil, when once they have prevailed, to

charge their profession with being no more than a pretence to commit, or a cloak to cover, the worst of practices.

It is the greatest absurdity therefore to contract *intimacies* with the vitious, (as the plea must imply if it is any plea at all for what I have been condemning) in order to *prevent* reflections on Religion: since daily experience tells us, that is the way beyond all others to load it therewith: and such a one as it hath suffered infinitely more from than from any others. Suppose then, that a person be termed morose and sour for refusing such friendships, and it be imputed to his Religion, as doubtless true Religion will ever lead to such a refusal; he is no way criminal herein; it is an offence taken and not given: it cannot be required of us to purchase a good word for Religion in general, at the imminent hazard of our own in particular. If any will stifle a fear of offending our Maker, Superstition; a care of our immortal Souls, Preciseness and Humour; and an abhorrence of evil, Ill-nature; they must: but we should be egregious fools not to be *obstinate* in this Superstition, Humour, and Ill-nature: and Religion would suffer infinitely more by our avoiding these thro' intimacies with, and an almost *unavoidable* conformity to such revilers in any really vitious practices, than it can possibly do by any of *their* reflections.

This plea indeed can be nothing but weakness or pretence: and I fear that when such *mention* a regard to Religion they *mean* themselves; when they *talk* of rescuing that from censure, they only *mean* their own gratification and escaping personal censures.

fures. It looks to be more a dictate of Vice than Religion.—No; if the shunning such intimacies be moroseness, superstition, or any other hard thing which they will please to stile it, let us be more so: for to this conclusion we may come, and may most reasonably abide by it, “ Religion needs none of
 “ these recommendations or supports; reproaches
 “ can never be probably avoided by friendships
 “ with the vitious, but upon our going *all* their
 “ lengths; and if we do, it is great odds but they
 “ will be the first that shall reproach for that con-
 “ formity.” This every one must see is infinitely harder to bear, than any we can sustain for shunning their friendship, since it will be seconded by conscience; and the sting of every reproach lies in its justice and truth.

S E C T. V.

VITIOUS friendships appearing so dangerous, and so entirely without plea and defence, as I hope they do to those who have carefully read so far, I trust it will not be unacceptable to those who are convinced thereof, if I subjoin some advices which may be serviceable to all either for preservation or recovery from them.

From a natural instinct we go into friendships and intimacies, and, as I have allowed, there is hardly any circumstances wherein the mind so agreeably unbends itself, as in the conversation of a well-chosen friend. But since by carelessness or a wrong-turned mind our greatest pleasures and benefits may become mischiefs, I would suggest a few things

things for our more safe converse and familiarity with others: which, if Good, are of the greater consequence, as our company hath so considerable an influence upon our minds and practice.

First Advice. Let us carefully see to the general state and turn of our *own* minds; that it be prevailingly good and holy. It then may be stiled so, when we have an inward abhorrence of iniquity and vice, and a settled relish and love to Piety and goodness. Our security as to all the snares of conversation lies very considerably in the settled temper and disposition of our own minds towards the ways of righteousness and life. Unless that be good, we may say, humanly speaking, it is pure accident or chance if a person comes not out of *common* conversation the worse for it: but when our own minds are complectionally good in respect of their dispositions, it is an antidote like an excellent constitution in the time of a common contagion. They will then lay hold of the good that is offered, improving it and will be improved by it: they will feel a shock upon every appearance of evil, and an increase of their abhorrence from thence; be more quick at discerning any thing that looks that way, and meet it with a proper check and indignation. *To be out of the way of temptation* is a great advantage, but not equal to a heart fully set against all evil, and in love with goodness. It would considerably promote such a settled good disposition would we but frequently and deliberately consider the unreasonableness, dissingenuity, and danger of vice; would we but set it before ourselves as an offence against the highest and best

best Being, most unbecoming ourselves as we are reasonable, and directly repugnant to our own interest as we are designedly immortal. Let us also to this end conscientiously and stately engage in those exercises of Piety, which in their nature tend to plant and improve the fear of God and a regard to him at all times: this hath a direct influence upon habitual goodness and holiness, by destroying our love of sin which is its strength, by securing the aid of divine grace, and letting us into pleasures and advantages far superior to what vice can propose. And let us depend upon this so far as to make the experiment, "That the more of the mind and heart there is in these exercises, the more their benefit this way will be experienced."

Second Advice. Let us exercise a constant watch over our particular temper, and guard against the particular snares that may expose us to. We must be great strangers to ourselves not to know what it is: and as that hath a considerable influence in the choice of our company, for we generally sort with those who suit ourselves in that, so from their suitability to us they have the greater ascendancy over us to betray us into extreams, and if vicious, they will certainly make an advantage of it.

Every kind of natural temper hath its advantages and disadvantages in respect of Religion. The lively and chearful, when the mind is set right to God and goodness, are capable of more active service than others: but then on the other hand, they are exposed to levity, and froth, and to what comes with the alluring face of pleasure. The sweet, civil, and gentle disposition, when accompa-

nied

nied with Religion, is retained generally by the strongest principle of Religion, Love, Gratitude, and every thing that is generous: but this also exposes greatly to a conformity to the company it is in: it renders it very difficult to deny or practically to dissent even when it disapproves, and endangers the sacrificing conscience to apprehended forms of Civility. It must therefore be of the greatest service to us, to carry about us a lively sense of our prevailing cast and turn of mind; to abstain as much as possible from all such company as we know will prey upon our weakness, will put our temper to the test, or make an advantage of it for sinful compliances. I think the lively and chearful should be much upon their guard in that company, where nothing but pleasure and mirth is proposed: the civil, affable, and obliging disposition should never but by necessity frequent that company, where it knows it shall frequently be put to the difficulty of saying, No; or of denying, in order to preserve its virtue and innocency. In every company let us attend to our own temper, that it run us not into extreams with others, and let us Religiously shun that company, which we have found to make an advantage of our disposition for a conformity to vitious practices.

Third Advice. Let us place all honour and happiness in what will secure us the approbation of God, and the testimony of our own consciences; or, make that the standard of what is truly honourable and felicitating. Every principle that is a natural motive to goodness ought to be encouraged; but there is nothing more pernicious than mistakes

as to principles of action. Applauses and Characters from men have been most successful inducements to surrender reason and conscience, to betray into an universal conformity to company. It was the free declaration of one who bore the title of Nobility, not less remarkable for his free accusations of himself under his sickness, than for the bold impieties of his health, "that he was influenced
 " to his extravagant language and his formal de-
 " fences of Atheism by the affectation of being the
 " First-Wit ; and that he was led on in that course
 " from time to time by the applauses of his com-
 " pany, tho' under bitter and reproachful exclama-
 " tions against himself, when alone." Indeed, when honour and happiness is thus placed it quickly defeats its own end, and the result is infamy and disgrace. Let a person place his felicity in the opinion of the world, and ultimately seek the honour that comes from thence, he must as a means to his end accommodate his behaviour to their taste, and govern it by their maxims. He must study to do what is pleasing to the world, and whoever doth so, must in many cases displease himself and God too, by doing what is really dishonourable. And what doth the applauses of a croud signify, when a man is in disgrace with himself? What is reputation abroad, when a man hath none at home or with himself? It is very hard, if possible, to be this way honourable and virtuous at the same time; for such applauses are too commonly founded on resemblance of practice, and that none of the best, and lead those who affect them *as*
 I *their*

their happiness to live by custom and common example.

Let us endeavour then to set our understandings right in this matter, that we may not be misled by popular but empty sounds. Reputation and Honour are grateful to human nature, and are to be valued for the opportunity they sometimes give for usefulness: but then, their value and worth abundantly vary according to the quarter from whence they come. The applauses of the idiot or ignorant are justly deemed contemptible from their inability to judge of excellencies, or to distinguish between them and their contraries: the applauses of the vicious are chiefly scandals and reflections from a supposed resemblance of themselves: none but the wise and virtuous have any honour to *give*, and that is only to be *taken* as conscience seconds it. Now, when, from this way of estimating, our hearts are set upon the honour and happiness flowing from the approbation of God, who only can make a right judgment of us and esteem us according to our real merit, we are in a fair way of conversing more safely with others. Vicious examples then will want their chief motive; we shall neither fear the censures of the wicked, nor seek their applause; we shall find it much more easy to leave others where we think they leave God; and feel a warm resentment against every indignity offered to him, by whom we covet to be honoured, and from whom we hope to be happy: we shall then be free to follow conscience *against* custom and company; our principle of honour will be *with* conscience, and we shall covet nothing from the world
but

but what we can obtain with the approbation of God, and a well-done from our own hearts.

