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THE
NECESSITY

OF

Divine Revelation,

AND

The TRUTH of the
CHRISTIAN REVELATION

Afferted; in

Eight Sermons.

To which is prefix'd,

A PREFACE with some REMARKS
on a Late Book, Intitled, *The Scheme
of Literal Prophecy consider'd, &c.*

By JOHN ROGERS, D. D.

Canon Residentiary of WELLS, and Chaplain to
His Royal HIGHNESS.

L O N D O N :

Printed for WILLIAM and JOHN INNYS,
at the West End of St. Paul's, M.DCC.XXVII.



T O

His Royal Highness,

G E O R G E,

Prince of *WALES*.

S I R,



Shou'd injure Your
Royal HIGHNESS,
if I imagin'd You
wanted any Conviction these
Papers can afford. But if

A 2

my

iv *The* DEDICATION.

my mean Abilities can contribute any Thing to the Service of Religion, it becomes an Offering due to Your Royal HIGHNESS, from the Character in which I have the Honour to serve You.

THE Clergy wou'd esteem themselves happy, if Arguments on the Subject here treated were every where as unnecessary, as they are in Your Royal HIGHNESS'S Court. With much greater Satisfaction We shou'd exercise our Ministry in explaining
ing

The DEDICATION. V

ing the Doctrines, recommending the Duties, and enforcing the Motives of the Gospel. When the Foundation of a true Faith may generally be presumed, These, we know, are the proper Superstructure we shou'd build upon it ; the ordinary Christian Food of which we are appointed Stewards and Dispensers. But when Poisons are dispersed among our People, and laid in every one's Way, our Office will require us to provide Medicines as well as Meat, and supply them with Antidotes equal

vi *The* DEDICATION.

to the Danger. When the Grounds of our Religion are openly attack'd; when the Authority on which its whole Obligation depends is disputed, and Infidelity is prevailing as a Fashion, some at least among us may appear properly employ'd in repelling the Enemy. Your Royal HIGHNESS, we are assured, wishes Success to every Hand engaged in this Service, and we bless God for the Influence of Your great Example in promoting it.

WE

The DEDICATION. vii

WE solicit not the Countenance of the Great, or the Assistance of Authority, from any Distrust of our Cause, or our Abilities to defend it. Our Cause is the Cause of God and his Christ, against which the *Gates of Hell shall not prevail*: Neither will the Labours of the Clergy be wanting in a just Defence of it. And if Providence shou'd call us to that Trial, we are prepared to suffer for it, as our Predecessors have done. But we may observe to Your

A 4 Royal

viii *The* DEDICATION.

Royal HIGHNESS, and all who are in Authority, that *our Religion* is a Part, and a most valuable Part, of our Legal Properties. We may observe the Tendency of these Attempts, to unsettle Mens Minds from the Principles and Belief of all *Reveal'd Religion* ; and leave every one to pursue what each shall think fit to call the Dictates of his *natural Reason*. We may observe what Confusion these licentious Notions must produce, what Effects they must have on Morality, civil Peace, the
Se-

The DEDICATION. ix

Security and Influence of Government itself. Publick Wisdom may surely be permitted, without the Imputation of unreasonable Severity, to restrain Men from thus *scattering Arrows, Firebrands, and Death* amongst us. His Sacred MAJESTY will, we doubt not, apply Remedies agreeable to His Wisdom, and rescue Himself and Your Royal HIGHNESS, from the terrible Prospect of governing a People without *any Religion.*

WE

x *The* DEDICATION.

WE acknowledge, with humble Gratitude to GOD and His MAJESTY, the Protection our Establishment enjoys under His gracious Administration ; and rejoice in the Hopes Your Virtues give us, that this Blessing will be farther continued and confirmed to us and our Posterity.

THAT the Dew of divine Benediction may descend on Your Royal HIGHNESS's Person and Family ; That the Wisdom of God may direct
direct

The DEDICATION. xi

direct, his Power preserve,
and the Graces of his Holy
Spirit adorn You with eve-
ry good and perfect Gift,
is the daily Prayer of our
Church, and offer'd with un-
feign'd Sincerity,

By

Your Royal HIGHNESS'S

Most Dutiful

Servant and Chaplain,

JOHN ROGERS.



T H E
P R E F A C E.



*W*HILE the following Discourses were in the Press, I received a Defence of the Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons, &c. intituled The Scheme of Literal Prophecy consider'd, &c. In my fifth Sermon I occasionally dispute one Point with the Author of the Grounds and Reasons, &c. viz. Whether the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles are so useless an Evidence, as he pretends, in our Inquiry whether Jesus Christ was the Messiah foretold to, and expected by the Jews: And I was willing, in such a short
View

xiv The P R E F A C E.

View as the Time permitted, to observe how far any Thing suggested by this new Piece, affected my Way of Reasoning on that Question.

I confess, I consider'd that Author as arguing under the Person of a Jew, who acknowledg'd the Expectation of a Messiah, founded on some preceding Predictions, but deny'd that Jesus Christ had produced sufficient Evidence of his being that Person. On this Supposition I observ'd,

1st. That the Nature of the Thing requires that this Person shou'd appear to be sent, or raised up, by God, of which Miracles are the most unquestionable Proof that cou'd be given.

*2^{ly}, From several Passages in the Gospels, I observ'd, that the Jews expected their Messiah shou'd be distinguish'd by the Power of working Miracles, as a prophesy'd Part of his Character. To which Places we may add * What Sign*

* John vi. 30, 31.

The P R E F A C E. xv

shewest thou that we may believe? What dost thou work? Our Fathers did eat Manna in the Wilderness. *Where they plainly challenge Christ to prove himself like to Moses (as he had foretold the Messiah should be) by performing some Miracle, equal to that of Moses, in giving their Fathers Manna from Heaven. To them therefore Miracles were a specific Evidence, without which no one cou'd be acknowledg'd as the Messiah. This Argument, indeed, proves only, that Miracles were esteem'd by the Jews a necessary Mark of that Person whom they expected. What Authority the Jews had for this Expectation, is another Inquiry. That they grounded it on preceding Prophecies, cannot be deny'd: And if they truly understood those Prophecies, then the Conclusion goes farther, and the Miracles of Jesus are one Evidence, that he was a Person long before foretold; and give all the Testimony to him that a prophesy'd Character, the least capable of being counterfeited of any, cou'd give. And the Generality and Firmness of the Expectation itself, affords a probable*
Argu-

xvi The P R E F A C E.

Argument that it was deduced from some authentick Exposition of the Prophecies. This is a way of reasoning used in other historical Inquiries, and allow'd to have Weight, where the Matter will admit it, and 'tis not plainly contradicted by any preceding Testimony.

*But the Person of the Jew seems now to be dropp'd, and we are taught, that no such Character as a Messiah was foretold in any of the antient Prophecies: And, to cut off all Argument from the general Expectation of such a Person prevailing among the Jews, 'tis averr'd, * that this Expectation was no earlier than in or about the Time of Jesus.*

But, in the first Place, how does this Gentleman prove it no earlier? Why he affirms it; and there remaining to us no Jewish Writers for some Ages before, he is very sure we cannot produce any that mention it. But since all the Jewish Writings about that Time mention it,

* Scheme of literal Prophecy consider'd, &c. Cap. I.

with-

The P R E F A C E. xvii

*without the least Intimation of its Novelty, or assigning any Author from whom it was lately derived, or any Date of its Commencement; this is a fair Presumption that the Rise of it was much older, and beyond Memory at that time. And since this Expectation was professedly founded on the prophetick Writings, the Exposition of those Writings, from which it arose, must have been as old as the Expectation; and may, with Probability, be thought to have descended down from the prophetick Age, tho' 'twas more generally attended to near the Time of Jesus. * This Gentleman wou'd disparage this way of arguing, as no better than the Papists Method of proving*

* The Expectation of a Messiah, as founded on the Prophets, appears not only from the Gospels, but from the oldest Rabbinical Books, the Targums of *Jonathan* and *Onkelos*; the former, according to the Jews, was wrote before Christ, and the latter soon after. 'Tis pretended, indeed, that these are later, and much † *interpolated*: But if they are *interpolated*, it must have been done by the Jews, in whose Hands they were, for the early Christians do not appear to have known them: And 'tis not probable, the Jews wou'd interpolate Acknowledgments so much in Favour of Christianity, as that any of the Prophecies referr'd to by Christ or his Apostles did really relate to the Messiah.

† Scheme of literal Prophecy, &c. p. 16.

xviii The P R E F A C E.

** Transubstantiation, who beginning at the Age in which it was professedly taught, presume thence backwards on a Tradition from the Apostles. But he will perceive a great Difference between them, when he observes, that the Protestants shew a continued Succession of Christian Writers, thro' several Centuries after the Apostles, who explain the Words of Christ in the Institution of the Eucharist in a figurative Sense, as we do; which proves, not only that Transubstantiation was not the Doctrine of the Christian Church in those Ages, but that the Doctrine which we affirm in opposition to it, was. Nay, we can assign the Time when, and the Persons by whom the Doctrine of Transubstantiation was first publish'd, viz. by John Damascene in the East, and by Pasch. Radbertus in the Western Church. Here the Tradition itself is disproved, and not merely by Silence, but by positive Evidence. Let this Gentleman then tell us, by whom the Expectation of a Messiah was first publish'd.*

** Pag. 65.*

Let

Let him produce a Succession of Jewish Writers, antecedent to the Time in which he allows that Expectation to have prevail'd, contradicting it, and the Interpretations of the Prophets on which it was founded: This will be something to his Purpose: But since he cannot produce one, a wide Difference must be acknowledg'd between these Cases, in the very Point of Argument; and therefore a Parity of Reason cannot lie from the one to the other. But were the Tradition in both Cases upon an equal Foot, yet the different Character of the Doctrines destroys all Comparison between them. The one is so evident a Falshood, that it cannot, upon any Tradition, be admitted as the intended Sense of Words, which we acknowledge to have been divinely inspired. But this Author will never prove it equally impossible, that the Prophets shou'd intend the Sense in which the Jews understood them, and from which they derived their Expectation of a Messiah.

*But suppose this general Expectation, and the Exposition of the Prophets from which it was derived, did obtain no earlier than he pretends. Is it impossible that a Prophecy which was not understood before, shou'd begin to be understood then? Many Reasons might be given, why divine Wisdom shou'd choose to deliver Prophecies in some Obscurity. From this Gentleman's way of reasoning I may suggest one. Wherever he apprehends a Prophecy to be plain, he immediately rejects it as a Forgery. Thus he rejects the Book of Daniel, because it speaks of Matters of Fact, in the way of Prophecy, with the Clearness of History *. And thinks, the clear Reference in it to Alexander the Great, does itself evince that 'twas composed after the Conquests of that Prince †. And in another Place he tells us, The Punctuality of the Predictions in it, so uncommon to Prophecies, can be owing to nothing but the Time of its Composition; when the Au-*

* Pag. 143. † Pag. 431.

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thor cou'd very easily place the Things he treated of, in the order of Time in which they happened *. *If Punctuality and Clearness are such certain Marks that a Prophecy is spurious, we must confess it agreeable to the Wisdom of God, to involve what he intended to be receiv'd as a real, genuine Prophecy, in such † Obscurity as might secure it from so insuperable a Suspicion of Imposture. But then, it seems, if the Prophecy is thus obscure, it has no Meaning, and can signify nothing at all. But if it be possible for the Spirit of God to deliver Prophecies with some certain Meaning, and every Prophecy must be obscure, to gain it the credit of being a real Prophecy, then God may deliver an obscure Prophecy with some certain Meaning. And if it be obscure, it may not be presently understood, but lie a long Time in the*

* Pag. 147.

† The Right Reverend the Bishop of *Litchfield* and *Coventry's* Defence, &c. p. 407, & seq. has shewn from the Prophets themselves, Declarations that several of their Prophecies were dark and unintelligible, and were to continue so, till about the Time of their Completion; and that God purposely conceal'd his Meaning in ambiguous and figurative Expressions.

dark. But when the Completion of it draws near, it is very reasonable to imagine, that the Providence of God shou'd prepare Men for it by a greater Attention to the Prophecy; that it shou'd appear in more Light, and raise such Expectations, as might dispose Men to acknowledge the Event, when fulfilled. Supposing then, not granting, that the Expectation of the Jews, and the Expositions of the Prophets on which it was founded, were no older than this Author pretends; yet it cannot be thence inferr'd, that these Expositions were not agreeable to the real Intention of the Prophecies, but the Presumption will rather lie on the other Side.

The Declarations of later Jews, when they affirm the Expectation of a Messiah as foretold by the Prophets, are treated by this Gentleman as very inconsiderable Evidence; tho' great Stress is laid by him on a single Authority, disowning, or even doubting of it. Thus

** R. Hillel's Opinion, that no Messiah*

* Pag. 24, 25.

was

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was foretold beside Hezekiah, is introduced with pompous Encomiums on his Character. And some Others are supposed to have approved his Doctrine, (tho' they profess'd the contrary to it) because they did not † excommunicate, or deem him an Apostate. Hillel lived in the third Century, when more than two hundred Years Experience might well have convinced him of the Difficulties, which he and his Brethren labour'd under, in disputing with the Christians; while they acknowledg'd, that the Prophecies appeal'd to did really, in their original Intention, relate to a future Messiah. And is it any Wonder, that a zealous and obstinate Jew shou'd be driven, as the last Refuge of a desperate Cause, to cut the Knot which he cou'd not untie, and deny their Traditions, when he cou'd not otherwise answer the Christian Arguments from them? Or that the good Intention of the Expedient shou'd procure him Excuse from his Brethren, tho' they cou'd not agree

† Pag 25.

xxiv The PREFACE.

in Sentiments with him? This Person is the first Instance produced, of any Rabbi declaring for this Opinion; neither does he appear to have had many Followers. The general Stream of Jewish Writers, both before and after him, profess the Expectation of a Messiah, as foretold in the ancient Prophecies; nay, in most of the same Prophecies which Christ and his Apostles had appeal'd to. And their Testimony is of the more Weight in this Case, because they may be suppos'd unwilling Witnesses. Nothing but a firm Conviction, that these Traditions were derived down to them from unquestionable Authority, cou'd have induc'd them to give their Adversaries the Advantage of them. And this Presumption is all we have Occasion to infer from their Testimony. For I confess, I do not think the Concurrence of the Rabbinical Writers, how general soever, in the traditionary Application of a Prophecy, will amount to a necessary Proof that 'tis truly apply'd.

For

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For the Conviction of a Jew these Traditions may properly be urg'd, as Arguments upon Concession. And since both the Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons, &c. and the Defence of it insist, with much Triumph, on any Passage in these Writers, which either in general disowns the Prediction of a Messiah in the ancient Scriptures, or denies the Relation of any particular Prophecy to him; these Suggestions are fairly refuted, by shewing that they contradict the general Current of Jewish Tradition. We may hence also farther observe, that the Applications of the ancient Prophecies to a future Messiah, whence Christ and his Apostles argue, were not Inventions of their own to serve a present Turn, but agreeable to the receiv'd Sentiments of that Nation. And since these Traditions must have obtain'd some considerable Time before the Birth of Jesus, and no Date can be fixed for their Commencement, it is a probable Conclusion that they were derived down from the Prophetick Age.