Fourth Advice. Trust to *no* Company so far as to indulge a security. As to what generally goes under the name of *Good* company, it is frequently termed so from what would not recommend it to a wise and good person. But when we do associate in a friendly way with those of a character for sobriety and a regard to God, let us not in confidence of safety give a loose to our temper, or be off our guard. The best of persons are not our rule ; for such may be guilty of indiscretions very little different from vice, and of carrying lawful matters too far. One may propose, and another, from the general good character of the proposer, may implicitly consent to what is in itself of no good report, and of a very evil tendency. In whatever company therefore we are, let us maintain our watch, and judge of preferences and actions, not by the character of the persons, but by the nature of the actions, and the denomination they have in the Gospel of Christ. I fear indeed, if we go by this rule, we shall be obliged to stop short of the lengths that many run, who wear the general character of sobriety, and to enter a protest against the conduct of many as walking disorderly, who flatter themselves that theirs is only Christian liberty. But *for this very end* I have laid down this Advice: duty and safety make it necessary. Absolutely to trust or give up ourselves to the conduct of *any* company or society, is running a very great risque: none are thus to be trusted in be their character what it will. If

one, presuming upon absolute safety from his company, shall give temper or inclination a loose, others for the same reason will probably fall in therewith, and thereby folly and sin too may insensibly circulate. On the contrary, would every one in societies and in company of the best character, but be upon their guard against the approaches to vice, they might jointly contribute to each other's pleasure and safety.

Fifth Advice. Statedly reflect on what hath passed in company, and judge of it by the common standard of life and rule of judgment. In the heat and pleasure of conversation many things pass unattended to, which probably a calm reflection would give us a very different sentiment of, from what we had at the time. When our conversation statedly undergoes a scrutiny from our selves, we are in the way to rectify former errors, which otherwise may be repeated from time to time till they become habitual, and the evil of them is entirely overlooked: and a consciousness of this our practice will render us more careful when in company, not to lead or join in any foolish talking and jesting which is not convenient, or becoming Christians*: Such as defiles the mind, intrenches upon the honour of God, or detracts from the veneration due to things sacred. These things may be unheeded at the time, but reflection would shew us their deformity: and if we are desirous of avoiding vice or what hath an affinity thereto, and of conversing innocently and safely, we should stated-

* Eph. v. iv.

ly review what hath passed in company in the calm and retirement of our own minds.

Sixth Advice. Let us check and keep a strict rein upon our inclination to company, that it gain not an ascendancy, and introduce the natural and various mischiefs of its excess. This is as capable of excess as any other inclination, it is as often found in its excess, and is attended with as fatal consequences. I fear many a single person and family too may lay their ruin in every sense, to what we usually stile *Company-keeping*. The mind and heart is undoubtedly engaged too far this way, when it breaks in upon the hours of business, when the calling is neglected for its sake, when retirement is rendered a burden, or when all leisure hours are melted down this way.

Such indeed may say, " They always take care " that their company is good. " But to this I must beg leave to reply, " Let the company be what it " will, such a love and addictedness thereto cannot " be good. " It is a very unreasonable and inordinate prevalency, and introductive to the greatest mischiefs as to both worlds. All that know what real Religion is, and to whom the Gospel of Jesus allows the character and hopes of the Religious, know also that it is not easy to secure and maintain the distinguishing character of a Christian with all their care, watchfulness, and improvement of opportunities to that end. What is *their* title to a Christian character then likely to be, over whom company hath this ascendancy? What are its natural effects? Why, observe it where you please you will find, that where persons have this unreason-

able *itcb*, to give it its best title, of *conversation* with others, that they have neither opportunity nor inclination, time or heart, to converse with themselves: they are strangers at home till they dare not return, their own thoughts and reflections being some of the worst company. From hence they derive such a levity and frothyness that they cannot admit a serious thought, and through a contracted incapacity and dislike of themselves they are averse to reflection. A pass, by this means, is opened to the mind for any thing to enter, and a total disinclination to recollection takes place, so that they cannot fix on any subject of a Religious nature to check an inclination, to correct any ill impressions that have been made, nor rise to any great, Ideas how much soever they deserve their attention, or how necessary soever to their reformation or improvement. The closet becomes hateful, nor know they how to employ themselves when there: every thing is burdensome that is out of their circle of empty pleasures, and every thing grows above them that is above amusement. If long observation and variety of testimonies do not fail me, I am very certain, “ That
 “ we may as well expect to accomplish any end
 “ without the use of natural means, as to be truly
 “ Religious without frequent retirement.”

Permit me therefore to press it upon all who take this into their hands, especially upon younger persons, who are making their way, as it is usually phrased, into the world, that they guard against such an inordinate love of company. Suffer not your selves to be *betrayed* into it: remember it is capable

pable of excess, it is easy to run into that excess, and then it is attended with as mischievous consequences as can well be imagined. The first inducement, I will suppose, is *good-company*; but let me tell you, without a restraint upon this inclination, you will soon lose your *first* taste by which you choose your *first* associates: *any thing* at length will do *if it be but company*, and you will become as undistinguishing in your relishes, as you are undistinguished in your morals. — I beg leave to add, That the more I know and observe the world, the more astonished I am at some ways of Education into which many, called Parents, run. I mean, the leading and introducing children into all *manner* of company before they have any ballast of their own, before they can in any degree distinguish between truth and falsehood, shadow and substance, or between what *is* done, and what *ought* to be done. This I know is glossed over with the term of *their knowing the world*. — But I would ask, what occasion is there for this knowledge? I would suppose that *no Parents* intend to *teach* their Children vice; on the contrary, that they propose amiable and useful qualifications by this means. But let me ask, cannot they be wise without having vanity and folly playing upon their senses, at a time too when one may say *they* are nothing but sense and imagination? Cannot they be led into just apprehensions of what is right and good, without being familiar with evil? May they not have a sufficient knowledge of the world to answer all the ends of their being sent into it, without being conversant with the worst scenes in it? With as much reason might it be said, however
homely

homely the comparison be, that a person could not know the world literally, or as a system, if he was unacquainted with the dunghills. Why must they be Eye and Ear-witnesses of all the varieties and forms of vanity and vice? Do such Parents know any thing of the world themselves, and not know that those things grow up so naturally of themselves, that they don't need to be watered and cultivated by such pains and expence? I would ask but one question more; do such Parents propose this knowledge of their children *in order to practice*? I own then the means is very apt, and they bid very fair for success; nay, I will defy them with all their authority and skill to *prevent* their being of the same stamp with the world, or the vain and vitious part of it, to the knowledge of which they so industriously introduce them; and if the misery of their children both here and hereafter will break their hearts, they bid fair for it, and are richly entitled to it. — God help such poor young ones! if this be Education, neglect were more desirable! —

As the result of this Chapter, may it be our care to possess our minds with the deepest sense of the All-knowing God, who is not only acquainted with our private hidden life, our secret haunts and company, but also with our *real* views and ends, our motives and designs, amidst all our *pretended* reasons for our associating as we do: Let this thought be familiar, and then it is likely to have its efficacy. May we exercise a daily care, and by daily prayer engage the Divine aid against the insinuations and influences of wicked examples; and let us remember our prayers, “ that we give not the lie to them by run-
 “ ning

“ning ourselves into temptation.” If any should take up this who have been carried away by wicked companions, and who continue to stand in their way, I would entreat them to remember, that their present course binds them down to be partners in their plagues as well as their pleasures: for with them, if you persist, will your souls be gathered at last. You cannot have the hope, whatever your presumptions are, of dying the death of the righteous, when you have lived with the wicked. The conversation of the wicked is an education for Hell; and they are surely in great danger, who are found amongst such as by their spirits and course are marked for vengeance. The wicked cannot upon the whole be *friends* here, tho’ they may be associates; and the greater associates here, the worse partners hereafter. May such who have hitherto escaped this and every such snare, from souls full of pity to the wicked as the most miserable, use their best endeavours for their conviction and recovery; and, by an improvement in goodness, may they live under the pleasing prospect of being one day adjoined to a blessed Society, incapable of sinning or of tempting: Spirits pure and happy: pure, according to the perfection of that glorious state the Gospel delineates and ensures, and happy, beyond all possibility of influence from the mixtures and changes of this.

C H A P. IV.

THE last stage of vice, as the Psalmist hath enumerated and ranged them is, “ The sitting in the seat of the scornful.” The expression itself sufficiently proves this cannot *suddenly* be the character of any : it must generally be the effect of time and toil too, since there is so much in nature itself, bad as it is, that must be struggled with and subdued, before ever a person can sit down in such a seat, or give up himself to such a society and practice as the scornful is. But, to this each of the foregoing steps paves the way. Seldom shall we find persons of loose and wicked principles, which was the first step, who are not also loose and vicious in their morals ; these naturally dispose them to associate with those like themselves, which was the second step ; from hence they are easily led, and have but a little way to go to the seat of the scornful, or to settle amongst such, to join with them in their scorning as their customary practice. The connection of these things in their own nature is very evident, when they are attended to, how hard soever it be to convince those of the first stage that they are in great danger of the last. From the hard’ning influence of vicious company, indulgence to appetite and inclination becomes more resolute and habitual : this naturally prompts to a proportionable opposition to the principles of Religion and dictates of conscience, nay indeed renders it necessary, since at times these must check and disturb them in their course ;
and

and nothing doth so effectually prevent all disturbances from them, as the ridiculing, or turning them into derision and a jest. When persons can thus commence scoffers, the work is done at once; and as the other steps prepare the way to this, so when they have arrived at this, the character and practice as vicious is finished and compleated.——It may be proper here,

I. To enquire who these scorers are, or who are represented under that character.

II. To examine the ground and foundation of their principles and practice.

III. To shew the weakness and insufficiency of their pleas for this their practice, or which are usually made the reasons and occasions hereof.

S E C T. I.

LET us first enquire who these scorers are, or who are represented under this character. And from what I can collect from the passages where they are mentioned, they seem such as had divested themselves of good principles, and acted under the influence of bad ones. Such as had brought themselves to deride and mock at both the principles and practice of Religion, as the contrivances of the Crafty and Designing, or the dreams and fancies of the Melancholy: invented to keep the herd of Mankind in order, that the inventors might more easily manage them, and make their earnings of them. Nor was this only matter of private opinion, but they in great kindness endeavoured to free the world

from those enslaving sentiments of Religion and Virtue, Good and Evil, with their imaginary foundations and consequences. The method they take for the accomplishment of this, is to *laugh at* all ties from or regards to Divine Providence, the immortality of the soul, the dictates or terrors of conscience, or the expectations of a future judgment. These are openly treated as fables and impostures, and of course every action or argument grounded on them is turned into ridicule. They themselves avoid every act that hath the solemnity of Religion in it, and the very appearances of a regard to Religion in others are treated as hypocrisy or design. If others scruple any act as evil to which inclination or interest invites, they treat it as errant folly; and all acts of Devotion, all regards to Divine institutions are scorned as the groundless prejudices of Education, or a stupid slavery to empty forms: they insult over a fear of a Divine Being as childish timorousness, and deride all other rewards and punishments of actions, besides *present* good and bad consequences. Thus they attempt to run down all Religion both in the principle and the practice, and to laugh it out of countenance. From this deriding scolding humour, they guard themselves against the reproofs of the Pious by contemning them, and fortify themselves against all amendment by scoffing at the means of reclaiming them. In the language of Scripture this term of Scorners or Mockers describes the very worst of Men: such whose faith is ship-wracked, whose very minds are corrupted, whose consciences are seared, who are entirely governed by their senses, humours, and passions, and from a devotedness to

vice are malignantly set against all thought and evidence, excepting what feeds their humour and befriends their prejudices against Religion. It's plain, from the frequent rebukes given to these sort of persons, that there were many of this tribe in ancient times: our experience tells us they are not extinct, but on the contrary their number daily grows. That a behaviour so extraordinary, when considered in itself, should be altogether unreasonable and without foundation, yea *against* the most self-evident principles of reason, it may be will not be presently allowed. It is therefore necessary and may be useful,

S E C T. II.

S E C O N D L Y. To set this Character and practice of the scorner more fully to view. In order to this I shall proceed gradually, desiring the following particulars may be considered and put together. — 1. The principles of Religion, if true, are of all other truths of the most importance and concern to us. The principles I am speaking of are these. — The existence of an Almighty, perfectly Holy, Just, Wise, and Good Being, from whom all other Beings are derived, from whom all receive their supports, upon whom all are absolutely dependents for happiness. — That this Being is the Governour of the world, directs and disposes of all things, even the particular affairs of individuals; he sees and regards our behaviour, and is pleased or displeas'd with us according to our actions. — Tho' this body of ours is subjected to death and dissolution, yet the principal part of our composition is not

liable

liable to its arrest, but is designed and capacitated for another state of existence, capable of pleasure or pain in the state of separation, and shall actually experience the one or the other in a degree beyond all its present conceptions, according to what the course of life in this bodily state hath been, either good or bad. — Tho' the body by the decree of Heaven must die and see corruption, yet it shall be raised again and re-united to the soul, at a day appointed for an universal Judgment; when the happiness or misery of every individual shall be perfected, and the sentence shall be governed by the conformity or disconformity of the individuals to the laws God hath given them to observe, and their improvement or non-improvement of the advantages he hath bestowed upon them. These things I say, if true, are of the greatest importance to us of any in the world from their very nature. I do not think there is a Scornor, who hath any understanding left, but, upon the supposed truth of these things, will allow "that nothing more concerning can enter into the heart of man." Well then, may we not demand their allowing these things to be merely *possible*? They must be so, if they carry no contradiction in them. Now upon the *bare possibility* of their truth, can any thing be more absurd and wild than scorning, playing, and jesting with them; than deriding those who profess to regard them, and who really esteem them as truths wherein they are concerned beyond every thing else? Surely such things, attended with a bare possibility of their being true, demand and deserve a fair trial by reason; since they are so adapted to the comfort and well-being of intelligent creatures,

and

and must, if true, entail such shocking consequences upon the scoffer. Certainly they are not at once to be hissed off the stage, or trampled on upon the bare proposal. What reasonable person could mock at principles of such weight without examining their grounds, without enquiring soberly into them, debating the matter with that gravity which the importance of the subject requires? Or who of that Character but would renew their enquiries, examine again and again, supposing they were not satisfied of the truth of these principles, because of their vast importance "if they should be true." — But some may say, "they have considered and weighed them, and upon trial they are found as light as vanity; they do not find they have evidence to support them." Supposing this to be fact as to any, yet their *scorning* is most unreasonable and indefensible upon this circumstance. For,

2. There is a possibility they may be true notwithstanding their enquiries. The evidences of these things are so strong, since they were intended to be the foundation of a Religious practice, that without a breach of charity I may say, "the scorner's enquiries have been very slight, very partial, and his conclusion very hasty. Nay, that inclination hath had a greater hand in forming it than reason." But, allowing that they have made enquiry, and can see no evidence sufficient to convince them, what is the conclusion they can *justly* draw? Certainly they can go no further than this, these things *may* not be true; they can conclude only with a *May-be*. Now if they only *may not* be true, they also *may* be true; if there is but a possibility on their

their side, there is a possibility against them. But who, except a distracted person, could venture to scorn and deride such truths, when they themselves must own there is a possibility of their truth? Nothing can justify such a treatment of matters, so weighty in their nature and consequences if true, but the being able to prove them "absolutely impossible;" which no creature, that I have heard of, hath been hardy enough to undertake. Have these persons enquired into the foundation of these principles? But, have they at the same time been so free from prejudices as to be capable of discerning what foundation they had? Have they set themselves to the work with a desire of being convinced if they could? Have they given every thing its due weight that hath made against them, as well as what hath made for them? I must say, their very *scorning* is a just ground to suspect they have not. For, the Scorer from his very disposition puts himself out of the way of satisfaction; he is disqualified for impartial searches into divine truth. "The scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not." * He hath conceit enough to start objections, but he hath not honesty or impartiality enough to wait for an answer, nor to take up with an answer when made. He is so fond of his own opinion, and it is so much his wish and interest that it should be true, that he naturally throws contempt on every thing that makes against it; he looks upon every thing of that kind as upon an enemy, with abhorrence and dread, and therefore hath as little to do with it as possible. How can such a one as this ever judge of truth? However

destitute Religion may be of foundation, of all persons the scoffer is most unlikely to detect it. If it is a Deceit, it is not so obvious a one as to be seen thro' by any one that can laugh or break a jest. One can never think that it should be hid from the wise, honest, labourious enquirer, and be revealed only to those who have neither disposition nor capacity for enquiry, for want of humility or honesty.