In

xxvi The P R E F A C E.

In explaining the Phraseology of the sacred Writers, the Peculiarities of their Style, the Customs they often refer to, and the usual Signification of certain Types and Emblems in the Prophetick Language, the Remains of Jewish Tradition transmitted to us in the Rabbinical Books, and especially the earliest of them, are certainly proper Helps, and some of the best we have. But tho' the Assistances we receive from them be very great, and give both Light and Strength to the Evidences of Christianity, and particularly in its Appeal to the ancient Prophecies; yet, with all Submission to better Judgments, I neither conceive the Arguments arising from them strong enough to stand singly by themselves, nor so absolutely necessary, but that our Conclusion may be proved without them.

*The Miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, I contend to be a clear, direct Proof of their Mission from God, and consequently they assert the Authority of divine Testimony to their Application of
the*

The PREFACE. xxvii

the ancient Prophecies. I propose not this Way of Reasoning as any Thing new ; 'tis obvious enough, and was excellently and fully urged by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Litchfield and Coventry in his vith Chap. to which his Answerer has given, in my Opinion, a very insufficient Reply. Instead of refuting his Arguments, which he ought to have done if he cou'd, he has only produced the Assertions of some learned Men, that an Attestation from the Prophets is necessary to support the Pretensions of our Lord to the Character of the Messiah ; we own it ; and insist, that the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles lead us necessarily to the Acknowledgment of such an Attestation. Here are Prophecies appeal'd to, in Proof that Jesus Christ was a Person antiently foretold by the Spirit of God, under the Character of a Messiah, a great Prophet who shou'd come. Upon this a Question arises, whether these Prophecies had, in their first Intention, any Relation to such a Person ; and what better Proof can be given or required.

xxviii The PREFACE.

of such Relation, than the Affirmation of the same Spirit, who is supposed to have dictated the Prophecy? The Argument in Form is this,

*What God affirms to have been intended by his Spirit in any Prophecy, that certainly was intended in it :
But*

God affirms, that in the Prophecies apply'd by Christ and his Apostles, his Spirit intended to foretell a Messiah. Ergo,

The Minor is proved thus,

What a Person or Persons, proved to be inspired by God, affirm, that God affirms : But

Christ and his Apostles are proved to be inspired by God, and affirm, that in the Prophecies which they apply, the Spirit intended to foretell a Messiah. Ergo, &c.

For

The PREFACE. xxix

For Proof of the Inspiration of Christ and his Apostles, we appeal to the Miracles wrought by them, the most unexceptionable Evidence any Person can give, that he is sent by God, and speaks with his Authority. I can perceive no Defect in this Argument, and think it not the worse for being plain and short. If it be shewn impossible for the Prophecy to have had such Intention, it is confess'd Miracles will not prove it, because Miracles cannot prove an Impossibility: But if, upon any possible Supposition, the Prophecy might have such Intention, the Assertion of a Person, whose Mission from God is attested by Miracles, is a just Proof of such Intention. That 'tis possible to understand the Prophecies in Question with such Intention appears, because they have been and are so understood, both by Jews and Christians; and the Author of Grounds and Reasons finds such Intention asserted by probable Arguments at least, arising from the Matter, the Expressions, and Circumstances of the Prophecies themselves,
and

xxx The PREFACE.

and Traditions, whose Beginning cannot be assign'd, affirming it. The Dispute between him and his Adversaries is not, so far as I apprehend, whether it be possible the Prophecies might have such Intention, but whether such Intention can be made to appear to any one inclined to contest it; and when the Intention is affirm'd by a Person, who gives the best Evidence of his Inspiration that can be given, I think the Question is fairly decided by divine Authority.

This Gentleman seem'd, as I observed before, to assume the Person of a Jew, one who own'd the Inspiration of the antient Prophecies; and agreeably he tells us, that we ought regularly to be first Converts to Judaism, and then proceed, upon the Principles of that Religion, to examine the Evidences of the Christian. In debating this Question, therefore, I supposed his Objections to Christ's Allegations of the antient Prophecies to have been made by a Jew, and observe, that, having from our Lord's Miracles the same (I might say greater) Rea-

The PREFACE. xxxi

*Reason to believe that God spake by Christ, as he had to believe that God spake by the Prophets ; He had the same (or greater) Authority for the Exposition or Application of the Prophecies, as he had for the Prophecies themselves. But the Argument will equally conclude, if we change the Person to a Gentile. For suppose a Gentile, upon the Sight or Assurance of Christ's Miracles, to have been convinced of his Mission from God ; as the Considerer of the Scheme of literal Prophecy , &c. acknowledges he might be. He tells us, that * Had Jesus Christ come as a Person sent with a new Revelation from God, and perform'd Miracles as Credentials of his Mission, he wou'd have had a Right to have been attended to, and try'd upon that Foot ; and if no internal Objection had appear'd against his Doctrine, his Miracles ought to have determin'd Men to have believ'd on him. Well then ; this Convert finds Jesus to have assumed the Character of the Messiah, a*

* Pag. 310, 311.

xxxii The PREFACE.

Person supposed to be foretold in the Jewish Prophets. We acknowledge it requisite, that this Claim shou'd appear duly supported; and are at Liberty to suppose, that no Contradiction to any Prophecy is assign'd, in Disproof of this Claim; but that the Question lies before him, under the Difficulties suggested by our modern Objecters. Several Prophecies are appeal'd to, as predicting this Messiah; and are acknowledg'd by the Jews to have had that Intention: But when he comes to examine these Prophecies, we will suppose (with all the Advantage to the Objecters that may be) that he finds no clear express Mention of such a Person, but that such Intention is collected only from some obscure Passages, or from some typical, allegorical, or secondary Sense of the Words. In short, that it does not appear to him from the Words themselves, that either the Jews, or Christ, had any certain indubitable Grounds for such Application. Suppose all this, I say, yet when he observes the Ground he already stands on, that he has the fullest Proof that

The PREFACE. xxxiii

that can be given, that Jesus Christ, who affirms this Exposition, is a Person sent by God, and who speaks with his Authority, might he not justly argue thus? — “ It is not impossible, but “ the divine Wisdom might intend to deliver these Prophecies with some Obscurity ; nay, there are obvious Reasons which might induce him to do so. “ God certainly knows, whether he intended thus to foreshadow this Event or not. If he affirms the Intention, “ can I dispute his Authority, and “ tell him he did not intend it ? And “ since the Miracles of Christ give me “ the utmost Assurance of his divine “ Mission, what he declares, God declares ; and I can no more doubt the “ Truth of his Exposition, than I can “ doubt the Veracity of God”. No internal Objection, but a manifest Impossibility in the Assertion, can invalidate this Reasoning ; and such, I presume, will not be produced. But till it is produced, this Gentleman must be contented to retract also his * Parallel

* Pag. 316.

xxxiv The P R E F A C E.

between the Papists Proof of Transubstantiation by their Miracles, and our Proof of the Intention of the Jewish Prophecies from the Miracles of Christ. For Transubstantiation is a Doctrine incapable of being proved by Miracles; so manifest a Falshood must overbear the utmost Evidence that can be produced for Inspiration. But the Case is quite otherwise here. The Point in Question is, whether an antient Prophecy, supposed to have been dictated by the Spirit of God, was intended to presignify a Messiah, or not. It is disputed pro and con by probable Arguments, arising from such Lights and Circumstances, as are usually call'd in to illustrate antient obscure Writings: And we think, the greater Weight of these Arguments is with us. But supposing the Ballance only equal, or even inclining against us; yet when we have the best Proof, which in the Nature of the Thing can be given us, that God himself affirms the Intention we contend for, the Scale is turn'd with so vast a Preponderancy, as leaves no farther Room for Doubt.

If

The PREFACE. XXXV

If these are really Prophecies, God must be consider'd as the Author of them, and must certainly be the best Expositor of his own Meaning in them. And since Miracles are the strongest and most unexceptionable Evidence of any Person's Inspiration by God, if a Person, whose Mission is so attested, affirms a particular Meaning, God himself must be understood to affirm it. This single Argument, unless it can be shewn to be barr'd by a manifest Impossibility in the Matter affirm'd, is sufficient to carry us thro' every Question which can arise on this Subject. It asserts not only the Application of the Jewish Prophecies, to which it bears Witness, but the Authority of the Prophecies themselves. It supports and confirms all Evidences a priori, gives Strength even to probable Conjectures of the Intention of the Prophets, and removes every Difficulty suggested against them. In particular, it gives a full, and perhaps the best, Answer to that Objection of the Adversary. — That if we allow the Authority of the Jewish Traditions, they will

xxxvi The P R E F A C E.

prove more than we desire; that the Person foretold by the Prophets was a temporal Deliverer, and not such a Messiah as we contend for. *For when their Tradition for the Prediction of a Messiah is affirm'd, and the particular Character in which they expected him to appear, is rejected by divine Authority, we have very good Reason to believe them right in one Tradition, and mistaken in the other. I do not offer this in Disparagement of any other Reply, that may be given. But I am inclined to think, that whoever will attentively examine the Grounds upon which he admits one Part of the Tradition, and rejects the other, will find himself principally to rest on this Argument: And that if our Lord had appear'd in the Figure of a temporal Prince, and confirm'd the literal Meaning of those Prophecies, which are understood of a Messiah, and speak of him under that Character, he wou'd readily have admitted that Meaning.*

For my own Part, I scruple not to own, that I therefore believe the Jewish
Re-

The P R E F A C E. xxxvii

Revelation ; because I find it confirm'd by the Christian. For tho' the Jewish Revelation is supported by direct Proofs of its own, yet these Proofs wou'd not have appear'd with the same Light and Force, if they had not been strengthen'd by the Testimony of the Gospel Revelation. I am convinced of the divine Authority of Jesus Christ by full Evidence, and especially by the Miracles which attest it. I here fix my Foot, and under this Conviction consider what He has taught. He affirms the Jewish Revelation in general, and the View and Intention of several particular Prophecies in it. I discern nothing impossible in his Assertions ; nothing that can oblige me to retract my Belief of his divine Authority, and therefore I am assured by that Authority, of the Truth of what He affirms. In a general View of that Revelation He proposes to me, I am pleas'd to see a wonderful Scheme of Providence derived down, with great Consistency, from the Beginning of the World, and gradually open'd thro' a long Succession of Ages. I observe, with Satis-

xxxviii The PREFACE.

faction, the Evidences arising to this System, from the direct Proofs of the Jewish Religion, the Import, the Rites and Institutions of that Revelation, and the Traditions of that People; But all these are but accessional Supports, to Conclusions already proved by divine Authority; without which, these other Arguments wou'd have given but a faint and uncertain Light; or, at least, wou'd have wanted that Clearness and Force, with which they now appear.

A Jew, indeed, wou'd naturally begin at the other End of the Argument, and proceed from his Conviction of that Revelation which he had before receiv'd, to examine the Christian. His first Inquiry wou'd be, whether they were consistent; his next, what Testimony the former bore to the latter: And while he was in this Search, the Import of the Prophecies, Traditions, and whatever other Lights might ascertain the Intention of them, wou'd be proper Subjects of his Consideration. If he perceiv'd an irreconcilable Contradiction between

The PREFACE. xxxix

tween the two Revelations, he cou'd not acknowledge both ; and if he adhered to the former, he must reject the latter. But if he had no other Objection, besides some Difficulties and Uncertainties in the Application of the Prophecies appeal'd to, when he attended to the direct Proofs of Christ's divine Authority, that Authority must over-rule all Doubts or Scruples of that Kind, which cou'd remain with him. So that his Inquiry wou'd end, where mine began, and both wou'd ultimately rest on the same Foundation, the divine Authority of Christ.

If the Premisses in this Way of Reasoning are allow'd, the Conclusion, so far as I can perceive, follows by clear and necessary Consequence from them. I am not wanting in a just Deference to the Sentiments of learned Men ; But when, upon the best Attention in my Power, I am convinced an Argument is conclusive, I cannot, upon any Authority, give it up as inconclusive. What my learned and worthy Friend the Dean

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of Chichester says, is certainly very true, viz. What a Prophet has not spoken, Miracles will not prove him to have spoken: For neither Miracles, nor any Thing else, can prove an Impossibility. But when the Question is only about the Meaning and Intention of what a Prophet has spoken, if an Intention be assign'd, which is not only possible, but supported by several probable Arguments, the Affirmation of divine Authority, assured to us by Miracles or any other proper Evidence, is the most decisive Proof, that the Nature of the Subject is capable of.

My Dispute with the Author of Grounds and Reasons, &c. is confined to a single Point; and I can observe nothing more in his Defender, by which any Conclusion of mine appears to be affected. When he publishes his threaten'd Treatise of Miracles, I may perhaps find my self more concern'd. In the mean time I doubt not but the worthy Persons he opposes, will do themselves and him Justice,

But

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But in his XIII Chapter, where he opens his Scheme of Liberty, he comes within the compass of a Subject, which I have formerly consider'd with some Attention. I shall therefore give him my Reflections on this Part of his Performance; to which I am the rather induced, because the Censure I pass in the following Discourses on these Schemes, as tending only to Licentiousness and Confusion, appears fully confirm'd in it. And if I use him with somewhat less Ceremony than I have hitherto done, the scurrilous Insolence, with which he here treats a learned and venerable Prelate of our Church, will be my Excuse.

He breaks forth into Reproaches against the Bishop, for presuming to hope for the Royal Protection and Countenance of his Majesty, and the Assistance of those employ'd in the Administration; for those, or the like, Passages in his Lordship's Dedication are what, I suppose, he reflects on, as † calling in the Aid of the civil Magistrate. And surely

* Pag. 392.

such

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such Aid his Lordship might reasonably call for. This Gentleman must know, that our Religion is incorporated into our civil Constitution, and become a legal Part of our Property; as much secured to us by the Oaths of our Princes, and the Authority and Sanctions of our Laws, as our Lives, or Fortunes. On this Argument, we all know, the Revolution, and the happy Settlement consequent to it were founded; and we are firmly assured, that His Majesty's royal Wisdom and Justice will not permit, nor his Councillors advise, the Subversion of that Foundation.

*The Christian Religion did not obtain the Favour of civil Establishments, without due Consideration. It had been disputed near four Hundred Years; every Objection that Persons, of as much Learning and Parts as this Writer can pretend to, cou'd suggest, had been heard and refuted: And then, upon full Conviction of its Divine Authority, and the Excellency of its Rules, it receiv'd that Encouragement, which Civil Power will
ever*

The PREFACE. xliii

*ever find it necessary to give to some Religion or other. And does he think these Conclusions are all to be reversed, publick Constitutions unframed, and all Laws suspended, as often as any petulant Scribler shall have an itch to shew his Skill in Argument, and revive the Controversy again? Are Questions of this Importance to be kept open for ever? And is it not possible for us ever to know when we have attained Truth and Conviction? If * the Liberty he contends for were establish'd, Truth, he thinks, must needs have the Advantage over Error and Falsehood. Christianity has stood the full Trial of Debate, under all the Liberty of Opposition to it, that could be desired, and has prevail'd. We have then this Circumstance to add to the direct Evidences of its Truth: And must we never rest in our Conclusion, so long as there is one Infidel left, who has Vanity enough to think he has something to offer, not consider'd before? A just Reply is not, and will not be, wanting to all he has said, or can say; but while our Laws*

* Pag. 413.