Nay further, I affirm the Scorners hath never made any due enquiries into the truths of Religion, "if he doth not know there is a great deal to be said for them;" and if he doth know this, his scorning is intolerable: because, that is treating things which have considerable evidence of their being true, as the veriest fancies and most groundless impostures. If he doth not embrace them, they merit a better regard than mockery: there is always a decency due to such sentiments tho' we think them not true. I hope it will be allowed, that scorning proves nothing; that reviling is not disproving: If so, after all there remains a *possibility* on the side of Religious principles, and this very possibility, joined with the importance of the truths themselves, render this humour and practice perfect madness. Were there but just proof enough to *stir* tho' not to *stagger* an infidel; were the evidences of these truths but slender; were there but enough to prove them possibilities, which nothing but stupid ignorance can deny, it is a folly not to be conceived, because an hazard above every other, for any to take the chair of the Scorners. But

3. These truths are demonstrably very great *probabilities*. This, if made good, still heightens the

extravagant wildness of their temper. And let any of this tribe, if they can, account for those marks of Wisdom and Design, the exact adapting of means to ends, and organs to use; the variety, harmony, and perfection that appears to their senses throughout the creation, "without setting a God at the head of all." Upon these grounds of probability "that there is a God," which are very strong, let them, if they can, tell us, why this Being, who from the perfection of his nature is qualified, may not concern himself with the creatures he hath thought fit to produce? Why he, who is every where present and perfectly wise, may not direct and govern the world? Why he, who hath made an order of creatures capable of moral Government, may not *intend* to govern them, and make their happiness and misery to depend upon their pleasing or displeasing him? With which of his perfections can it clash to treat Beings according to their natures? And if nothing can be brought against these with any degree of strength, as I think the united force of the corners may here be defied, then there is a great probability this is the case in fact, "That God is observant of our behaviour, attentive to our cries, the disposer of our lot at present, and that his eyes are open upon the ways of men, to give every one hereafter according to his ways and the fruit of his doings."

As to our own future existence, and a state of future rewards and punishments, there is sufficient evidence to prove the strong probability of both. If we carry about us any thing besides, distinct from,

from, and superior in its nature to body, let any scorner tell us what necessity there is *that* should perish with the body, or why we may not believe it the design of the Great former, that it should exist separately: and since every *other* passion hath its object, and we find it was not given us in vain or merely to torment us, let any of them, if they can, tell us, why the passion of Immortality, as natural to us as the meanest passion is, should not have its proper object provided for it.

These hints are sufficient I think to establish the probability of these truths, whilst more is ready to be offered to that end if it were needful; or if it were the design of this discourse to enlarge upon them. What is said is sufficient to answer my intention, if it be sufficient to prove that it is ignorance or prejudice not to allow them a good degree of probability. And if they are probable, it will eternally fix the brand of unreasonableness upon the scorner, since his folly and guilt must bear a proportion thereto, and the hazard of a dreadful consequence must encrease therewith.

4. Nothing short of absolute certainty and demonstration that these doctrines cannot be true, can justify such a behaviour, or exempt it from the charge of singular folly and madness. May-bees and meer possibilities of their fallhood, if there were any just ground for them, are not sufficient for a creature that is reasonable and naturally capable of immortality to proceed upon, in order to justify himself before God, if there be one, nor to himself neither. And the reason is this, Their consequences are beyond all others awful and con-

cerning to himself, if they should prove realities. It is distraction in any to deride those principles, till it is absurd to put that Question, "What if they should be true?" and there will always be a just foundation for such a Question, till those principles can be *demonstrated* false and without foundation.

But can any one who understands the nature of the propositions, "That there is no God, That there is no future state of existence after this," ever attempt such a thing? I am sure the bare pretending to it is a demonstration they neither understand the terms, nor what they are going about. The most that can be said, the furthest they can carry their sophistry is "That it may be so." But as I said before, this will not do by any means. For, if there be only a *May-be*, a bare possibility on their side, there is necessarily a possibility *against* them; and then to scorn and deride them as if it were *impossible* they should be true, really wants a name. I repeat it again; nothing but *demonstration* of the falshood of these principles can render mockery and scorn tolerable. Till then, that is, for ever, the Questions may still be put without any hope of answer, "What if there should be a God? What if the Soul should survive the Body? What if there should be a future state of rewards and punishments?" If there be any reply, it can never be such as to affect the questions, but only to make the scorner's joints to tremble, and his heart to die within him. For, I cannot conceive any other than something of this tenor, "Then, he falls under
" the

“ the peculiar displeasure of that Being, as certain-
 “ ly as he exists ; from a behaviour the most in-
 “ solent, and an impiety of the deepest dye. Then,
 “ he is certainly and everlastingly undone, as he
 “ hath made no provision for his own future hap-
 “ piness, and hath ridiculed, in spight of conscience
 “ and considerable evidence, an overwhelming woe.
 “ Then, he must appear before that Being who
 “ hath been the object of his contempt and scorn,
 “ I need not say with what astonishment, from the
 “ unexpectedness of the thing, and the then ap-
 “ parent distraction of his conduct.”

And unless these scoffers are able to prove the
 principles of Religion *absolute impossibilities*, they
 must know, if they will think, that these direful con-
 sequences may follow their behaviour, these issues
 may take place. But who in their senses would scorn,
 till they were *infallibly certain* there was no God to
 resent their derision, that there was no possible hazard
 if they should be in the wrong, or that things are
 demonstrably what they wish them to be ? And
 who, that hath any knowledge of what they speak
 and affirm, would ever pretend to any thing of
 demonstration or assurance ? In such an under-
 taking, I believe they would be scorned for fools
 by all the sensible part of their own tribe, and
 might without the least arrogance or insolence be
 esteemed by all, stupid even to infatuation.

5. The principles these scoffers oppose to those
 of Religion, and the ends they propose by scorn-
 ing Religion, are exceedingly injurious and detri-
 mental. No one can engage deliberately in actions
 without some motive and view: the scoffers doubt-

less have theirs: nay, they declare it. Now what are they? Why, as the great Patrons of Liberty and Truth, they would free Mankind from the ties and bondage of Religious principles; they would deliver them from those horrors that the belief of a God, a Providence, and a future state of retribution subject them to. But, whatever they may stile themselves, they are justly to be esteemed *enemies to Mankind*: for hereby they would rob them of their best supports, their most cheering prospects, and of what every one naturally wishes might be true. Would they help them off with their fears? Ay, but they strip them of their hopes too. Would they rescue them from one kind of fear? Probably they may, but they subject them to many others, each of which is of a tormenting kind. Hereby instead of freedom and happiness, they introduce nothing but disconsolacy, desperation, and gloom.

What friends they are to Mankind will be further seen, by considering the benefits they propose to themselves from scorning and trampling upon Religious principles. And they are evidently these and nothing better: "That they may follow their
 " inclinations and indulge their appetites as they
 " please: That they may embrace every proposal
 " that they like without scruple or hesitation:
 " that they may get rid of their Reason, and get
 " the better of their Consciences; suppress thought,
 " and fence against reflection, whereby they may
 " enjoy the freedom of acting without the in-
 " terruption of those shackles, or paying any
 " slavish regard to Decency, Justice, Wisdom and
 " Truth."

" Truth, " I allow from hence, when they have thus attained to the scoffer's chair, they may take greater scope and liberty than others. But are not these glorious advantages for a person to labour for? And labour it must be, where natural reason and conscience have ever had any strength, before they can attain to them. What do all these amount to more than this? " That they can make more " free with their Maker ; are more at liberty for " vice, or are more ready for any proposal of " that kind ; can be greater slaves to their passions ; " can multiply distresses in this world, and, if " there be another, can destroy their Souls ; and " this more easily and speedily than some others " can. " I have not knowingly aggravated or misrepresented the matter in the least, nor attempted to excite one Idea in the reader's mind, but what the nature of the thing carries in it. Sober consideration, methinks, would lead every one to pronounce, there is no temptation in all this, if proposed, to lead to that height of impiety, deriding and scoffing at Religion: but if there be any temptation, I am sure there can be no recompence. Who would become a scorner when these are all his gains? When 'tis only from the loss of reason and thought, that they themselves can think them advantages at any time, and when they oftentimes must *feel* them the most unhappy circumstances of their lives?

Thus have I endeavoured to let to view this Character and practice of scoffing at Religion ; from whence I think we may justly collect there is a peculiar absurdity, guilt, and danger accompanying it.

S E C T. III.

BEFORE I proceed any further I would make this earnest request, That what hath been already offered may be considered and improved, for the fortifying our minds against infection from these sort of persons. They are not so few, nor so shy in the discovering their humour, as to render an antidote needless to any. The danger doth not arise from the arguments that they have to produce, nor from the addresses to the reason of others, but from their Numbers; which, with too many, gives this scorning temper the influence of a fashion; and also from the plausible stile they give to this their humour, I mean, that of Wit, Sense, or a Free way of thinking; but neither of these can belong to it wherein they are real excellencies, or merit the esteem and emulation of Mankind. However, from hence the infection is too often conveyed, and the poyson taken down. To these may I not subjoin, their direct attacks on the natural passion of shame by jests and railery, which many, especially of the younger sort, cannot stand? These are indeed mean arts and pitiful triumphs, since the means is deception, and they are beholden to the weaknesses and vitious inclinations of Mankind for success: and, without any hesitation, we may pronounce all their pretensions to promote Liberty and Truth downright impositions upon the credulity of Mankind, since their aim is manifestly

meer victory, and since the worst of slavery, the most uncomfortable and dangerous errors, are introduced by their success.

That such may never carry us over to their Tents, Let us consider this scoffing humour as to the principles and practice of Religion, or as to a fear of sin, a regard to God, and an Eternity before us, in the light wherein it hath been set. And sure I am, none amongst themselves, who are fit to be reasoned with, can deny, “ That the
 “ principles they deride, if they should prove true,
 “ are of more importance to us than any besides.
 “ They cannot deny a possibility of their Truth ;
 “ nay that there is a considerable probability ;
 “ infomuch, that a multitude of facts which their
 “ senses and experience attest, can never be ac-
 “ counted for without admitting the truth of
 “ those principles: further, it is impossible from
 “ the nature of the thing to prove them false, or
 “ to be assured in a rational way they cannot be
 “ true ; nay, granting them what they would
 “ have, that they should prove fancies and fictions
 “ in the end, yet their scorning them at present
 “ ministers no advantage to encourage a reasonable
 “ creature to join them, since the sum of their
 “ privilege is, only to be *more vitious*, or more
 “ easily so, than others ; which, were there no God
 “ to punish hereafter, is in fact only to be *more*
 “ *miserable* than others at present.” Thus I think
 the case truly stands. I hope every reader who
 hath embraced the principles of Religion and hath
 engaged in the practice of it, will, from what hath
 been offered, find himself much less liable to be

damped in his fervor, or unhinged in his course by any thing that scorners can throw out ; since, after all their efforts to rob him of what is at the very foundation of his present peace, as a God, a Providence, and a future state of existence, they cannot rob him of the *possibility* of them ; and since *this lowest* of all those circumstances which guide or determine the human mind, is sufficient to justify him in his *Supream* regards thereto. For, tho' meer *possibility* respecting the truth of a thing, when single and alone, is not of much moment or force ; yet where a thing is undoubtedly possible, and at the same time from its very nature and consequences is of *the utmost importance* if it should prove a truth, the case is greatly altered ; and amongst the thinking part of Mankind it will be accounted a sufficient reason to rescue it from common scorn and contempt : how much more, which is the case before us, when *great probability* is on its side, continually growing upon enquiry, and *none* lying against it.

C H A P. V.

S E C T. I.

SCORNING at Religion is the character and practice of many from downright stupidity, and disuse of their faculties ; from an education in vice and the most servile employment of their understandings : they have scarcely senses left them by their vices to exercise, or to enable them to discern

discern between good and evil. But this flows so naturally from another cause, that I think I should be justified if, without any further enquiry, I should resolve it into that as the general cause and reason; I mean, "A resolution to follow their own inclinations and humours, and to admit of no restraints in the prosecution of their pleasures." Supposing such a resolution as this, which the general behaviour of such persons proclaims, it is easy, and impartial reason would say it was just, to resolve their scoffs and derisions into this, if not as the only, yet as the principal cause. It is certain, the better any person is, the more delightful is it to him that there is a God, the stronger is his desire of Immortality and the greater his satisfaction in it: and as his goodness improves, this satisfaction encreases. From hence there is great ground to believe, that it is a consciousness of vice and a resolution to follow it which renders the truths of Religion at any time painful, and is at the bottom of this malignant scorning. When persons are resolved upon a full and unlimited indulgence, it naturally raises their spleen against every thing that would abridge or reproach them: this the principles of Religion must do: they immediately therefore turn enemies to them. And since they dare not descend to the merits of the cause, or to the goodness of the foundation, they have no other weapons to fight with against it, but scorn and derision. I would appeal to the *observation* of every one, whether such a dissoluteness of principles is not generally attended with a dissoluteness of manners: and may I not also appeal to

the *reason* of every one, whether a resolution for an unrestrained gratification of the passions doth not naturally lead to an abhorrence of Religious principles, which stand in the way of their design, and prophesy nothing but evil to them? When persons offer known affronts to Heaven, it concerns them to extirpate all apprehensions of a God to punish them. “The fool hath said in his heart, “No God †:” none for me! let there be none! it is the language of inclination and desire, not of his understanding and judgment. When persons live in the violation of natural conscience, it becomes their interest to keep out or banish all apprehensions of Immortality and Judgment: they cannot but be enemies to what is so destructive of their important wishes.

I am fully satisfied this is the grand reason and secret of the scorner’s practice: they would run down those things which they dislike, and because they dislike them; they would fain bring them into disgrace with themselves, because they check them in their pursuits, and because they cannot think of them, but in pain. But, as some of them may think this mean and base, at least may in words disclaim it, so I would proceed to the

S E C T. II.

THIRD thing I proposed, to consider the occasions which they may stile the *reasons* of their practice. There are some will tell us their deriding both the principles and practice of Re-

† Pfal. xiv. 1.

ligion proceeds from just causes. In justice to my subject, out of a regard to truth on which side soever it lies, and for the satisfaction of the reader, I shall follow them in their pleas. And as far as I have been able to collect from conversation, observation, and hints which some of this sort have dropt in print, the following things have had the greatest stress laid on them, and have given the greatest handle to this scorning humour.

It hath been sometimes urged, “ That there
 “ have been a great many cheats and impostures
 “ in the world, and great use hath been made
 “ of Religion in every age to delude and make
 “ a prey of Mankind, and therefore it merits
 “ contempt and scorn, therefore such a treatment
 “ of it is justifiable.”

Strange conclusion this! as to which I would appeal to the common understandings of men. Is there any connection or consequence in this? “ Many
 “ have made use of Religion for the carrying on
 “ vile and base designs, therefore there is no
 “ truth in its principles, no foundation for its
 “ practice.” Surely the reality and truth of those principles is absolutely fixed and necessary, antecedent to all the uses that men may put them to, and entirely independent therefore of all their abuses! The ends and uses they may employ them to subserve can never affect their reality, or, if they were true before, render them a jot less so afterwards: how then can Religion itself merit their contempt, or how can their scorning that be justified? Further, can any thing of the most acknowledged truth and goodness escape abuses, or
 the

the being employed for the carrying on some base design? Do not ill-minded persons make use of the best things they can to accomplish their ends? But is this ever allowed to alter the *nature* of those things? If there was no foundation for Religious principles, if they were not approved universally by reasonable minds, how should designs be so successfully carried on by their help? If they were so *notoriously* groundless as the scorner would have himself and others believe, they could never be made such engines of as he pretends they are; mankind could not be so easily betrayed by them as he would represent. This itself therefore is a better argument for Religion, than any that he hath for his scorning. But, if this abusive application of Religion affects the principles, or saps the foundation of it, I know not what can stand: if, because men have made use of the principle of a Divine existence, of a Providence, and a state of future rewards and punishments to subserve their own mean or vile ends of Mankind, it justly follows that there is no truth in the things themselves, or that they from thence merit the treatment of impostures; the scorner whether he will or no must allow this further general consequence, “that every thing which is abused and “misapplied really wants truth and foundation:” and then I know not what can escape, or what will be left us. Honour, fidelity, justice, friendship, and reason itself must go, as being nothing in reality but engines of deceit; for all these have been abused and perverted to mean and base ends. And why don't these scorners exercise their talent upon
upon

upon every thing alike, when there is equal ground? Why don't they rally in their coarse way all pretensions of sincerity and honesty, and, with their usual decency, declare these to be no other than artifices whereby every one endeavours to put a cheat upon his neighbour? for in truth they have been applied to that end. It looks like dishonesty and is very unlike free-thinking, to single Religion out for drollery and raillery because it hath been abused, when every thing else that is excellent, and that they allow to have a reality and foundation hath suffered the same way, even every principle that they can set up instead of Religion.

Another occasion of this scorning is, “ An affection of deeper thought and freer enquiry than others : these persons set up for greater wisdom and penetration than others. They would be thought, from their renouncing commonly-received principles, to see further than other people, and to have detected the fallacy of some things that hath lain hid from all excepting a very few : agreeably to this, they represent those who believe and act upon the principles of Religion as a parcel of poor credulous people, who believe any thing that is told them, and their principles as the meer effects of education, arbitrarily instilled at first, and unreasonably or traditionally held to the last.”