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*continue in Force, he must not expect they should stand still, and be only idle Spectators of the Contest. He is pleas'd to think, that whoever advances any Principles contrary to his, (i. e.) contends for any religious Establishments, * ought to be made an Example, That if he contradicts what the Laws of his Country deem the Gospel, all Advantages shou'd be taken against him from those Laws, and particularly, that the R. R. Prelate he disputes with, shou'd be thus taken to task for his Doctrines. This it seems wou'd be no Persecution, but † a Proposal highly just to be put in Execution. But if the Laws, which he openly affronts, were to be executed upon himself; if any Restraint shou'd be laid on the Liberty he assumes of publishing Notions subversive of the Christian and all reveal'd Religion, and which manifestly tend to introduce the utmost Confusion, civil and religious; we shou'd presently, I doubt not, have an Out-cry of Tyranny, Persecution, and Inquisition. If he were so thoroughly convinced, as he pre-*

* Pag. 398. † Pag. 399.

tends,

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*tends, of the Truth of his Notions, and * his Duty to publish them, he shou'd not, methinks, be so very apprehensive of a little Discouragement. The Christian Religion, he knows, has stood firm thro' the most enraged Persecutions of secular Power ; and been attested by the Blood of innumerable Martyrs. And notwithstanding his mean and disingenuous Reflection on the Clergy of this Church, as Men so attach'd to their Preferments, that they wou'd † subscribe to any thing rather than part with them, he may be able to recollect within his own Memory, or late History can recount to him, numerous Examples among them of a Courage superior to all Impressions of secular Terror. And he may assure himself, they will appear with as much Zeal and Activity against Libertinism and Anarchy, as they shew'd then against Tyranny ; and, if the Occasion requir'd it, wou'd be as little moved by any Fear of Suffering, as they were then. And I may observe to this Gentleman, that the Resolution and Constancy of its Professors in suffer-*

* Pag. 408. † Pag. 400.

ing for any Cause, is no inconsiderable Argument in its Favour. Before he pretends to compare his Religion with the Christian, he must produce some Ballance to the Testimony of its Martyrs. A Confessor or two would be a mighty Ornament to his Cause. If he expects to convince us that he is in earnest, and believes himself, he should not decline giving us this Proof of his Sincerity; what will not abide this Trial, we shall suspect to have but a poor Foundation. And when we see him so terribly frightened with Apprehension of the very gentle Restraints of our Laws, calling out to have the Edge of them turned, and his Adversaries † singled out and made Examples by them, we can hardly think him in earnest in what he has wrote; or that he means any Thing more, than to shew us a Specimen of his Parts and Reading, to give vent to his great Plethory of Knowledge, teaze the Clergy, and divert himself with a little Disputation.

† P. 398.

Nay,

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*Nay, but He has a serious Propofal to make to us ; and * O what Piety, and true Honour of God, what Virtue, Order, and Peace would prevail in the World, if Men would but receive it ! He has collected, good Man, a Treasure of † Pearls for us, but he is afraid we should bite him, and therefore contents himself, at present, with only defiring us to throw away all the Religion we have ; and then if we will come to him, and give him good Words, he has || Creeds, and every Thing else we can want, ready provided for us. But first, we expect better Arguments from him, than he has yet produced, before we part with our present Religion. And then, since he allows that § all Projects, Defigns, or Schemes are to be judged good or bad by the Effects, we beg leave to observe to him, that the Christian Religion has been approved by the Experience of many Centuries. That there are indeed and have been wicked Men and turbulent Spirits, whose Lusts and Passions would not be restrain'd within the Rules of that Re-*

* P. 414, 415. † P. 408. || 418. § P. 411.

ligion,

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ligion, we confess and lament ; and should be oblig'd to any one who could tell us how to prevent it ; but can see no Reason to hope that Things would be much better'd by his Scheme. It would have been a great Satisfaction to us, if he had referr'd to some Age and Country in which his Scheme had obtain'd, and produc'd those glorious Effects he promises us from it. I believe our own History can furnish him with a Precedent, the nearest to it of any in the World. In the Days of the great Rebellion, our Fathers saw this Universal Liberty in its full Latitude and Extent, when every one was left to choose or devise his own Religion, and to have any or none just as he pleased, provided he would renounce that before establish'd. Among the innumerable Projects then advanc'd, there was not one but pretended to rectify all that had ever been amiss : Each was † the true and only Scheme by which the World ought to be regulated : And if Men would but come into the Proposal, each promi-

† P.413.

sed them * Happiness in this World and the next, and all the fine Things this Gentleman has provided for us. But whoever reads the Annals of those miserable Times, and attends to the Complaints of all serious Men of all Parties and Distinctions, will find very little Inclination to have the Experiment tried over again. And, among those Complaints, I beg leave particularly to observe one from Mr. Pryn, and others who had concurr'd in the Councils of those Times, and the Subversion and Confusion they had produced. That Popery never got more Ground, nor prevail'd faster than it did then. None labour'd with more Assiduity to advance the Scheme of Universal Liberty, than the Emissaries of that Religion. The Christian Moderator, a Treatise intirely built upon that Scheme, was wrote by one of them: And we have good Evidence, that the Project of our Troubles was laid by that Church, and this Engine pitch'd upon as the most effectual to execute it. How far the

* P. 415.

I The P R E F A C E.

Hand of that Enemy is concern'd in the present Attempt to revive that Scheme, we can only conjecture; but the Service they do, and must receive from it, is apparent to all observing Men.

*But perhaps this Gentleman has corrected the Defects and Inconsistencies of those former Projects; his is, what it pretends to be, the most harmless and beneficial Overture, that ever was made to the World. They were so weak as to allow some Sort of a publick Ministry, with Allotments of Revenue for its Support, and gather'd themselves into Congregations, and a Kind of Churches: But the Plan he has to offer, † for the information of our Makers of Laws for regulating Society, is free from all these Imperfections. The Religion he has devised for us, * is a Matter purely personal; and the Knowledge of it to be obtain'd by personal Consideration, independently on any Guides, Teachers, or Authority. Why this was their very Scheme;*

† p. 417. * p. 416.

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but unless human Nature cou'd be chang'd into something very different from what it is, it was and ever will be impossible to execute it. Their Theory was as finely imagin'd, as his can be; and his is as incapable of being reduced to Practice, as theirs was. He might, perhaps, change the Way of speaking, and what were then call'd Dictates of the Spirit, might under his Plan be called Dictates of Reason; but both wou'd mean much the same thing; and his Reasoners wou'd be as weak, as ignorant, and as confident, and in a very little time as great Enthusiasts in Religion, as they were: And while each acted as he tells us || they ought to act, and publish'd such of their Thoughts and Opinions as they deem'd beneficial to Men, and tending to their Peace and Welfare, (as to be sure every one wou'd deem or might pretend to deem his own) the same Chaos and Distraction that prevail'd upon their Scheme, wou'd as certainly prevail upon his. Truth indeed in the End did then happily prevail over Error, tho'

|| p. 408.

*we are not so confident as this * Writer that it always will do so. The Body of the Nation, convinced of their Delusion by those Projects of Liberty they had pursued, and wearied with being toss'd to and fro without finding any Ground to rest on, were glad to rebuild what they had demolish'd, and purchase their old Constitution again, tho' at the Price of all their Plunder and Sacrilege. This was the Event then : But God only knows what Issue a second Experiment might have. This Gentleman's Scheme wou'd as surely and as effectually subvert and pull down, as theirs did. But we know we have a vigilant and powerful Enemy, acting by subtil and united Counsels, who watches every Breach in our Constitution ; and, if all our Inclosures were now to be thrown down, might, with the favour of other incidents, enter upon us with more Advantage than he cou'd do then. God, we trust, whose Goodness deliver'd this Church and Nation, from the Miseries brought on them by that former*

* p. 413.

The P R E F A C E. liii

Project of Liberty, will protect us from the Evils threatned by this: And we doubt not, but the Wisdom of our Superiors will guard us against the Return of the one, or the Admission of the other.

I may observe of both Schemes, (if they differ any more than in Words) that they proceed on these fundamental Mistakes; the One, that God has promis'd to every Christian an infallible Guidance of his Spirit: The Other, that every Man left to himself wou'd reason justly, judge truly, and act agreeably. If human Nature were really in this State of Perfection, there wou'd be little Occasion for Laws, Government, or Authority in the World. But the Case in Fact is quite otherwise. And publick Constitutions, if they will do any Good, must consider Mankind as they really are, and, taken in the gross, ever will be, weak, ignorant, passionate, and conceited; and make suitable Provisions both for their Direction and Restraint. And tho' no Man ought, upon any Authority, to believe Contradictions, or profess an Assent to evident Falshoods; yet in Questions

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*stions where he must in the Event be determin'd by some Authority or other, he may reasonably prefer the Authority appointed by publick Wisdom, and may justly be requir'd to do so. I appeal to this Gentleman himself, whether he can seriously think the Bulk of Mankind capable of examining, with that Accuracy his Scheme supposes, the Christian, His, or any other Religion; of debating the Proofs, Objections, and Replies; and collecting the proper Conclusion from the Whole. The Wisdom of God has, with great Condescension, adapted the Rules and Evidences of the Christian Religion, to the general Capacities of Mankind. As the Gospel was preach'd to the Poor, so it was offer'd to their Faith by Proofs proper for their Conviction, plain sensible Evidences of its divine Authority. Its present Credibility, as to outward Proofs, depends on the Tradition of those Evidences, for which he who is not capable of deducing it regularly down by his own Inquiry, must necessarily have Recourse to Authority; and if 'tis affirm'd to him by Persons, to whose Knowledge
and*

The P R E F A C E. I v

*and Fidelity he has no just Objection, he has all the Proof that 'tis possible for one in his Circumstances to have; and his private Judgment may justly rest on it. This Gentleman's Address to Persons of this Character (i. e.) the greater Part of Mankind, amounts only to a Persuasion to quit their present Guides, and trust themselves with him. They are manifestly unable to form a Judgment, either of the Arguments by which he endeavours to subvert our Religion, or establish his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they must unavoidably rely either on his or our Authority, for the Truth of those Suggestions on which their Conclusion depends; and we presume our Word may go as far as his. But perhaps he intends only the Satisfaction of Persons of Learning and Study, and the * Information of those in publick Authority, when they make Laws for regulating Society. But by all these Persons, the Question he proposes has been fully consider'd, and concluded long before he was born: They are perfectly satisfy'd*

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in the Truth of their Religion, and their Duty and Interest to protect it from all Insults; and upon mature Deliberation have made Laws for its Establishment, and Defence against all Schemes that wou'd subvert it. And will he refuse them that Liberty, he pretends to assert to all Men, and not suffer them to act according to their Conscience and Conviction? Or is it impossible for them only of all Mankind to have either Conscience or Conviction?

*Well, but " in his present Capacity, he offers his Proposal * only by way of Persuasion: He wou'd not for the World † single out and make Examples of any who differ from him. And really his is a most admirable Project, || the true and only Scheme by which the World ought to be regulated: And O how happy it wou'd make us if we wou'd but come into it!" But since he is only upon Terms of Persuasion, we hope we may refuse his Scheme, if we do not like it. We presume we have a much better of our own, whose*

* Pag. 415. † Pag. 398. || Pag. 413.

The P R E F A C E. lvii

good Effects we have long approved ; and as for his, we must be plain to tell him, we have been undone by it once already, which we think enough for Experiment, and desire to be excused from a second Trial. We can apprehend no use it can be apply'd to, but Subversion : And if he knows any People who want to be thrown into Confusion, and destroy'd, he may recommend it as a most effectual Prescription for their Purpose. For Root and Branch Work, there is no Engine like it. Let it be but loose in its full Activity, and it will level all before it, and demolish every Society, civil or religious, in the World.

*Nay, but we wrong him ; for he expressly allows a civil Magistrate, tho' under this Restraint, that * nothing be enforced by civil Sanctions but only the Law of Nature. But I am afraid some Free-thinker or other will assert this to be a Personal Matter too, and then the Magistrate will have nothing to do with*

* Pag. 414.

Iviii The P R E F A C E.

it. I suppose this Law of Nature is the Law of Reason; and if we take Revelation out of the Hypothesis, as I presume this Gentleman will give us Leave to do, the Convictions of Conscience will be nothing else but practical Conclusions of Reason: And if the Convictions of Conscience are a personal Matter, the Conclusions of Reason will be so too; and the same Arguments which exclude the Magistrate from meddling with one, will equally exclude him from the other; and so, for ought I see, he will have nothing at all to do. Might not any one inclined to carry on the Scheme of universal Liberty, ask this Gentleman what Authority any other Man had to prescribe his Conclusions to him, and who gave him that Authority? Might he not observe, that his own Reason was his only Rule and Guide, and the Conclusions of it his Law of Nature? That he was no farther under any other Man's Direction, than he cou'd be prevail'd on by Argument and Persuasion, and then he himself was the sole and ultimate Judge of his own Conviction; and as he did not prescribe his Law of Nature to other People, he saw

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no Reason why they shou'd prescribe their Law of Nature to him? But we will take his Scheme of Government in the Terms given, without putting him to the Difficulty of assigning an Original for it, consistent with his Principles. The Magistrate, it seems, must be confined to prescribe or enforce nothing but the Law of Nature; beyond this he must have no Authority, and consequently can lay no Obligation. But who must be Judge of this Law of Nature to be enacted? If whatever the Magistrate shall think or pronounce the Law of Nature, is to be enacted and acknowledged as such, we had e'en as good leave him to his own Discretion without this Restraint. If the Subjects are to be the Judges in this Case, then whenever any one thinks, or (which to human Inspection is the same) pretends to think the Rule enforced not to be a Law of Nature, he is discharg'd from all Obligation; and, in my Apprehension, might as well be left without any Magistrate. It may be, this Gentleman will point out precisely the Law of Nature to be enforced. But is he sure every Body else
will

Ix The P R E F A C E.

will approve his System? Suppose the Magistrate himself shou'd differ from him, in judging of some Law of Nature; must He lay aside his Authority, and go to disputing with him, and not presume to act according to his own Convictions, till He can prevail for his Approbation? But when He has satisfy'd him, the same Trouble will arise to him from others, who have as good Pretensions to direct, and hold the Hand of the Magistrate from enforcing any thing, as he has. If nothing is to be enforced, till every one approves it, I doubt nothing will be enforced at all, but every Man must be left to do what is right in his own Eyes. This indeed wou'd be universal Liberty, but the Magistrate will be apt to call it Licentiousness, and think the Authority given him in Words to be in Reality nothing at all; and may justly resent the Affront offer'd him by these Projecters, who, in their Schemes of Liberty, suppose every Man fit to be left to his own Conclusions and Conduct, except those in publick Authority, and those who defend it, who are generally represented
in

The PREFACE. lxi

in every Argument either as Knaves or Fools.

In short, in all this Gentleman has offer'd in Defence or Recommendation of his Proposal, his Invectives against Authority, and his Declamations on the mighty Blessings he has prepared for us, He has only staged over the common Track of Projecters, and said nothing but what has been long since consider'd and answer'd, to the Satisfaction of all reasonable Men. And if any of the † ingenious Persons, in whose Words he takes upon to rebuke the Bishop, have either, to make room for some Project of their own, or in favour to some other Man's, gone too far into the disbanding Scheme, and making Religion a personal Matter, I hope they will review their Notions of Liberty, and stop short of his Latitude; which is manifestly subversive of all Order and Polity, and can no more consist with civil, than with religious, Society. All the Liberty that can consist

† P. 392.

with

with Government or Society, I would assert as earnestly as they can do; but at the same time, I think it equally my Duty, to contend for such Authority as is necessary to it. The Liberty of private Judgment in Religion, I acknowledge to be an inherent Right of every Man, and confirm'd to every Christian by the Gospel; neither do I persuade any Man to be more resign'd to Authority, than the Nature of the Question before him, his own Capacities, and the Ends of Society require. As Christianity is by its Institution a social Religion, the Liberty of each Individual must be under such Restraints, as the Nature and End of such a Society necessarily demand. Strictly speaking indeed, the Liberty of private Judgment or Opinion, cannot be taken away, or restrain'd; but an unbounded Liberty of publishing that Judgment, can be challeng'd from no Claim of Nature, no Rule of the Gospel; nor reconciled to the Order, or even the Being of a Society, founded upon a certain System of Doctrines and Rules, as the Christian Church is. If any one is re-
quired

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*quired by proper Authority, to profess his Belief or Opinion on any Article, He is certainly bound as an honest Man to make such Profession, according to his own Sentiments and Convictions whatever they are, and ought to be allowed to do it with Impunity. But without some Call of this Nature, there appears no general Obligation either of Reason or Religion, which requires a Man to publish his Sentiments, and set up for a Teacher and Converter of others to them; especially in Opposition to publick Establishments. In Christian Religion the Apostle's Rule is, † Hast thou Faith? have it to thyself; and if any Man will be obtruding his Singularities, and thereby * making Divisions among us, we are under his Direction * to mark such Person and avoid him; and, consequently, the Church or Christian Society may declare him to be avoided. And as to the Magistrate, He certainly owes Justice and Protection to all his Subjects; neither do we desire he should*

† Rom. xiv. 22. * Rom. xvi. 17.

afflict

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*afflict or punish any for his mere Opinion, or the Persuasions of his Conscience. But Marks of Favour and Encouragement, he cannot be deny'd the common Privilege of bestowing as he pleases, and may surely be allow'd to give them to that Religion, which his own Convictions and the deliberate Conclusions of publick Wisdom have approved. And this Encouragement and Protection may be assured to it, under the same legal Tenure and Claim, that any other Right derived from publick Favour may. If a Jew, a Turk, or Heretick will be content with the quiet Enjoyment of his own Conscience, let it be indulged him; neither wou'd we have him * beaten into the Gospel, or the Church. But if he will openly affront and oppose the Establish'd Religion; if he will publish Schemes and Projects, for the Subversion of the Church and the Gospel, he appears under another Character; and may be consider'd as the Aggressor, an Invader of settled Rights, a Distur-*

* Pag. 398.

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ber of publick Peace ; and if he may not be beaten for it, yet surely holding his Hand, and restraining him from such turbulent Attempts, is not persecuting him, but protecting those to whom Protection is due.

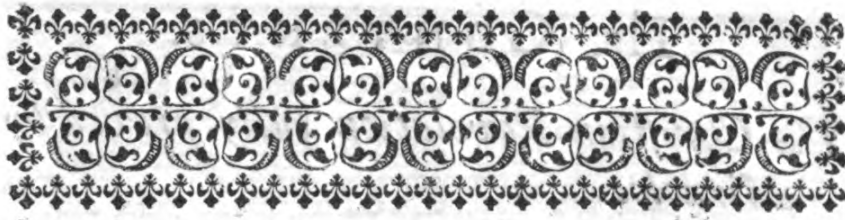


E R R A T A.

PAge 114. l. 5. for *supposed*, read *supported*. p. 146.
l. 1. for *suc*, r. *such*. p. 64. l. 6. after *Improvements*, add *of*.

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THE



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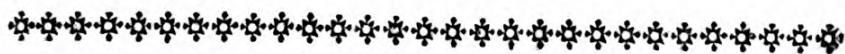
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SERMON



S E R M O N I.



H E B. I. I, 2.

*G O D, who at sundry times, and
in divers manners, spake in time
past unto the Fathers by the
Prophets,*

*Hath, in these last Days, spoken
unto us by his Son.*



AS a proper Introduction to dis-
pose Men to receive the Gospel
he preach'd, the Apostle ob-
serves, that God had in all
Ages communicated his Will to Man-
kind by special Revelations. This from
the Beginning was God's Method of
publishing his Laws: And even in the

B

Hea-

2 *Revelation necessary*

Heathen World we may trace out many traditionary Remains of those Institutions, which He deliver'd to the Patriarchs of Mankind. But the Family to whom this Epistle is especially address'd, which Providence had chosen, for the Appearance of that Person by whom the last Declaration of his Will shou'd be made, He was careful to keep in a constant Dependence on his Authority, by a continued Series of Revelations.

IN the Fulness of Time the Son of his Love, that *Sun of Righteousness* which had been promis'd, appear'd; *a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of his People Israel* *. That the Pride and Prejudices of a World, overrun with Darknes and Superstition, shou'd at first scruple his Authority; That a Doctrine new and untried, opposite to the establish'd Errors and Vices of Mankind, shou'd prevail but slowly, and meet with Difficulties and Contradiction, is no more than might be expected. But when the Gospel has

* Luke ii. 32.

been

to fix a Rule of Morality. 3

been long receiv'd, the Excellency of its Rules approved by publick Wisdom and civil Establishments, in all the more polite Nations of the World, and rejected only where Ignorance and Barbarism prevail, we might reasonably hope, that so much Experience and Authority shou'd secure it from any farther Insults ; that every Tongue shou'd be silenced, and every Hand restrain'd, from opposing a Religion so wise in its Directions, so powerful in its Influences, so manifestly conducive to the Happiness of Mankind. But, in Defiance of our Laws, and in Affront to general Profession, this harmless and most beneficial Institution has found Enemies among us, who with open Zeal and Assiduity labour its Discredit and Subversion. And what wou'd they substitute in the Room of it ? Can they expect we shou'd give up a Religion, whose happy Influences have long engaged our Reverence and Esteem, for we know not what ? Nothing is offer'd : but the Christian, and all other Revelations are represented as equally Fables and Impostures. A God they are

4 *Revelation necessary*

contented to acknowledge ; but persuade us He has left Mankind every one to his own Government, without any other Guide or Rule than the Collections of natural Reason ; and this is all the Provision that is made, for our Direction to Duty and Happiness.

IN Opposition to this Libertine Scheme, I shall endeavour to prove the Necessity of admitting some divine Revelation. The Apostle, in the Scripture before us, asserts the Fact, that there has been such an One derived down thro' all Ages, and at last sealed up, and perfected in the Gospel of J E S U S C H R I S T. And if we can evince the Necessity of admitting some divine Revelation, his general Assertion will stand clear of all Difficulty ; and the Christian Revelation in particular, which he offers to us, may hope for an attentive and impartial Consideration. I shall attempt this,

It. By shewing, that nothing but the Credit and Authority of divine Revelation cou'd establish an uniform Rule of Moral Virtue among Mankind.

THAT

THAT there is a God I am at Liberty to suppose, as an acknowledg'd Principle: And the Attributes of Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, and Providence imply'd in that Idea, oblige us to conclude, that He is concern'd for the Happiness of his Creatures, and has made a suitable Provision for it. And 'tis a Corollary arising hence, that the Happiness and Perfection of every Creature, must consist in acting according to the Will and Intention of the Creator. His Will is the proper Law of every Nature throughout his Dominion; and, to a free and intelligent Agent, this Will must be publish'd, be open to his Notice, lye before him as his Rule, and be recommended by suitable Motives to his Observance.

Now 'tis evident, that both the publick and private Happiness of Mankind depend on their Conduct towards one another; in other Words, on a mutual Practice of moral Virtue. We must, therefore, conclude, that 'tis the Will of God, that these Virtues shou'd obtain

6 *Revelation necessary*

in general Observance ; and consequently they must be proposed to the general Notice of Men, and be enforced by Motives sufficient to induce their Practice. That a divine Revelation is both the fullest and most compendious Provision to direct Men to the Knowledge of their Rule, and the most effectual to engage and unite them in the Observance of it, is apparent. Such, we bless God, we enjoy in the Gospel ; and therefore are very unwilling to part with it. But 'tis pretended, that God never made any such Revelation ; but left all Mankind to collect the Rule and Motives of their Actions, from the sole Use of those Faculties He gave them, without any prior Direction. Let us see, then, what a Rule of Morality is like to obtain upon this Hypothesis.

Now, I presume, the Gentlemen of this Scheme will admit human Reason to have been always the same it is now ; subject to those Weaknesses and Imperfections we feel in ourselves, and observe in others : For that it was ever
in

to fix a Rule of Morality. 7

in a State of greater Perfection, we learn only from Revelation. And, under this Concession, we think it may be prov'd, that natural Reason cou'd not be such a Direction to moral Virtue ; and, consequently, such a Provision for the Happiness of Mankind, as the Wisdom and Goodness of God oblige us to believe, He design'd us.

FOR, admitting that some thoughtful Persons, of great Attention and Improvements, might collect as exact and useful a System of moral Duties as can be imagin'd ; yet unless we can find an Expedient, to give their Conclusions the Authority of a general Rule, we have provided only for the Direction of these few ; while the rest of the World, who have neither Leisure nor Abilities for these Researches, are left to wander in the dark, without any Guide or Measure of Duty. And when we consider the Weakness and Confusion of vulgar Capacities, how unequal they are to abstract Inquiries, how irresistably the various Lusts and Passions of Men will inter-

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8 *Revelation necessary*

pose, darken the little Light they have, and corrupt their Judgment, and persuade each to accommodate his Rule to their Suggestions, what can we expect in the Result of this Scheme, but an utter Confusion of all Morality? And since the Felicity of Men in this Life depends, not only on each Person's own Conduct, but on that of other Men too, even the few wise themselves wou'd find their Happiness but ill secured upon this Hypothesis, and the general Event must be all the Misery, that Folly and Passion, let loose upon the World, wou'd naturally produce.

IF, indeed, the weak, the ignorant, and the passionate wou'd submit to the wise and thoughtful, we might hope for some Remedy to these Confusions: But what Provision is made for this? The State of Nature, contended for, supposes all Men equal and independent. None has any Right to over-rule the Sentiments and Persuasions of another; but every Man is to think for himself, form his own Rule of Action, and judge of his
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to fix a Rule of Morality. 9

own Interests. If it be said, that the Equity and Usefulness of Virtue, and the Inconveniences of Vice, must appear to the meanest Understanding, when proposed to his Consideration ; and, therefore, tho' inferior Capacities might be unable to collect, and digest such Prescriptions into an uniform Rule of Practice, yet they wou'd presently receive them, when offer'd by Persons of greater Sagacity. We may answer to this, That Men are not so ready to submit their own Understanding to other Mens, as this Expedient supposes. The weakest are often more opinionated of their Parts, and more tenacious of their Conclusions, than the best Capacities. We have known the greatest Absurdities in Morality asserted, even the Distinctions of Good and Evil reversed, and *Private Vices defended as Publick Benefits*, by Persons, who have, at the same Time, thought themselves distinguish'd from the rest of the World, by the Accuracy of their Reasoning, and the Depth of their Penetration.

10 *Revelation necessary*

IF Men had no Passions, or no Satisfaction in gratifying them, the Reason of the Wise might hope for some Attention and Authority. But the Fact is quite otherwise; Men are led by strong Appetites to vicious Pleasures and Interests, which obscure the Evidence, and overrule the Convictions of Truth. Even the Wise themselves are not secure from their Delusion, and how much more must they prevail among the Weak and Thoughtless? And if even the Arguments and Authority of Religion, are found often too weak to restrain the Torrent of Mens Passions, how irresistably wou'd they bear down the mere Persuasions of Philosophy? Let us imagine a Philosopher addressing a Libertine in this supposed State of Nature, persuading him to leave his Vices, and confine himself within the Rules he wou'd prescribe to him. Might he not answer his Adviser, — I am no more under your Direction, than you are under mine? In some things, as a Man of more Inquiry, I may permit you to see for me; but you must not pretend to feel for me too. I feel my self happy in the way of Life I
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to fix a Rule of Morality II

have chosen, and must be render'd very uneasy by the Restraints you advise. Do you pursue your own Satisfaction by what Methods you please, and leave me to the same Liberty in consulting mine. I see not what effectual Reply he cou'd make to him upon the Hypothesis contended for, or by what Argument of Duty or Interest he cou'd hope to prevail on his Compliance.

I do not say, that Justice, Temperance, and other moral Virtues may not be proved to sober and dispassionate Reason, the proper Interest and Duty of Man: They certainly are so; and when view'd with a clear and impartial Eye, and in a proper Light, must appear to be so. But this I say, that 'tis vain to expect that the generality of Men will ever be govern'd by sober and dispassionate Reason; and therefore a Scheme, whose Success depends upon so groundless a Supposition, must be given up as chimerical. If every Man were left, as is here supposed, to collect his own Rule of Action, without the Awe or Direction of any Authority, Lust wou'd be
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12 *Revelation necessary*

one Man's Reason, Avarice another's; every one's governing Passion wou'd be his Reason. These are the Reasons to whose Conduct Mankind must be left, when we take away the Light and Authority of Revelation. And, if we wou'd argue justly upon the State of the Case before us, we must consider, what sort of Morality such Reasons as these wou'd produce.

MR. *Hobbs*, who thought somewhat deeper than these Gentlemen, perceived this great Difficulty in the Infidel Scheme. He saw plainly, that 'twas necessary to social Happiness, that Men shou'd be under some common Rule, some general Obligation to the Practice of those Virtues which promote it. And that ignorant, wilful, and passionate Men, (of which Characters the bulk of Mankind will always be composed) left every one to his own Conclusions, would never be led by their own Reason, or be persuaded by other Mens to agree in such a common Rule. That such a Rule cou'd never be establish'd, but by a general Submission to
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to fix a Rule of Morality. 13

some Authority prescribing it; and therefore, tho' he was as little a friend to Revelation as these Gentlemen, yet convinc'd of the Necessity of some Equivalent for its Authority, he substituted Civil Power in the Place of it, and made the Prescriptions of the Magistrate his Standard of Morality. This Expedient will come under Consideration; but at present I only observe, that from the reason of the Thing, confirm'd by the Concessions of this great Father of modern Infidelity, it appears, that no System of Morality cou'd ever obtain as a general Rule, but by the Prescription of such an Authority, as all Men wou'd be dispos'd to submit to. Such an Authority Divine Revelation unquestionably carries with it, the Authority of God, whom every Man, as a Creature, must confess himself bound to obey; whose Laws must be consider'd as the Directions of infinite Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness; and whose Threats and Promises as the immutable Declarations of Omnipotence and Truth. Every Motive, that can dispose Man to Submission, is here apply'd in its utmost Force and Efficacy: Gratitude calls upon
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14 *Revelation necessary*

him, to reflect on his numberless Obligations to the Goodness of the Prescriber. Prudence will engage his Acquiescence in a Wisdom, which sees the Tendency of every Action, and knows his Interest better than he himself can do. Fear will remind him of his Justice and Power, and his Hopes will be animated with this firm Assurance, *That, faithfull is he who has promised, who will also perform* *.