That this is *pure affectation* is very evident, because this conceit of themselves is entirely founded upon their thinking differently from others. But will any one calmly say, that merely to differ from the rest of the world is an argument of a better understanding-

derstanding, or that truth and falshood is to be judged of by meer novelty or antiquity? this is new-standard indeed! Scorning itself can never prove free enquiry or deep penetration, but may prove the contrary to both, and when exercised upon Religious principles doth do so; for I will venture to affirm, if it be any venture at all, that it never yet was the effect of enquiry or free thought. Could the embracing of Religious principles be resolved absolutely into an implicate faith, the rejecting them might argue deeper thought and enquiry: but when by the laws of our Religion we are not only permitted but enjoined to search and try, to prove and examine what we more implicitly received in our education, and to ground all our faith upon evidence, it is ignorance or arrogance, and not greater wisdom or penetration, to scoff at those principles, which multitudes, of at least equal abilities, more close and impartial enquirers, and as honest as they can be for their lives, have believed and founded all their hopes upon.

As for credulity or easiness of belief, which this scorning humour imputes to those who receive these principles, it is astonishing with what face they can impute it to others *meerly* for that reason; as if there was *no* evidence attending them, as if there were *no* reasons to support such a faith and practice, or as if it was upon that account these scorner rejected them. Whereas in truth, if they have any creed at all, it must be made up of such absurdities and contradictions, that they must be the most remarkable of all people living for credulity,

lity, or for believing both without and against reason. It is an insolence that might justify a degree of indignation, for men to charge others with believing *any* thing, only because they believe the best attested truths in the world, or meerly because they believe things which the scorner doth not. It would be well if such would consider, that their measure of conceit, and their undistinguishing suspicion of every body and every thing in matters of Religion, is full as likely to abuse and mislead them as the most easy credulity can do; and that their treating those points with contempt and scorn, which both instinct and reason, not to mention revelation, concur in attesting, is a mark of fond conceit and ridiculous affectation, yea of any thing *but* a superior understanding or penetration. Were they but as much afraid of imposing upon their own understandings, as they gravely pretend they are of having them imposed upon by others; or of *not* believing things most obvious, important, and which have the strongest evidence, as they pretend they are of believing upon little or no evidence, their contempt and ridicule of Religious principles would soon be exchanged for reverence, and they would scorn themselves as much as they have derided others.

Another occasion of this scorning temper is the behaviour and practice of many who profess Religion. “ How many are there, saith the scoffer, who publicly and warmly avow the principles, but in life and conduct discard them? if they are not matter of professed belief they sound the alarm of Heretick and Infidel, whilst that cir-

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“ cumspetion,

“ cumspection, holiness, and usefulness in life, which
 “ these avowed principles demand, is entirely disre-
 “ garded; and they do no more, they live no bet-
 “ ter, sometimes much worse, than those who in
 “ words disclaim those principles.” This hath
 often opened the mouth of the scorner, and been pro-
 duced as a warrant for their scorning at Religion it-
 self as a jest and artifice. For say they, what truth
 can we suppose there is in these things, when those
 whose province it is to search into their foundations,
 as particularly the Clergy, and others who make a
 great noise about them in conversation, give such
 glaring practical evidence they don't believe them-
 selves?

I acknowledge this is an unhappy case, and as to
 the general fact I wish it were not so often verified.
 I pretend not to excuse such be they of what order
 or class soever; but I must in justice demand of
 those who are addicted to scorning, that the over-
 flowings of their humour be confined to the persons
 who are thus subjecting and exposing themselves,
 and that they blend not the innocent with the guilty,
 nor transfer their scorn from their practice to their
 principles. For, the question which the scoffer is
 concerned in is, not, whether some do profess the
 principles of Religion who do not really believe or
 regard them; but this, “ Whether the principles them-
 “ selves have not the most sufficient satisfactory evi-
 “ dence attending them agreeing to their nature, and
 “ whether the inconsistencies of others will bear him
 “ out in this contemptuous rejection, if at last he
 “ should find there is a God that judgeth.” These
 persons will not allow that Religion hath ever the

more

more foundation, because many do really believe its principles and adhere to its practice; why then should they make it an evidence of its *wanting* foundation, that any of its professed adherents do not act in conformity to it? If the faith and practice of the one doth not affect the nature of the things, neither can the disbelief and inconsistency of the other. No; the scorner hath full liberty of examining the principles themselves: he is under no restraint but his own inclination from enquiring, on what foot the Divine existence, the Soul's immortality, and a future state of recompence stand. To these enquiries let him go: that is the way to be satisfied if he *desires* to know how matters really are. The *behaviour* of persons is never allowed to be a rule of judging the truth of principles by: it may be an evidence of their own personal belief or disbelief of them, but never can evidence what foundation the principles themselves have. To take occasion then to scorn and despise Religious principles, from the unsuitable behaviour of those who profess them, only betrays a strong disposition in such to scorn; it only proves their aversion to them, and shews what they would *wish* them to be, groundless fictions; but it can never justify their derision, nor in the least impair the strength of Religion's foundations.

These are some of the chief occasions of this humour, in which I hope the reader sees that there is nothing to justify it, or to rescue it from the charge of unreasonableness, crime, and madness.

S E C T, III.

TH E scornful are evidently of two sorts. Some this way attack the *very principles* of Religion themselves, and it may be, through their debaucheries or the long application of scorn and ridicule may have brought themselves to disbelieve them, and really to laugh at them as fables and impostures. In pure pity and compassion to such, not knowing but this may fall into some such hand, I would address myself to them, beseeching them by all that is dear to them, by all that is serious and valuable ; as they love themselves, or, if there be a God, as they hope to share his love, that they would consider the folly that their practice betrays, and the risque they run in the consequences, whatever their over-weening opinion of their understandings, or their sensual inclinations may lead them to believe.

I would appeal to and ask such, if they have the reason of men, whether if the principles of Religion are true, they are not from their very nature of more importance than any thing besides themselves? If there is such a Being as the Lord our God is described to be, of such Power, Purity, and Justice ; so intimately present with us, so particularly observant of us, who will finally and for ever adjudge our state from his perfect knowledge of our hearts and ways. — If as to our better part, our Souls, we are designedly immortal, and are now upon our trial for an happiness inconceivably great, or liable to an equal punishment. — Who with any understanding but must acknowledge, that these are infinitely

finitely more concerning to us than any thing that can enter into our hearts besides? Methinks then however doubtful they were, if at the same time they were *barely possible*, they ought to be considered and seriously spoken of. There cannot be any room for jest and drollery. No one in his wits can think that a Being of infinite power, all-knowing and just, or that eternal happiness and misery, are subjects of derision and scorn, unless they were palpable absurdities and contradictions. But where is the hardy creature that will attempt the proof of this? And if they are not downright absurdities and contradictions, their very nature saith there may be truth in them: but before the scorner's behaviour can be vindicated by reason "he must be absolutely certain "they cannot be so." And will you put the hazard of your eternal state upon the foot of your ability of demonstrating that there is no God, no state of existence after this? Whoever hath arrived to this pitch of stupidity is past reasoning with. But I appeal to the consciences of such, whether their scoffs, their ridicule and contempt ever arose from any *evidence* of the falshood of these principles, or whether they did not entirely result from a *bare wish* that there might be nothing in them? Are not their guilt and their fears the springs of their scorning? Is not the reason of their endeavouring to run down the belief of a God and a future state of recompences, "because they can extract nothing but terrors from "thence?" But, what is all this more than merely to wish they may not be true? Fond man! consider the vanity of thy wishes! It may be for thy interest to wish there was no God, no state after this :

this: but so much the more dreadful thy circumstance that thou hast made it necessary, “ when thou hast nothing but a wish for it.” This only saith what thou wouldst have to be true, but doth not carry the least evidence, or yield the least ground to believe, it is so. If thy wishing or thy scoffing either would *make* things true or false, it were to thy purpose; but can either of them work in that manner? Canst thou think of altering things by thy imagination or inclination? Try the experiment first in lower matters, either in respect of thy health or thy substance, and see what wishes and imagination can do there.

Well then; if all thou hast for there being *no* God, *no* future state, is only a wish, I must tell thee there is as much demonstration on the other side as the case will admit, which is always accounted as much as a wise and reasonable person should require. If the Question, “ what if these things should be true,” when seriously put to thyself, is enough to shudder thee, and more than thou canst ever answer, what will the certainty and the conviction do with thee hereafter, if that be thy experience? Vain imagination! to think that thou canst carry thy scoffs even to the grave, if thou lovest not the exercise of thought before! It is very great odds, but thy senseless Chance, Fate, and Fortune, to which thou ascribest every event, shall be exchanged for the powerful apprehension of an existing God; that the fond conceit of Insensibility at death will vanish at the approach of a terrible hereafter, **THE SOMETHING** beyond the grave. If thou couldst scoff
under

under one apprehension, I am sure thou wilt dreadfully recoil and shrink under the other.