CONSIDER human Reason then, as it is in Fact, modify'd by the various Disabilities, Passions, and Prejudices, which will ever prevail among the greater part of Mankind; consider every Man left in this wild disconcerted State without Rule or Guide, to search out Truth and Happiness by his own Collections; and what Distractions and Perplexities must they run into? What dissonant, interfering Schemes of Morality must be produced? How irreconcilable to each other, and how inconsistent with publick, and consequently with private Happiness? And

* Heb. x. 23.

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when you have this View before you, try if you can imagine any thing so desireable, so apposite to the wants of human Nature, as that God shou'd interpose; by an authoritative Declaration of his Will enlighten the Darkness, and compose the Dissentions of Men; and unite them under a Rule of Action, which the Character of the Author must recommend to universal Reverence and Submission. For what Man cou'd presume himself wiser than God, or dare to oppose the Persuasions of his Appetite, or the Imaginations of his Pride, to the Conclusions of infallible Wisdom? Who cou'd distrust his Goodness or Veracity, or venture to defy his Power? Even he who transgress'd such a Direction, must confess his own Folly; and still acknowledge the Law to be *holy, just, and good* *.

IN short, if the Social Happiness of Mankind depends on a general Practice of moral Virtue; if this can never obtain but by a general Acknowledgment of some

* Rom. vii. 12.

common Rule; if no Rule cou'd ever prevail for such a general Acknowledgment, but by the Prescription of some Authority to which all wou'd submit; and if the Authority of God only cou'd effectually engage such Submission, his Goodness will oblige us to conclude, that he wou'd notify his Will, and not suffer his Creatures to want so necessary a Provision for their Happiness.

BUT Mr. *Hobbs* thinks, he has given us an Equivalent for Revelation, in the Authority of the Civil Magistrate; whose Will he proposes as the Measure of Good and Evil. But there occurs at first View a fundamental Difficulty in this Scheme: How shall this Authority, which is to fix the Rules of Morality in the World, be establish'd it self? In that imaginary State of Nature, on which this Hypothesis as well as the former is built, every Man is supposed equal and independent. How then are they to be brought into Order and Subjection? Why, they are all to be set to War with one another, and fight on, till they can harrass themselves into
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Subordination: And when the Stronger have subdued the Weaker, the arbitrary Impositions of their Will are to be receiv'd as the ultimate Rule of Action. This it seems is the Original of Government; and the Dictates of a Power thus founded in Violence, Fraud, and Oppression, are to be revered as the Standard of Right and Wrong, Vice and Virtue; and this Standard too must alter, as often as the Prince changes his Sentiments or Humour, and can last no longer, than till a superior Force supplants him, or his Subjects themselves shall have Courage and Strength enough to break his Yoke; which they have the same Right to shake off as he had to put on: And whenever they have Power, are under no Restraints of Conscience, Duty, or Interest from attempting it.

BUT suppose this Government settled in a quiet Submission, and its Administrations as regular as can be expected in the ordinary Course of things: No doubt it will be attended with great Advantages, be infinitely preferable to

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18 *Revelation necessary*

that wild State of Anarchy before supposed; and, for its own Preservation, will establish many useful Rules of social Life. But when its Commands are proposed as the final Measure of moral Virtue, and the only Obligation to the Practice of it, it will be found but a poor Equivalent for a Divine Revelation. And the Disparity will appear, if we consider either its Direction, or its Influence. The Direction of human Laws cannot possibly be so particular, as to descend to all Actions of a moral Nature. There are numberless Acts of Justice, Charity, and other Virtues of great Importance to the mutual Happiness of Men in Society, whose Obligation depends on variable Circumstances, which the wisest Constitution cannot ascertain, and which therefore must be left to private Conscience: And consequently, no Authority can engage the Acknowledgment and Practice of these Duties, but such as can reach the Conscience under general Prescriptions. Now a Divine Command, tho' deliver'd in the most general Terms, yet being address'd to every
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Man's Conscience, will extend its Influence and Application to every Occasion of Action. But human Laws are confined in their Subject to specifick Actions, and imply no more than they express. If therefore human Laws are the ultimate Rule and Standard of moral Good and Evil; if nothing be good but what they direct, and nothing Evil but what they forbid, Men are left in these Cases without any Rule, without any Motive or Obligation to these Duties, or any Restraint from acting contrary to them.

AND when we come within the compass of Civil Authority, and the Cases to which its Prescriptions can reach, and consider the Force and Efficacy of them, they will, in this respect, bear no Comparison with a Divine Command. For,

1st. To a Divine Command the Character of the Author prepares Men to submit, with a full Assurance of its Wisdom and Justice: But Princes, they know, are not exempt from Weakness and Passions,

sions, which will unavoidably mix with their Counsels, and corrupt their Judgment, as they do other Mens: And tho' human Authority may restrain the Liberty of Action, yet it cannot take away the Liberty of Judgment; and after all Mr. *Hobbs* can say, where there is so little Security of the Abilities or Equity of the Prescriber, Men will examine the Tendency of the Prescription, and comply but heavily where they can perceive no other Goodness in it, but what the mere Pleasure of such an Authority can give it. That Confidence in the Wisdom and Rectitude of the Law will be wanting, which alone can engage a chearful and hearty Obedience; and nothing will remain to influence Practice, but an Expectation of the Imposer's Favour, or an Apprehension of his Resentment.

As to the Favour of the Prince, supposing it always conducted by the exactest Wisdom and Justice, and never to be guided by Humour or Passion; yet this is a Motive of a very narrow Influence. Few can fall under his Notice,
much

to fix a Rule of Morality 21

much fewer can hope for any distinguish'd Encouragement: And the most punctual Obedience of the far greater Number can expect no other Reward, than barely an Exemption from Punishment. And as to the Fear of his Resentment, this Restraint has no longer any Force, where Men can presume themselves cunning enough to elude the Notice of human Justice, or rich enough to bribe, or strong enough to defy the Execution of it. Human Authority is here at the end of its Line; its Provisions can go no farther: And if there be no superior Law, no higher Tribunal to whose Cognisance and Justice Men are accountable, the crafty and the powerful, who can do most Mischief, and most want Restraint, are left under none at all. So imperfectly are the moral Ends of Government, and the Rights and Interest both of Prince and People secured by human Authority, when 'tis left without the Support of Divine; which alone can supply the manifold Defects of Civil Power, and give Efficacy to the Institution. When the Prince is supposed to

22 *Revelation necessary*

act himself under a superior Rule, dictated by infinite Wisdom and Justice, and an Almighty, Omnipresent Power, whom no Artifice can deceive, and no Strength resist, is acknowledg'd to enforce his Commands, this will derive Reverence on his Laws, and Authority on his Office. And agreeably all Lawgivers and Founders of Societies have endeavour'd to give the Character they assumed, and the Rules of Life they prescribed, the Support of Divine Authority. Either some Oracle was consulted, and pronounced in general the superior Wisdom of the Man, or approved his Prescriptions; or they were affirm'd to be dictated by some Dæmon. Some Evidence or other was call'd in, to attest a Divine Direction or Approbation; and whether this was real or only pretended, the Application equally proves, that no Principle was presumed sufficient to engage the Reverence and Submission of Men to any System of Rules, but a Persuasion that they came from Heaven, or were ratify'd by Divine Authority.

UPON

UPON the whole; we have consider'd the Expedients which have undertaken to supply Mankind with a Rule of Morality, equal to the Purposes of social Life, without having Recourse to divine Revelation. It is evident, that no Rule cou'd answer this End, unless it cou'd obtain a general Acknowledgment: And I think it as evident, that Mankind, left every one to his own Collections, in a State of absolute Independency, cou'd never agree in such a Rule, or be kept even a Day in an uniform Submission to it. Before this can appear possible, the Bulk of Mankind must be supposed to apprehend clearly, and reason justly, without Prejudice, Passion, or Partiality; a Supposition manifestly contrary to Fact, and fit only for *Utopia*.

AND as to Mr. *Hobbs's* Expedient, we confess the Excellency and Usefulness of Civil Government; but we think the libertine Principles, from which he derives it, leave it precarious in its Foundation, and even disqualify it for promoting ei-

24 *Revelation necessary*

ther the Virtue or Happiness of Mankind. And when we consider Civil Power, with all the Advantages and Perfection that any Supposition can give it, yet still it wants a prior Rule for its own Direction, and requires the Acknowledgment of a superior Power, to procure Firmness to its Establishment, and Reverence and Efficacy to its Commands.

IN short ; under the former Hypothesis, Mankind are left open to all the Distraction that Lust and Folly, all the wild Appetites of corrupt Nature let loose without Restraint, must necessarily produce. The latter only changes the Source of our Misery ; and, to rescue us from the Passions of a confused Multitude, delivers us up, in the most implicit Bondage, to the arbitrary Will of one Tyrant, undirected by any Rule, unawed by any Authority, and distinguish'd from the rest of the Herd by nothing else but a successful Oppression. Cou'd we conceive the World without a God, something like this might be supposed

to fix a Rule of Morality. 25

posed the Condition of Man in it ; but Reason can never admit such an Image as this, of a World made and govern'd by infinite Wisdom and Goodness : * *A God of Order, and not of Confusion.* And yet, for these Absurdities we are persuaded to exchange our holy Faith. These are the Schemes which pretend to assert the Liberties of Mankind, and rescue them from the Yoke and Terrors of Superstition. This is the blessed State into which we are invited, and which is immediately to commence, as soon as we can be prevail'd on to depart from Revelation. But surely, if this be the best Prospect that human Reason can give us, after so much Study and Refinement, without calling in a superior Assistance, we need no other Argument for the Necessity of such Assistance.

WHAT a different Face of Things appears to us under the Hypothesis of Revelation ? How effectually is every Dis-

* 2 Cor. 14. 33.

26 *Revelation necessary*

order calm'd, Ignorance and Folly enlighten'd, and every Passion brought into Subjection, by the Authority of infinite Wisdom, Justice, and Power? What Reverence and Efficacy attend Civil Government, when 'tis consider'd as the *Ordinance of God* *, directed by the Prescriptions of his Wisdom, and supported by his Authority? So far as the Conduct of a voluntary Agent can be influenced by the most venerable Direction, and the most powerful Motives of Action, we have here the utmost Provision that can be made, or even conceived, for the Order, Virtue, and Happiness of Mankind.

LET us, therefore, bless God, who has call'd us to the Knowledge of his Will by a pure and holy Revelation, derived down to us thro' a long Succession of Ages, and at last compleated, in its full Light and Perfection, by the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*. A Rule worthy the Wisdom of the Author, fitted for the Direction of every Relation, Office, or

* Rom. 13. 2.

to fix a Rule of Morality. 27

Condition of Life, and equally conducive to the Happiness of all. The Prince is here taught how to govern, and the Subject how to obey. The Rich and the Powerful are prescribed those Virtues, which will procure them Honour and Esteem ; and the Poor such Returns of Gratitude, as will secure to them Favour, Support, and Protection. The Insolence of the one, and the Envy of the other, every provoking and disquieting Passion are put under Discipline and Restraint : And the various Ranks and Orders of Men are enjoin'd such a mutual Exchange of Services, as will endear them to each other, and spread Chearfulness and Pleasure thro' human Society. And to the whole System of these beneficial Duties we are engaged, by all the Motives that can be offer'd to the Reason, or influence the Hopes or Fears of an intelligent Nature. * *Happy are the People that are in such a Case, yea, blessed are the People who have the*

* Psalm 144. 15.

Lord

28 *Revelation necessary, &c.*

Lord for their God! Let vain and insolent Sinners reproach us, if they please, with Slavery and Superstition; but let us glory in Subjection to the Will of God, whose Service is perfect Freedom, whose Fear is Peace and Liberty.



SERMON



S E R M O N II.



H E B. I. 1, 2.

*G O D, who at sundry times, and
in divers manners, spake in time
past unto the Fathers by the
Prophets,*

*Hath, in these last Days, spoken
unto us by his Son.*



WE have consider'd the Necessity of divine Authority, to fix such a Rule of Moral Virtue, and unite Men in such a Submission to it, as the private and social Happiness of Mankind requires. It
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30 *Revelation necessary*

appears, how imperfectly these Ends cou'd be provided for, either by the Reason of an independent Multitude, left every one to his own Collections, or by the Prescriptions of Civil Authority, if we exclude divine Revelation. And it cannot but confirm our Adherence to our holy Faith, and that excellent Rule of Life and Action it proposes to us, to observe for what a Scene of Misery and Confusion we are persuaded to exchange it. But before the Gentlemen, who are so importunate with us to part with Christianity, can expect our Compliance, they are concern'd also to answer us another Question, — What Religion are we to have in the Place of it ?

FOR if, as they permit us to believe, there is a God, the Creator and Governour of the World, concern'd for the Happiness of his Creatures, every intelligent Nature in the Creation, must be under a Sense of Duty and Gratitude to this Being. He must reflect, how much he depends on his Providence, how much he owes to his Goodness

ness, and be convinced, that all the Homage and Subjection he is able to express, is due to his infinite Majesty. He will perceive his Happiness to depend on the Favour or Displeasure of this Almighty Power; who rules over all, and disposes every Event of Life. These are Sentiments, which no Degrees of Barbarism have been able wholly to efface out of the Minds of Men; and which have led all Ages and Nations of the World into some kind of Worship of the Deity, some Applications to incline his Favour, and avert or reconcile his Anger: So that we may look upon Religion as a Natural and Universal Principle, as distinctive of our Species as Reason it self.

AND when we consider Men as social Creatures, united in Communities, and having a joynt interest to engage the Publick Blessings and Protection of God to them; no Conclusion can appear more obvious and natural, than that publick and joynt Applications to the Deity, are as proper to acknowledge,
or

32 *Revelation necessary*

or procure these publick Blessings, as the Addressees of each Individual are with respect to his personal Wants. To which we may add, that the Fear of God being, in its Nature, the only Principle that can effectually restrain Men from Frauds and Injuries, and engage them to Justice and Veracity in their Dealings, 'tis reasonable in it self, and necessary to that mutual Trust and Confidence which the Ends of Society require, that Men shou'd give one another some Security that they act under the Influence of this Principle. And what Security can they give, but appearing publickly to worship God? He who does this, declares that he owns and fears a God: But he who worships none, may justly be presumed to acknowledge none; and consequently, not to be restrain'd from any Wickedness by the Awe of a Supreme Being.

WHILE we own a God then, we cannot be satisfy'd without some Religion; and the Ends of Society require some publick Worship of the Deity; and what
Religion

Religion have these Gentlemen provided for us instead of the Christian? I suppose they will tell us Natural Religion. But what Acts of Worship shall this Religion consist of? By what Observances shall we propitiate the Deity, reconcile his Anger, and engage his Favour and Assistance to us? As to social Worship, this, in the Nature of it, requires an Agreement in some publick outward Observances; for 'tis not imaginable, how Men can any other Way be united in a common Action. What Provision then is made for this Agreement? Who shall appoint the Rule? And by what Arguments, or Authority, shall the various Sentiments and Capacities of Men be reconciled in a Submission to it? Every Man, upon the Principles here supposed, is left to collect a Religion from his own Reason independently on any other Man's. And what Harmony can we expect in the Result of this Scheme? In these general Conclusions, that there is a God, and that he is to be worshipp'd, every Man's Reason may be supposed to

34 *Revelation necessary*

concurr; but before Men can be united in social Worship, they must agree in the Acts and Observances it must consist of; and here the Distraction will begin. For Reason in general directing nothing of this kind, with any Certainty of the Divine Approbation, the Conclusions of the best Understanding will be but his Opinion; and every ones Opinion will be of equal Authority; the Consequence of which must be as many Plans of Religion as there are Men. If (as has been before observ'd) the Conclusions of the Wise cou'd never hope to over-rule the Folly and Obstinacy of an equal independent Multitude, and obtain the Authority of a general Rule even in moral Conclusions, which are in their Nature within the Compass and Proof of human Reason; much less cou'd they prevail for this Authority, in a Question where they cou'd offer nothing but mere Guess and Opinion. If in such a State of Independency, nothing but the Authority of a Divine Revelation cou'd engage a general Acquiescence of Men in any System of moral Duties, a Subject
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in which 'tis possible for Natural Reason, with such Improvements and Attention as 'tis capable of, to discover the Will of God; much more must such a Revelation be necessary, to give Assurance and Reception to a Scheme of Divine Worship; a Subject in which Reason confesses its Ignorance, and cannot with any Certainty affirm what is acceptable to God.

MR. *Hobbs's* Recourse, for the Solution of this Difficulty too, is to civil Authority, whose Prescriptions he makes the ultimate Rule of Religion, as well as Morality. What he has offer'd shall not be neglected: But at present I observe, that the Modern Enemies to Revelation, whom I am here opposing, can have no Advantage from his Scheme; because their Hypothesis equally excludes God and the Magistrate: And 'tis laid down as a first Principle among them, that no human Authority has any thing to do in Matters of Religion. We are required by them to consider Mankind in a State of absolute Independency as to this Point;

36 *Revelation necessary*

and I think it as evident, as the Negative in any moral Question can be, that, under the Suppositions of that State, no Religion, at least no social Religion, cou'd ever obtain, but by the Credit and Authority of Divine Revelation. And if we consider the Case of each Individual in this State, exclusive of any joynt or social Worship; What monstrous Absurdities must the Folly, Ignorance, and Superstition, which will ever prevail among the greater Part of Mankind, lead them into, when left to their own Collections, without Rule or Instructor?

WHEN we are inquiring what human Reason wou'd do, it may be worth the while to look back, and observe in Fact and Experience what it has done. I presume, the Gentlemen I am opposing will admit the World to be, at least, as old as we believe it: And is it not very strange, that the Religion which they suppose natural Reason to dictate, shou'd never obtain as a publick Worship of the Deity, in any one Nation, or Society

to ascertain a Religion. 37

ciety of Men thro' the whole World? Cou'd no Body, besides these sagacious Persons, ever light on this obvious Discovery? Or were Mankind so universally absurd and irrational, that none cou'd ever gather a Congregation, to joyn with him in a Worship, which every Man's Reason is supposed to direct? From this single Consideration we may justly conclude, that this Natural Religion to which we are invited, is but a dark impracticable Project, incapable of that rational Evidence and Satisfaction it pretends to give. And if, on the other Hand, it appears upon Inquiry, that Mankind have always referr'd themselves to Revelation, as the only Rule that cou'd direct, the only Authority that cou'd prescribe, an acceptable Worship of God; this is a fair Proof, that human Reason is conscious of its own Weakness and Insufficiency for this Inquiry, and can rest on nothing but Revelation. How was it then, that all the Superstitions and Schemes of Religion, which we have either known or heard of, obtain'd Credit and Reception

in the World? Did they not all pretend to derive from Heaven, and refer to some Revelation, some special Notice of a Divine Direction or Approbation, for their Original? We, who acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as such a Revelation, contend that God did specially appoint the manner of his Worship to the Patriarchs of Mankind. And we wou'd ask a Deist, what other rational Account he can give of the Way of Worship by Sacrifice, so early and so generally receiv'd thro' the World. What Suggestions of Reason cou'd lead so many distant Nations, without Affinity or Correspondence with each other, to agree in so improbable a Conclusion, as that the Favour of God should be inclined, his Anger appeas'd, and their Offences attoned, by shedding the Blood of his Creatures: An Action, in all the Views of Reason, rather like to provoke, than reconcile the Deity. What tolerable Account can be given of this notorious Fact, but that assign'd by us, — that this was originally a positive Injunction of God, derived
down

down by Tradition to the several Families of Mankind, and carried with them into the several Places of their Dispersion? And I cannot but observe by the Way, what Confirmation the Christian Religion receives, from the clear and consistent Account it gives us of this Institution. When we consider Sacrifices in the Views arising to us from that System of Theology, as prefiguring the final Sacrifice of Christ, *that Lamb who was slain from the Foundation of the World,* * the Relation and Significancy of the Rite are apparent. Nothing cou'd be better devised, or more apt to continue down such an Expectation among Mankind. We may reasonably believe, that, when this Rite was appointed, the Intention of it was, in some Measure, explained; and the Faith of Men directed to the Hope it was design'd to preserve. But 'tis easy to conceive how all this might be lost, and yet the Rite it self retained. A Doctrine, deliver'd in the Prophetick

Rev. xiii. 8

Obscurity, and taught only by oral Tradition, might easily be lost or mistaken; but 'twas scarce possible, Men shou'd forget an outward visible Act, performed by their Fathers as a Propitiation of the Deity. This was portable, and travel'd with them wherever they went: And all the succeeding Superstitions they received, prevail'd only for a new Application of this Rite, with regard to the Object of Worship, or the Addition of some others to it. But I must observe further, that none of these accessional Superstitions obtain'd in the World, but upon the Credit of a particular Revelation from Heaven. Some Signification or other of the Divine Will was presumed, in Obedience to which they were admitted into Religion; and generally the same Histories that report the Observances, tell us also the pretended Revelations which authorized them. This Argument, and this only, was able to engage the Faith and Submission of Mankind. It was obvious enough to conclude, that God might annex his Favours to what Observances He pleas'd;

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But Reason cou'd not discover his Pleasure, or by any Conclusions of its own assure these Effects to one Scheme of Religion in preference to another. It might indeed have refused whatever appear'd inconsistent with the Attributes of the Divine Nature. Thus far it might argue in the Negative: but, as to any positive Direction, it stood silent and suspended, listening after some Voice from Heaven; and was, in this Disposition, prepared to admit any Superstitions, which the Craft and Subtilty of the Devil or Man impos'd under that Character. The best Understanding was here in the Dark, and cou'd affirm nothing positively from its own Light: But as to the thoughtless Vulgar, who have neither Leisure nor Capacity for accurate Examinations, they acted, as it must always be expected they will do, and resign'd themselves implicitly to the Appearance of Revelation.

As the universal Conduct of Mankind is an Argument, that human Nature cannot rest satisfy'd in any Scheme
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42 *Revelation necessary*

of Religion, but what it presumes has the Authority of a Divine Prescription; so the many Absurdities and Impieties, which were admitted under that Character into the Heathen Worship, are a good Proof how unable human Reason is to judge for its self in this Inquiry; how necessary for Men, and how agreeable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God it is, that He should direct them by a real Revelation.

IF this Natural Religion we hear so much of, imply'd any determinate Worship; if human Reason had such clear and positive Views in this Matter, as those who recommend it for our ultimate Rule wou'd persuade us to believe; it is not imaginable how those ridiculous, and, which are worse, those impure and immoral Rites which polluted the Heathen Worship, cou'd have found so wide a Reception. 'Tis true, indeed, these were not proposed as the Conclusions of Reason, but as the Prescriptions of pretended Revelations; But they were the Contrivances of their Reason
who

who imposed these pretended Revelations. And as they were concern'd, upon political Accounts, to assure the Success of the Imposture, they wou'd certainly leave it as little expos'd to Objection as might be; and adapt it, as well as they cou'd, to the Taste and Sentiments of those to whom they offer'd it: And accordingly they did accommodate it to the Reason of those to whom they propos'd it; a Reason darkned by Ignorance, and corrupted by Passion. To the Approbation of such a Reason as this, the Pretense of a New Revelation found it self even recommended, by offering an Indulgence to the Lust, the Cruelty, or Revenge of Men. Hence it was, that the most abominable Pollutions of Sensuality, the Sacrificing captive Enemies, and other Impieties were received into the Pagan Rituals, as Acts of Religion, and Propitiations of the Deity. So unable is Man, without the special Direction of God, to fix the proper Rule of his Actions, either in Religion or Morality.

44 *Revelation necessary*

IF it be said, that the Offence which these Impieties must give to the Divine Nature, might have appear'd to any one who attended to the Consideration of them, and therefore these Instances do not prove the Incapacity of Reason to judge of this Subject, but only an Abuse or Inattention of it; We may Answer, that the Question is not how human Reason might act in such Circumstances, but how it wou'd act. This is indeed the great Fallacy, that runs thro' almost all the Libertine Schemes, which of late have been offer'd us. In their Premisses they consider human Reason in its highest Perfection, and then argue as if every Man in the World wou'd always act according to this Reason. No doubt right Reason might have discern'd the Inconsistency of such Impurities with the Nature of Divine Worship; but Mankind, consider'd in the gross, never were, nor ever will be govern'd by right Reason. And we are not inquiring, what Reason in its utmost Improvement might do; this is human Reason only in Theory; in Fact it is quite

quite another thing; lazy in its Search, confused in its Apprehension, and weak in its Deductions. Its Perceptions are blinded, and even its Convictions overborn, by various Lufts and Passions. This will ever be the Reason of a Multitude; and the Inquiry before us is what such a Reason as this, left to its self without any Superior Rule or Direction, wou'd produce or admit: And from what it actually has done in these Circumstances, we may fairly infer what it wou'd do again. Human Reason, as to its natural Powers, is just the same now, as it was two Thousand Years ago. If it argues better in Religion; if it rejects those absurd and detestable Modes of Worship it then revered and applauded, 'tis not because its Faculties are, in themselves, any clearer or stronger than they were; but because it has submitted its Weakness and Ignorance, its Pride and Passions to the Light and Authority of the Christian Revelation. Take away the Direction and Restraint of this Authority, it will act just as it did, and relapse into the same Extravagancies, the same Folly and
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and Superstition that prevail'd on it before.

SUPPOSE, then, these Gentlemens Principles shou'd universally be received (as no doubt they intend they shou'd be, by publishing them to the World) and that in consequence of them Christianity shou'd be abolish'd. It concerns us to reflect, what Face of things wou'd succeed in the Place of it. That State of Natural Religion, as they affect to call it, a Worship of the Deity dictated by sober and Dispassionate Reason, which they persuade us to expect, is a mere speculative Notion, which never was, nor ever can be, reduced into publick Practice. These Projecters will find it difficult to agree among themselves what Acts of Worship this Natural Religion shou'd consist of; but what can we imagine must be the general Event of this Scheme among Mankind, left every one to shift for himself, and devise his own Religion? Human Reason, indeed, under its common Disabilities, is pretty uniform: so far as these first and general Conclusions,

clusions, — That there is a God, and that He is to be worship'd; but as soon as we go beyond them, and carry the Inquiry into the Particulars of that Worship, (as we must do before it can be adapted for the Concurrence of any Number of Men in it) the best Capacities can but guess their Way, and the Bulk of Mankind must presently be lost in Darkness and Confusion. Imagine, then, the Suppositions of this Scheme effectually to take Place; Men to be universally persuaded to renounce all Revelation, and Divine Worship to be left a Blank, to be fill'd up as every Man pleas'd; What wou'd be the Result? Why, it seems a glorious State of Natural Religion. But is there any Provision made for publick Worship? None at all, it must be given up as impracticable. So that this State of Natural Religion must, in all Appearance, be a State of general Irreligion. But Experience assures us that the far greater Part of Mankind will have a Religion, and will not be satisfy'd without some Appearance of Revelation in support of it: And therefore the real Consequence of discarding

48 *Revelation necessary*

discarding the Christian Revelation, wou'd be a Succession of some other Pretence in the room of it: A Revival of some old, and a distracted dissonant Jargon of new Superstitions. These are the Blessings, to a Participation of which these Gentlemen so earnestly call us. The necessary Consequences, that must attend the giving up Christianity upon their Scheme, are either that no Face or Appearance of Religion wou'd be left in the World; or else that all the absurd and impious Superstitions that Folly, Ignorance, Knavery or Enthusiasm cou'd suggest, wou'd prevail with so irreconcilable a Distraction, as must render all Religion ridiculous, and all social Worship impossible.

LET us see, then, how Mr. *Hobbs* has provided for us upon his Hypothesis, which refers us to the Magistrate for the ultimate Rule of our Religion. Something better it must be confes'd: For, in the first Place, here is some, tho' imperfect, Provision made for the political Ends of Religion, and its Influence on
human

human Society. And then, if the Magistrate happens to approve it, we have still a Chance to keep the Christian Religion. But we wou'd willingly receive our Religion upon a better Authority, and hold it by a better Tenure than this.

FOR, *1st*. The Reason of the Magistrate is no more able to discover the Will of God, or what Worship is agreeable to him, than the Reason of other Men; and therefore, as to any Presumption of engaging his Favour, any Satisfaction of Conscience in the Performance, we are in the same, or rather a worse, Condition upon this Hypothesis than the former.