But what is thy surprize like to be, when those realities, those comparatively *only* realities, of an Almighty God and an Unchangeable Eternity, which in thy fond conceit thou hast treated as dreams and phantoms, shall appear in their direful *demonstration!* When it shall be all *sight* and *experience!* When thou shalt “ feel there is a God in the terrors “ of his justice,” and be convinced by what thou sustaineft “ that the prefaces of Eternity in thy own “ frame were true!” What will the sensations of thy own mind be from its reflections upon its past derision and scorn? How absolutely wilt thou become the object of thy *own* detestation and scorn, which is much harder to bear than all that the world can pour out upon thee? If the truths of a Divine existence and a future state are *possible*, it is possible for this to be thy case; which one would think no reasonable creature could bear the apprehension of: and that they are possible, he is not a Man that denies. If they prove a *certainty*, they fix the certainty of this thy condition; a condition no human tongue can represent.

I would appeal once more; is it not wisdom in matters of infinite consequence if they should prove true, supposing them to be doubtful, to chuse the safest side? And what is the safest side in respect of these truths, “ but to regard them as if they were certain?” For, if they prove delusions thou canst not upon the whole be ordinarily a sufferer in this state, nor canst thou suffer for thine error hereafter: *that* will perish with thee. If there be no God, there

will be none to call thee to an account for thy mistake : if there be no future state thou wilt fare as well as thy fellow-mortals. But, if they prove realities, as they are indisputably possibilities, if thou hast regarded them thou art eternally happy. It is then at least a wise and rational belief ; put it at the lowest it is a noble adventure : and if it is so, what is the practice of the scorner for folly and danger !

What hath been offered I hope contains sufficient reasons for such to make a stand, to reflect upon their behaviour, and to bring it to the test of reason and conscience. Their past indecent and wicked behaviour is now retrievable ; and it is distraction to continue their scornings till death convinces them. For, it is the evidence that attends these truths, productive of their *belief* of them at present, which will finally stand them in stead ; the evidence of sight and experience comes too late. In compassion therefore to such I would earnestly entreat them, if they are really dissatisfied about the principles of Religion, with the greatest impartiality and diligence to enquire into their evidence. For a time suspend your scoffs and lay aside your levity. You can retire and use much discipline for the cure of a chronical distemper, nor do you think it long or hard if you are any way successful at last. Surely the call to retirement and thought under the present circumstances of your minds is at least equally loud, and the end equally reasonable ! Do not scoff away your souls. Every thing reproaches such a levity ; and I am sure, Man hath the highest reason to be serious who hath such possibilities, yea such awful certainties,
before

before him to attend to, as an Almighty God and an eternal state of happiness or misery. If the event amount not to a serious reflection upon their conduct, it forebodes a dreadful resolution of trying the issue, which I sadly fear they will find the same with “ a resolution to be everlastingly miserable.”

But there is another sort of scoffers; who profess some regard to the Principles of Religion and afterwards believe them, whilst yet they scorn and ridicule a behaviour in others that answers to such principles. They would account it a reproach and reflection to be suspected of denying them, and yet deride those who act in a conformity to them. Surely such a conduct as this testifies they never seriously reflect upon the matter, nor weigh their own behaviour! If they did, they could not but see the shocking inconsistency of it, and that the reproach they endeavoured to fasten upon others returns with double force upon themselves. For,

“ They scoff at the Religious for believing in reality what they themselves allow to be true.”

But what shadow of reason is there in this for derision?

To say that Religious principles are true, is to say they are believed by themselves, and ought to be believed by others: the more firm and hearty then the assent of the mind is to them, the more is their truth and importance answered. If the scorers themselves think there is evidence sufficient to make them articles of their *professed* belief, it must be still more rational and commendable to be rooted and established in the belief of them, or which is the same thing, *really* to believe what they *professedly* assent to. If they allow them to be true, they acknow-

ledge they have a claim to the assent of the mind; the more thoroughly therefore the mind doth assent thereto, the greater suitableness is there in the act to the objects. So that these Scorners reproach the Religious for passing what they themselves esteem a right judgment; for doing that in reality which they themselves say ought to be done in shew and words, and for treating those things as truths which are confessed truths with themselves.

But the unreasonableness of these scoffers behaviour appears still more monstrous, when it is considered “ that they deride the Religious for acting “ according to the scorners own principles.” Every one that can distinguish must allow the principles of Religion to be of such concern and moment, that, if really believed, they must naturally influence the practice. What is thus natural to a reasonable creature, as reasonable, can never be ridiculous in such a one: Much less have they, who in general allow their truth, any *reason* for deriding others for acting agreeably to them; nay, of all the unreasonables this is one of the greatest in the world. For, this sort of scorners admit that there is a God, and yet mock at those who by their homage acknowledge it, or manifest any sense of him: they allow that he is Almighty, Wise, Holy, and Good, and yet laugh at those who express any fear, hope, and trust in him: they say, when they are appealed to, that his favour or displeasure must make an inconceivable difference in our state, and yet ridicule those who seek the one and endeavour to avoid the other: they will acknowledge the soul of man is immortal, and that an happiness or misery suited to that immortality

mortality must be the portion of all hereafter, and yet they jest at all concern of mind that the Religious express in the securing a glorious and honourable immortality: they will confess there can be no felicity here but in the peace of our consciences, nor none hereafter but in the approbation of God, and yet scorn those who scruple the losing of their peace, and are ambitious of keeping themselves in the Divine love: In short, they will allow that this uncertain state is designedly a trial for Eternity, from whence it must consequently derive its value, and yet they laugh at those who are governing their conduct by it, who prefer their Souls to their bodies, Eternity to time, or are making a due preparation for it. Their behaviour would not be more extravagant and wild, should they deride others for following any of the principles of self-love and self-preservation; in preferring ease, wealth, pleasure, and happiness before pain, want and misery; or for scrupling to run into the fire, or to throw themselves down a precipice with their eyes open. Certainly, if it is barbarous not to profess the principles of Religion, it can never be ridiculous to follow them or be governed by them! If it is matter of disgrace not to own and avow them, it can never be matter of common scorn to behave with that circumspection, seriousness, and strictness which those avowed principles demand! On the contrary, we cannot more expose ourselves to *just* derision, than by counter-acting our own professed belief of matters so important, allowing and disregarding them at the same time. I hope therefore none who thus see how the case really stands, will ever be moved from their steadfastness

By any such attempt. Place the ridicule where it ought to lie; it belongs to those who in the most obvious case see not what is ridiculous, nor that they are exposing themselves to just derision, in deriding others for governing themselves by reason, for acting consistently, and practically regarding those principles which the scoffer himself professes. Nothing can be more absurd and stupid than scorn and laughter thus placed; except it be, “the admitting their influence, either by deserting the practice of Religion, or meanly concealing our regards to it, upon their account.”

S E C T. IV.

I SHALL close with some advices to those, who are at present advocates and friends to Religion, and who desire to continue so. They are designed as preservatives against the influence of this unreasonable and wicked practice, amidst our unavoidable converse at some times with these scornors, and the danger we are thence in of infection from them.

1. Let us never converse with such but as pure necessity leads us. Relation or business may render some concern with them unavoidable: but I think the maintaining a civility towards such, and the dispatching of our business with them, ought to limit our converse. Where persons are of this scorning humour, we cannot be long with them, at least not in a free hour, but we must be witnesses of their talent; from whence no *advantages* can possibly arise: such conversation cannot enlighten or improve the mind;

mind ; but on the contrary, it must vex the soul that is truly righteous, it may greatly unhinge those who cannot bear a jest, or have not capacity to distinguish between what is derided and what *deserves* it, who were bidding very fair for Religion and Heaven before : it may corrupt their minds and greatly diminish the veneration and regard they had for sacred things. And considering what such scoffing is levelled at, I think our duty to God, to ourselves, and to the common interest of Mankind demand an *express* resentment, by leaving such company. They scorn, no doubt, not only to keep themselves in countenance, or to display the silly thing they stile wit, but to bring others over to their tents. Being determined never to be *reasoned into* seriousness, they have the confidence to try whether others cannot be *laughed out* of it. An attempt this is, that the very dignity of human nature requires should be received with indignation ; not to their hurt or suffering any way, but in order to our own security. For, what pretence of advantage have they to make to us ? They would laugh us out of all our solid support and comfort both in life and at death : they would ridicule us out of a belief of a Being that is our Preserver, Benefactor, Guide, and therein the object of our hope and trust beyond what all the world can be ; who is perfectly able, and may be regularly relied upon to conduct us through all the changes and hazards of our pilgrimage, and to introduce us to a state of perfect happiness hereafter : nay, they would banter us out of every great and generous thought, every noble aim and expectation — and when we have surrendered these, what are we to have ? — Nothing
that

that I can find, but the pleasure of scorning with them at things wherein our highest interest lies, things of the last consequence to us, things that can never be disproved: so that the blessedness amounts but to this, “we shall have the pleasure of being
“fools, mad, and miserable for company.”