2^{dly}, It is notorious, that the most absurd and impious Superstitions, that have ever obtain'd in the World, have been authoris'd by Civil Power; and therefore, we are no better secured against the Return of them by trusting the Magistrate, without any prior Rule or Direction, to provide for us, than by

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leaving every Man to provide for himself. And,

Lastly, I must observe, that Civil Authority has not, in Fact, prescribed any Religion as the Conclusions of its own Wisdom, but as directed or confirm'd by some Revelation. The Founders and succeeding Lawgivers of Societies saw a political Necessity of authorising some Religion; but they saw also, that nothing cou'd give Men that Satisfaction they requir'd in Religion, nothing cou'd assure them that God approved and wou'd reward the Service, but the Declaration of God himself. And therefore, tho' they adjusted the Religion they chose or instituted, as well as they cou'd, to their political Schemes, and to the Tempers, Sentiments, and sometimes to prevailing Vices of the People, to induce them more easily to credit a pretended Revelation; yet they rely'd not upon their own Authority, as sufficient to recommend it to the Reverence and Conscience of Men, but depended on the Revelation itself for that Effect. Ci-
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vil Authority then, which Mr. *Hobbs* offers us to supply the Place of Revelation, refuses the Province assign'd to it, and refers itself to Revelation for its own Direction in Religion ; and pretends only to inforce the Commands of a superior Authority. Upon the whole, this Hypothesis, tho' it provides some Remedy against the Confusions of the former, yet leaves us, upon the Issue, in little better Condition than that. We are to give up our Religion in a Chart blank ; and what are we to expect in the Place of it ? Even what a Man weak, ignorant, and undirected as ourselves, shall please to appoint us. We are to worship God, without any Satisfaction of Conscience in what we do, any Presumption of his Approbation, any Prospect of Reward from him. This is the manifest Consequence of this Hypothesis, as it stands in its own Terms, and proposes the Will of civil Authority as the ultimate Rule of our Religion, exclusive of all Revelation. But if we conclude, as we justly may, what this Authority wou'd do, from what it

52 *Revelation necessary*

formerly has done, the real Event of dismissing the Christian Religion, as we are persuaded to do, and desiring this Authority to supply us with some other in the Room of it, must be, that either *Mahometism*, *Paganism*, some old or new Superstition, as the Humour or Enthusiasm of the Prince happens to lead him, shou'd be authoris'd and impos'd on us as our Religion.

WE have seen and examin'd the various Schemes of Infidelity, the Overtures upon whose Encouragement we are desired to renounce our Religion. But surely if human Reason, for the Benefit of whose Direction we are persuaded to withdraw ourselves from Revelation, can make no better Offers than these, we may be permitted to stay where we are.

I propos'd not at present to assert the Evidence of the Christian Revelation, but only to clear the Way to it, by observing the Necessity of admitting some Revelation; and we desire

you only to adhere to the Christian, till some other better proved, and better recommended, shall be offer'd in the Place of it. In the mean Time, what has occur'd in these Reflections, will, I hope, determine you not to give up an Institution, which directs so rational a Service of the Deity, and enforces, by the noblest Prospects and Motives of Action, so pure, so useful a System of Morality, so conducive to the personal and civil Interests of Mankind, either for that wild, impracticable Project of Natural Religion, to which our modern Deists invite you, or for what Mr. *Hobbs's* Magistrate shall be pleas'd to devise for you. Bring but an equal, impartial Mind to the Inquiry, and the more attentively you examine the Gospel, the more you will perceive both the Evidence of its Authority, and the Excellency of its Rules : And be induced to adore the Goodness and Mercy of God, * *Whereby the Day-spring from on high hath*

* Luke 1. 78, 79.

54 *Revelation necessary, &c.*

*visited us, to give Light to them that
sate in Darkness and the Shadow of
Death, and to guide our Feet in the
Way of Peace.*



SERMON



S E R M O N . III.



I P E T E R III. 15.

Be ready always to give an Answer, to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.



SEVERAL obvious Conclusions arise to us from these Words. As,

Ist. THAT we must expect to be ask'd a Reason of the Hope that is in us. And tho' it may be presum'd, that the Occasions of answering Questions of this kind occur'd more frequently when

56 *No internal Objection against*

this Epistle was wrote, when the Profession of Christianity was yet but new, its Converts comparatively a small Number, and the greater Part of those among whom they lived were Infidels to its Authority; yet the Predictions of the first, and the Experience of all succeeding Ages assure us, that the Gospel will never want Enemies, who will call us to this Duty.

II^{ly}. WE may observe, that this Precept is not given with any special Restraint to the Ministers and Teachers of Religion, but directed without Limitation to all Christians. The Stewards, indeed, of the divine Mysteries, the Shepherds of the Flock, are by the Nature of their Office and Station especially requir'd to resist Gain-sayers, and ought to be more eminently prepared for this Service. But, since those who lye in wait to deceive, will generally attempt the Sheep rather than the Shepherd, 'tis the Duty and Concern of every Christian to be ready for a Trial, to which he is so much expos'd. And there-

therefore, tho' we are forbidden to entertain you with such Questions as only tend to *gender Strife* *, yet 'tis our bounden Duty, and a necessary Application of our Office, to instruct you in such Questions as relate to the Fundamentals of our Faith, and enable you to give an Answer to all who shall oppose them. But especially is this Care necessary, when open and publick Attempts are made upon the first Principles of our Religion. When the Contention is not about the Fitness of some Materials, or the Decency of some Ornaments in the Fabrick of the Church; (tho' these are not to be disregarded as Trifles) but the Edifice itself, and even the Ground it stands on, are attack'd: the Mission of our Lord, and the whole Authority of the Gospel disputed. In an Article of so much Danger, every Hand shou'd be strengthened, and provided with proper Arms for Defence. We may observe,

* 2 Tim. ii. 23.

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III^{ly}. THE just Temper with which these Contests shou'd be managed on our Part, *with Meekness and Fear ; i. e.* without the Railings of Anger, or the Levity of the Buffoon. We are required to * *contend earnestly for our Faith ;* but the Firmness and Zeal imply'd in this Expression, may very well consist with such a reverent and serious Composure of Mind, as is agreeable to the Gravity and Importance of the Subject, and the Genius of our Religion. But,

Lastly, THE great Conclusion suggested by these Words, and to which I wou'd chiefly engage your Attention, is,

THAT just and satisfactory Reasons may be given for the Hope and Faith we profess. Our Religion desires no other Favour, than a sober and dispassionate Examination. It submits its

* *The general Epistle of Jude, 3 ver.*

the Christian Revelation. 59

Grounds and Reasons to an unprejudiced Trial ; and hopes to approve itself to the Conviction of any equitable Enquirer.

IN some former Discourses I have endeavour'd to open a Way to this Question, by shewing in general the Necessity of some Revelation. I proceed now to consider, in particular, what Evidences we have that the Christian Religion is derived to us from such a Revelation.

Now the Proofs of a divine Revelation may be distinguish'd into *Internal* and *External*. By *Internal* Proofs, I mean such as arise to us from the Matter contain'd, the Doctrines taught, or the Rules prescribed by the System proposed as a divine Revelation. The *External* Proofs are such outward Facts, as assert the Attestation of God to it. A Concurrence of both these kinds of Evidence is necessary, to assure our Faith in a divine Revelation. For if the Matter be such, as Reason tells us 'tis impossible

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possible God shou'd reveal, no outward Proofs will be able to convince us that God did reveal it. On the other Side, tho' the Matter be such as might be reveal'd by God, yet external and positive Proofs only can assure us of the Fact, that God did reveal it. 'Tis my Intention at this Time, to consider the *Internal* Proofs of the Gospel Revelation ; and shew, what Answer may be given on this Head, *to every one who asks a Reason of the Hope that is in us.*

BUT it must be premised, that from these internal Proofs we do not pretend positively and directly to infer, that any Doctrine or System, the Scriptures of the New Testament for Instance, are a divine Revelation ; but only that they may be. Some pious and good Men, indeed, from the excellent Effects, the Comforts and Illuminations they have found from reading the holy Scriptures, have concluded, that they carried in themselves a positive Evidence of the Spirit of God. But, I doubt, this Argument is only personal to themselves,

elves, and cannot, with any Hopes of Success, be apply'd to the Conviction of an Unbeliever. For these Effects of the Scriptures, are owing to the good Disposition with which they are read, and the Concurrence of divine Grace with it. He who is not so disposed, will not find these Effects; and consequently, will have no Inducement to make the same Inferences that they do. He cannot see them in the same Light, and discern the same Character in them. Whoever will argue from this Topick with another, does, in Reality, only appeal to himself, and his own Apprehensions: And if a *Mahometan* shou'd tell him he feels the same Effects from the *Alcoran*, and sees the same Marks of Divinity in it, he wou'd offer the same Proof for his Superstition, as the other offers for the Gospel. If we expect to convince any Man of what he does not yet allow, we must deduce it from some Principle which he either does, or we can by Reason oblige him to acknowledge. But to argue from inward Sentiments of our own, which he has not,
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and we cannot give him, is only persuading him to believe because we believe; and he may as well persuade us to disbelieve, because he disbelieves.

BUT tho' it cannot be inferr'd from the Contents of any Book or System of Doctrine that 'tis a Divine Revelation, yet it may be inferr'd that 'tis not. A Negative Conclusion may be good in this Case, tho' a Positive cannot. If such Book or System contains any thing contrary to any prior acknowledg'd Truth, this is a good Proof that 'tis not a Divine Revelation; because we are assured that God cannot affirm to us a manifest Falshood: But if no such Objection appears against it, all we can conclude is, that it may be reveal'd by God. Where a precedent Revelation is acknowledg'd, if what is offer'd as a Subsequent contradicts or is irreconcilable with that, it is certain that both cannot be reveal'd by God, because God cannot contradict himself: But a Freedom from such a Contradiction proves only that the latter may be reveal'd, as well as the former. In asserting, therefore,

the Christian Revelation. 63

fore, the internal Proofs of the Gospel Revelation, all we are concern'd to shew is, with respect to an Unbeliever of all Revelation, that it teaches or prescribes nothing contrary to any prior Truth, Natural or Moral. With respect to those who agree with us in receiving a prior Revelation, that it contains nothing inconsistent or contradictory to that. In short, That no internal Objection, of either of these Kinds, lyes against our admitting it as a Divine Revelation.

Now the Contents of the Gospel are its Moral Doctrines, Those Articles it proposes to the Faith, and those positive Ordinances it prescribes to the Observance of its Disciples.

As to the first, tho' I am persuaded, that generally the Restraints this Religion lays on the corrupt Lusts and Passions of Men, has been the real ground of their Prejudices against it; yet few have cared to own this Motive of their Opposition to it, or openly to object to the Morality of the Gospel. All its antient Enemies
were

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were contented to leave it without Accufation on this Head, and only to obferve, that its Rules of this Kind gave it no Pretence to the Character of a Divine Revelation; fince it informed us in no more than the Improvements natural Reason had concluded before, and the Philofophy of Pagans had taught in a more accurate Method and Digefion. But we are at laft attack'd even on this fecure Quarter, and are told by a * late Adverfary, that the Morality of the Gofpel is contrary to Reason. That what we have been taught to call Vices, are really Actions the moft beneficial, and moft conducive to the Happinefs of Mankind: And confequently, that what have obtain'd the Name of Virtues, are Actions of a destructive Tendency, and unnatural Abridgments of human Liberty: And that the Principles under which we have been perfuaded to abhor the one, and reverence the other, are mere Cheat and Imposition, the Inventions of crafty and designing Men. But we may ob-

* Fable of the Bees

ferve

serve with some Satisfaction, that tho' the immediate Object of this Writer's Malice be apparently the Christian Religion, upon whose Principles and Authority Morality is now establish'd among us; yet his Charge lies equally against all Rules of Action, which have ever obtained any lasting Esteem in the rational World: And that the Precepts he objects to as unreasonable, have been approved and recommended by the most celebrated Masters of Reason, Men of the greatest Capacities and Improvements, in all Ages. They wanted, indeed, what Revelation only cou'd give, a sufficient Authority to reconcile Mens Submission to their Rules; and a Prospect of Rewards and Penalties sufficient to engage their Observance, and over-balance the Passions that tempted Men to transgress them. But their Directions are very much the same with the Christian: And they propose them, as the wisest and most effectual Provision for the general Happiness of Mankind, that Reason cou'd devise. In Concurrence with this Argument, we may observe also, that the
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66 *No internal Objection against*

greater Part of these Rules have been prescribed by the Wisdom of all Laws; and wherever any Institution has departed from them, it has been generally censured as defective, and contrary both to Prudence, and Justice. Thus the best and most improved Reason of Mankind has been used to argue, in all Ages, and under all the Diversity of Religions: And, in the Result of its most attentive Inquiries, has concluded that Vice is a real Evil, and Virtue a real good; the one the proper Aversion, the other the proper Choice of a reasonable Nature, and the only sure Foundation both of personal and social Happiness. But it seems, all the Reason and Policy in the World have been hitherto perfectly in the Dark; and cou'd not, in so many Ages Search, find out the proper Interest of Mankind, till this Person of deep Thoughts came at last and discover'd the Secret.

BUT perhaps it will be said, that this general Approbation of Reason we argue from, is only the Notions of a few Speculative Persons, train'd up in a confined
Way

Way of thinking; who, in Confederacy with Civil Authority, have agreed to impose and enforce these Conclusions on the World. That the bulk of Mankind have always judged otherwise; govern'd themselves by different Maxims; and; wherever they had Liberty, pursued such Vices as were agreeable to their several Inclinations.

BUT when we ask, whether a Precept or Action be agreeable to Reason, I presume we mean right Reason: Reason abstracted from the Weakness or Prejudices, with which it is encumber'd in Particulars. To Reason as diversify'd by the various Lusts, and Ignorance of Individuals, 'tis impossible to say what is agreeable, or what is not. This is too inconsistent and irreconcilable, to be a Measure or Standard of Judgment. When we appeal to Reason, therefore, we must intend some fix'd and stable Principle, Reason in its proper Rectitude and Perfection. And surely the Consent of all thoughtful and inquisitive Men in all Ages in one Conclusion, is a strong Presumption

68 *No internal Objection against*

sumption that 'tis agreeable to right Reason. Error could hardly be so uniform as this. At least, the Concurrence of the most improved and most attentive Part of Mankind in any Assertion, is a better Proof of its Conformity to right Reason, than the Concurrence of all the thoughtless, stupid, inconsiderate Wretches, which compose the common Herd of the World, is of the contrary. And yet, in some late Arguments, these confused Sentiments of the Multitude have been complimented as the proper Standard of Reason; and Learning, Study, and all the Advantages which are usually thought to render one Man's Judgment preferable to another, have been represented as disqualifying Men for the Search and Discernment of Truth.

BUT, in the present Question, how does it appear, that even this bulk of Mankind are in Judgment against us? Why, they have in all Ages follow'd Rules directly opposite to ours, and indulged themselves in such Practices, as the Morality we contend for forbids. But admitting

mitting the Fact, does it follow thence that they have really approved their own Practice, and not acted against their own Convictions? Is it an uncommon Thing for Men to acknowledge a Law to be holy, just, and good, and yet to transgress it? But supposing each has acted with a full Satisfaction of his Reason in what he did; yet has any one of them approved all Vices as good, and condemn'd all Virtues as evil?