Besides; there is this reason for a very sparing converse with such scorners; as their practice can never instruct or improve us, so their disposition scarcely admits of a conviction or instruction from us. Whilst this temper and humour prevails, no argument or reason is likely to influence: for as soon as any thing like them appears, they are at once suppressed under the brand of *preaching*; they are immediately condemned under the term of *seriousness*; with both which the scorner is at open defiance. Now, who would associate with those, who will neither receive any benefit, nor can communicate any? Whilst at the same time all that distinguishes us as Men, and all that we justly triumph in as Christians, is hazarded thereby.

2. Let us be upon our guard, that we are not deluded by appearances and pretensions. This scoffing humour, as it often proceeds from an affectation of Wit, so it too much influences others from an apprehension of its being so; especially the younger sort. To be witty, stands with many for every thing; and they are ready to sacrifice any thing for the gaining of such a Character. It is very strange, that, amongst persons who can think, it should ever pass for an accomplishment to turn every thing into jest or ridicule; or that the attempting it should ingratiate any person! This
looks

looks as if Wit was made up of a command of words and a shameless face, or an ability of saying any thing of any thing, without regard to truth, decency, or good manners: if this is an excellency I know not what is a deformity. Whatever talents a man possesses, if they are employed to destroy the eternal distinction of things, to throw down what it is the highest interest of Mankind to believe and maintain the reputation of; let it have what plausible name it will, it is really the highest insolence and injury, and merits nothing but contempt and detestation. I hope none will ever surrender their Religion to any Phantom of wit or humour, or in the least suspect the principles thereof, because others take freedom with them, or droll upon them. This can never affect either their truth or importance. It is a very easy matter for the lowest sized understanding to throw out what may excite a laugh, and a very common thing for a laugh to go round, at what, if you abstract the impudence or prophaneness of the thing, hath nothing in it. But what hath truth and falshood to do with such things, or how can we distinguish one from the other by such means? Such an undistinguishing mind, with all its bold says, can never make Religion, but only itself, ridiculous, with all thinking persons.

3. Let us diligently beware of inconsistencies: and this both for the sake of others and ourselves. Let us do this for the sake of *others*: in order to cut off a considerable occasion of scoffing at Religion from those who seek occasion, and who make no greater improvement of any thing to this end, than

than the inconsistencies of those who profess it. Do we believe there is a God? Let us act as under his eye, and with a governing view to his approbation. Do we believe we are designed for another state, and that the issue of the present life will be reward or punishment unspeakable? Let our conduct shew that we live by faith and not by sense. Do we believe a solemn day of retribution, when rewards or punishment shall be fully adjudged to every one according to their deeds? let us see to it that we are in all things governed by the Gospel of Christ, which we believe to be the rule of the expected Judgment. This would prevent much scorning, and thereby render our temptation less from that quarter; nay it would be Religion's great credit and defence—— But let us beware of inconsistencies, from the influence and tendency they have to the reconciling us to the chair of the scorner. If we *indulge* our selves in acting contrary to our belief in any instance, or as if we did not believe Religious principles, we are in great danger of joining the scorners, at least as to that particular article to which our practice runs counter. For instance; Do we believe at present that we are designed for another state? but if we allow ourselves in what renders the thought very painful, who can tell how long this may be the matter of our faith? The uneasiness of mind which our conduct occasions by means of that article, will render it very soon our *wish* that there was no such state: and when it thus appears necessary for our peace that there should be none, shall we not easily admit disputes about it, whether it is so certain

certain as we thought, and whether much may not be offered against it? In this case shall we not be very willing to embrace objections against it, and be thankful to those who can supply us, and thereby help us off with it? From hence, having much accustomed ourselves to converse with objections to the neglect of the evidences, we are greatly prepared to fling it up and join with others in their scorning. The more careful we are to act consistently with the articles of our faith, the faster shall we hold them, and the less influence will all temptations to doubt or scorn them have upon us. If we would but so live that a Divine existence, a future state, and a judgment day were our *hope* and *consolation*, we should be able to sustain any attacks from the scorner, and soon discern their treatment of Religion proceeds not from any counter-evidence, but a dread and abhorrence of the truths they deride. In a word, whilst we live as those important truths require, our hopes of their final fulfillment will be a perpetual spring of pleasure, and thereupon every one will be esteemed our worst enemy that attempts to depreciate them, or to deprive us of them.

4. Let us guard against the prevalency of a drolling jesting humour. I am far from being an enemy to Cheerfulness, but on the contrary, under the regulation of reason would promote it all I could, as consistent with Christianity, promoted by it, and a recommendation of the strictest regards to it. Nevertheless, it is capable of degenerating into its neighbouring extream, Levity: and when thus degenerated and accompanied with a

readiness of thought, it may betray into an humour very detrimental to Religion. It is the indulged practice of some, to be continually jesting and giving light turns to things: if this is not under a check, we shall find not only, as we often do, that friend and interest are both sacrificed there-to, but that it will lead us to spare nothing however sacred, and to level every thing that comes before us. When there is an habit of turning things into ridicule it takes a person off his guard, he loses the sense of the difference in things; he is indisposed to attend to any thing serious *as serious* or weighty, and is thereby very easily led, not only to suck in, but to *chuse* the representations of things that jests and humour gives of them, and to make free with every thing that comes before him, the most solemn things not excepted. Tho' this doth not affect the nature of the things, yet it must affect *his apprehension* of them, and the influence they have upon him: sacred things, it is allowed, are still sacred, and important truths are still important; but I believe no one will say that they *appear* the one or the other to the mind that is dressing up every thing in the air of a jest, or that they can be regarded according to their nature, but according to their representation. If we find a strong disposition therefore to this humour, and delight in it, it is of the greatest importance that we set a guard upon it: it is a sad leveller where it prevails, for it destroys the wheat with the chaff; it naturally leads to that company where a man soon commences a scorner, it reconciles the mind to the prophaneness of such persons, and cuts off all

opportunity and capacity of better information and remedy.

5. Let us endeavour to grow in goodness, and to get an experimental acquaintance with the satisfaction and advantages of Religion, both in principle and practice. A mind under the stated influence of Christian principles, a will, affections and conduct under the influence of Christian precepts, would strongly fortify against the more beguiling or forcible attacks of the scorner. A growth in grace the Apostle recommends as a preservative against all practical errors, against all the seducements of the wicked †. What! when we have found the sweets of Religion, when we have experienced the many advantages flowing from the belief of its principles and the conduct of its rules.— Shall we ever surrender to a scoff, a bold jest, or an empty witticism! No; a person's experience is usually the last thing that he parts with: we are wont to say, there is no *argument* against it; it is very probable therefore that no derision, sneers, or laugh will prevail against it, which have no *shew of argument*. We do not know enough of Religion to enable us to bear any thing for it, or to abide by it. If we would but cultivate Religion by the practice of it, we should find that it ministers the courage and produces that love to itself, which are necessary for our adhering to it. When our reason and experience unite in their testimony for Religion, all the attempts of the scorner will appear highly injurious as well as unreasonable; interest will conspire with our judgments to set us at the farthest remove, both from their chair and their company. Let us labour

† 2. Pet. iii. 17. 18.

therefore to feel more of the power of that Religion, which hath Love, Peace, and Hope for its principles, and the perfection of every thing felicitating for its scope and end. As our own inward holiness improves, the more shall we feel a resentment and abhorrence of the scorner's practice, as the highest affront offered to our reason, an insolent denial of our own experience, and an inhuman attempt upon our most valuable interest.

To close: May he who scorneth the scorners, but giveth grace to the humble, bless us with, and preserve to us that serious, humble, teachable disposition, by which only we can attain to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, or be kept in the way of truth which he hath prescribed. May those who hold Religion at present in scorn and derision, be engaged by the divine grace seriously to lay their practice to heart, and be brought by conviction out of the chair of the scorner, to the knowledge of those benefits the Religion of Jesus secures at present, and to the rewards it will introduce them to at last.

F I N I S,