IN a former Discourse, to shew the Necessity of Revelation, I observ'd that no uniform Rule of Action cou'd ever obtain from the Conclusions of an independent Multitude, left every one to judge for himself, under the various Disabilities and Prepossessions, which must ever be expected to prevail among the greater Part of Mankind. The Consequence of such a State, wou'd certainly be almost as many Rules of Action as Men, diversify'd according to their different Passions and Capacities; nor is it imaginable, how they cou'd ever be united under one Rule, but by a Submission

70 *No internal Objection against*

to some Authority prescribing it. But still, to a Looker on, able to abstract from these Particulars, a Conclusion would arise, even from this dissonant Variety of Judgments, in Approbation of Virtue, and Condemnation of Vice. For tho' each would accommodate his Rule to his own Propensities, and include an Indulgence for his favourite Vices in his Scheme of Morality, yet, where he was under no such Prejudice, he would certainly approve Virtue rather than Vice; approve every Virtue but those he could not reconcile to his own Practice, and condemn every Vice but those he was fond of. And I doubt not, but if every single Virtue were put to the Vote, even of the whole Herd of Mankind, placed in all the Liberty that can be imagin'd, a great Majority would declare for every one: Tho' if the whole System of Virtues were proposed together, the various Interests of Mens Passions, inconsistent some with one Precept, and some with another, would engage, perhaps, a greater Majority to reject it. Nor is it possible (as I have said)

said) for any Principle, but an Authority superior to these Passions, to reconcile them to it. But still the Inference suggested upon the whole, would be, that human Reason, weak and corrupted as it is, even that Reason upon which the Bulk of Mankind act, approves Virtue and condemns Vice, in every Case but where a manifest Partiality over-rules its Judgment. In like manner, particular Men may object, some to one Precept or Restraint of the Gospel, and some to another, as they happen to be influenced by an Attachment to their several Vices; but if each allows the Equity and Usefulness of its Rules, wherever they do not cross upon his own particular Indulgences, there arises from the whole, an Acknowledgment that every Precept of the Gospel is agreeable to Reason. Nay, we may carry the Reflection still farther, and observe, that even the Vices Men allow in themselves they will condemn in others. Will a Thief confess it reasonable that his Confederates should rob him? Or will he who indulges his

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Lusts in the Corruption of another's Family, be content the same Injury shou'd be return'd upon him in his own? If the Action be in its self good and reasonable, he will certainly be pleas'd it should obtain in universal Practice: But if he approves it only in himself, and dislikes it in every one else, this is a Demonstration, that his Judgment in his own Case is partial; the Judgment of his Passion, and not of his Reason. So that he who will take upon him to prove the Morality of the Gospel repugnant to Reason, will argue under the Disadvantage of contradicting not only the wisest and most attentive Men in all Ages, but even the universal Confession of Mankind, wherever a manifest Partiality has not corrupted their Judgment. And,

To the Suggestion, that the thoughtful Part of Mankind have acted insincerely, and in Confederacy with the Civil Powers have agreed, the one to teach, the other to impose their moral Rules on the World, for private Ends
of

the Christian Revelation. 73

of their own, to advance their personal or political Authority ; we need only answer, that we can hardly wish for a better Proof of the Reasonableness and Usefulness of these Rules, than their being necessary for the Establishment of Civil Authority, and to provide for the social Welfare of Mankind ; or for a stronger Argument of this Necessity, than so general a Concurrence of Legislators in directing them.

BUT the moral Duties of Christianity may be prov'd a * *reasonable Service*, from much higher Principles than these, and deduced *a priori* from the Attributes of the Deity. As God in his intellectual Nature is the most consummate Reason, so the moral Attributes imply'd in the divine Idea, are a Standard of Morality, agreeable to the most perfect Reason. If therefore, the natural Idea of God represents him to us as a Being just, holy, merciful, &c. we must necessarily conclude, that

† Rom. 12. 1.

these

74 *No internal Objection against*

these Qualities are agreeable to the most perfect Reason. And if 'tis the Duty of every rational Nature to act agreeably to the most perfect Reason, as far as its Dictates can be discover'd, it follows, that the Imitation of the Deity in these Virtues, so essentially imply'd in his Idea, is the Duty of every reasonable Nature.

N O W the moral Prescriptions of the Gospel, are plainly conformable to these moral Attributes of the Deity ; and are recommended to our Observance, as an Imitation of the divine Perfections. If, then, these moral Attributes are really the proper Character of the Deity, we need no other Argument to prove these Prescriptions agreeable to right Reason. If they are not, then, in the Place of that excellent Nature we now worship, we must substitute an unjust, cruel, unmerciful Being, arm'd with infinite uncontrollable Power ; and this terrible destructive Idea must be the Standard and Measure of moral Perfection. Such monstrous Absurdities must Men run into,

to, who will object to the Reasonableness of the Christian Morality : Before their Arguments will conclude, they must degrade Man into a Beast, and change the Character of the Deity into that of the Devil.

BUT I must observe in this Argument, that the Question before us does not depend on our shewing, by direct Proofs, that every moral Precept of the Gospel is agreeable to Reason ; but he who will set aside the Revelation on Account of its Morality, must prove that some Precept, at least, is contrary and irreconcilable to Reason. We doubt not, but the Reasonableness of every one may be clearly asserted ; but should the Action in any Instance be found indifferent, neither directed nor condemn'd by Reason, this cannot be objected in Disproof of the Revelation : Because God may, without any Inconsistency, be supposed to prescribe an Action whose Reasons may not appear to us ; and therefore the Revelation may be what it pretends to be, notwithstanding such Prescription.

The

76 *No internal Objection, &c.*

The Negative, in this Case, can be concluded only from a manifest Contradiction of some moral Precept of the Gospel to Reason : And we desire to hold our Religion no longer, than till such a Contradiction be proved against it.

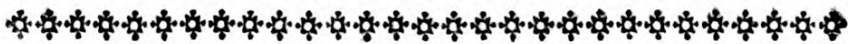
THE next Point in which we are to vindicate the internal Proofs of the Christian Revelation, is in the Articles it proposes to our Faith, to which I shall now proceed.



SERMON.



S E R M O N I V .



I P E T E R I I I . I 5 .

Be ready always to give an Answer, to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.



TH E moral Precepts of the Gospel I have endeavour'd to vindicate, from all Objections, which can represent them as an incredible Matter of a divine Revelation. But perhaps it may be thought a Task of greater Difficulty, to remove this Imputation from the Articles propos'd to our Faith. Many of these are confess'd incomprehensible

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comprehensible by human Reason in its greatest Improvements, and to be perfectly new and unknown to the World before ; and therefore we can neither deduce them, as direct Consequences from any natural Maxims, or argue their Probability from any prior Consent of Mankind in them.

I N Vindication of our Religion on this head, it will not be expected I should argue by Induction, and engage in a distinct Consideration of every Article of our Creed ; because we stand only on the Negative, that the Charge objected cannot be made good against any ; and it lies on those who oppose us, to prove, in some Particular, that our Faith is indefensible.

B U T if we can make it appear,

1st. T H A T, beyond the Conclusions of natural Reason, there may, and must be many Truths, relating to the Nature, Will, and Counsels of God, which we cannot discover or comprehend ;

2^{ly},

2^{ly}, T H A T 'tis very reasonable to expect, a divine Revelation should contain some Propositions of this Kind;

3^{ly}, T H A T when such Propositions are reveal'd, tho' they remain as incomprehensible as they were before, yet we are requir'd, by a clear Principle of Natural Reason, to believe them; ——— We hope, these general Conclusions will easily be apply'd to the Defense of Particulars: And no Objection will lie against any Article, that can affect the Credibility of the Revelation. And,

1st, I observe, that, beyond the Conclusions of Natural Reason, there may, and must be many Truths relating to the Will and Counsels of God, which we cannot discover or comprehend.

'T I S certain, Truth does not depend on our Perceptions, but on the real Relation, the Agreement or Disagreement of some Ideas with others; which is the same, whether perceiv'd by us or not.

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A Conclusion in Mathematicks, or any other Science, was as true before any Man discover'd it, as it is since its Discovery; and is as true when propos'd to an Idiot, as when propos'd to the most acute Philosopher. The gradual Advances of human Reason in what it does know, the Boundaries that stop its Progress and confine its Perceptions, oblige us to conclude, that there must be many Truths beyond our Discovery or Comprehension. We see Effects, for which we cannot assign any certain Cause: We acknowledge the Existence of many Beings, whose Attributes we cannot ascertain; and are often forced to content ourselves with superficial Descriptions, from the little that appears to us, instead of Definitions drawn from Nature. Our Prospect is terminated by a narrow Horizon, and our Knowledge imperfect, even within that Circle. In many Objects that are nearest to us, we can look no deeper than outward Appearances: Of those which are more remote, we see only one Side. As we proceed towards the Extremity of the Landscape, the Images
grow

grow faint, and the Objects are so diminish'd, crowd'd and confus'd, that we discern little with any Distinction. So far as we clearly perceive the real Agreement or Disagreement of Things, we affirm or deny with Certainty : And the Truths we thus discover, we apply as Rules and Measures in farther Inquiries. Where the Object is within our Reach, if our Rule is adequate to it, and we apply it with due Care, we have the same Assurance in the Conclusion, as we had in the Premises whence we deduce it. But where the Distance of the Object is such that we cannot reach it, or its Disproportion to our Rule such that it cannot be measured by it, we are left to Opinion and Conjecture. So far as we measure it we pronounce with Certainty ; but all we affirm beyond, is that there is a real Being, but what its Attributes or Relations are, we cannot determine. We may conclude indeed negatively, that they are not contrary or irreconcilable to what we have discover'd ; we are so far sure what cannot be affirm'd of it ; but farther than
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that we can affirm or deny nothing, but from our Conjecture, or the Reports of an Understanding superiour to our own. In the Question before us, all that human Reason can discover of the Nature of God, is that He is infinitely wise, just, good, powerful, &c. in short, a Being possess'd of all imaginable Perfection. But when we examine this Idea with Attention, it amounts to no more than this — We collect together all the Perfections of which we have any determinate Notion, all the Attributes by which we conceive one Being preferable to another, and unite them in God; and so far the Idea is positive: But then the Infinity we ascribe to these Attributes, and which renders them the distinctive Idea of God, is only a Negation of Limits and Circumscription. As when the Eye looks upon a Line or Superficies supposed to be infinitely extended, so far as our View reaches, we have a determinate positive Object; but the Immensity we affirm beyond that, lies all in the dark, and is in Truth only a Negation of Bounds. Thus it is in
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the Christian Revelation. 83

the Idea of God: So far as the Perfections we combine in it, are exhibited to us in our own, or other Natures whence we collect them, the Object is within our View; the Idea, both of the Particulars, and of the Aggregate arising from their Union, is positive: But the Infinity, to which we extend the Idea beyond that, is only a Negative. Reason cannot fix, or permit us to conceive, any Bounds; and therefore requires us to believe there are none: And what we affirm, is that He is wise without Limits to his Wisdom, powerful without Limits to his Power, &c. Now so far as this Idea is positive, natural Reason may conclude with Certainty, and reject any Affirmation that is contrary to it, as incompatible with the divine Nature. Should any Book or System of Doctrine offer'd to us as a divine Revelation, affirm any Thing of God inconsistent with Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, &c. this must appear to us a manifest Falshood, and therefore impossible to be reveal'd by God. The general Negation of Limits

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to the divine Perfections, being also a certain Conclusion of Reason, whatever Doctrine sets any other Limits to these Perfections, but what one Attribute necessarily sets to another, must appear irreconcilable with the divine Idea, and consequently cannot be admitted as a divine Revelation. But then, in that immense Blank (as to our Conceptions) which the Infinity of this Idea implies, beyond these Conclusions, Reason cannot but acknowledge, that there may, and must be innumerable Attributes of the Deity, which it cannot discover: And if any Attribute of this Kind be affirm'd of God, Reason is perfectly suspended, and cannot, by any Light or Principles of its own, perceive whether the Affirmation be true or false. It may be true, tho' Reason does not discern it to be so; and since it does not discern it to be false, it cannot pronounce it to be false. If, therefore, such a Proposition be offer'd to us as affirm'd by God, Reason cannot, by any internal Argument drawn from the Matter of it, prove that 'tis not affirm'd by God;
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because it may be true for any Thing Reason can determine to the contrary; and what may be true, God, who certainly knows whether it be true or not, may affirm. He who attempts to disprove a Revelation by internal Objections drawn from the Matter it contains, must argue *ab absurdo*; and can succeed only by shewing, that we cannot admit it to be so, without contradicting some evident or confess'd Truth. Such a Truth we acknowledge it to be, that God cannot affirm a Falshood: But we can never be reduced to the Absurdity of contradicting this Principle, by admitting a Proposition to be reveal'd by God, in which we can perceive neither Truth nor Falshood. For Instance: That God is one necessarily existent Being, is a Conclusion of natural Reason, imply'd in the divine Idea; and therefore any Proposition contradicting that Conclusion, we are sure cannot be affirm'd by God. But the Manner of the divine Existence, is a Subject perfectly in the dark, as to us; natural Reason cannot affirm or deny any Thing about it.

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Suppose then it is offer'd to us as a divine Revelation, that this one God exists in three Persons. The Proposition is certainly incomprehensible by us, we cannot, by any Light of our own, perceive it to be true ; but neither can we perceive it to be false. He who asserts that God does not exist in a Trinity of Persons, has no more Perception of Truth in his Negative, than he who asserts that he does so exist, has in his Affirmative. All we contend for is, that the Affirmative is not evidently false ; and if it be not, 'tis no Contradiction to the Principle that God cannot reveal a Falshood, to admit this as reveal'd by God. Whether it be reveal'd or not is an Inquiry of Fact, and depends on external Proofs.

WHAT we have observ'd concerning the divine Nature, may also by Parity of Argument be apply'd to the divine Counsels. If in a Book or System offer'd as a divine Revelation, any Counsel or Resolution should be ascribed to God, which is manifestly incompatible with

the Christian Revelation. 87

with the Attributes imply'd in the divine Idea, this would be a just Reason for rejecting the Revelation : But if the Resolution declared to be from God, neither exceeds his Power, nor is inconsistent with his Goodness, Justice, &c. to perform ; no negative Objection can lye against the Credibility of the Revelation, on Account of the Matter of such Resolution : It cannot but be acknowledg'd possible ; and if God may perform it, it depends purely on his Pleasure, whether he will perform it or not : And when the Revelation is proved, his Pleasure is proved.

I hope, then, it appears that there are, and must be many Truths relating to the Nature of God incomprehensible to us : These are as truly affirmable of God, as those Attributes which natural Reason ascribes to Him. I have not troubled myself to prove that God may reveal them to us, because I presume, no one who understands the Terms of the Proposition can deny it. Suppose then this possible Thing should

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come to pass, and God should reveal them ; they would not be one Jot more comprehensible to us than they were before. The Habitues and Relations of the Ideas on which their Truth depends, are beyond the Reach of our Faculties, and we shall no more perceive them when affirm'd by God, than if they were affirm'd by any one else ; and therefore our not perceiving them to be true, is no Proof that they are not reveal'd by God. This Negative can be inferr'd only from our perceiving them not to be true ; and then we confess it impossible for us to believe that God affirms them : But they may be reveal'd by God, notwithstanding we cannot comprehend, or perceive the Truth of them.

2^{ly}, THEN, let us next inquire, Whether, supposing a divine Revelation should be made, it be reasonable to expect that such Propositions should be contain'd in it : For if such Propositions be not only a possible, but a probable Matter of a divine Revelation, our finding them in any Book

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or System of Doctrines, cannot with any Colour be urged as a Disproof of its being a divine Revelation. Now the only imaginable Ends of a divine Revelation to Men, must be to direct them to Happiness and Duty ; to engage them to pursue the one, by performing the other. An Acknowledgment of the divine Attributes, Reason it self must suggest as one of the first Duties we owe to God, because 'tis the Foundation of all others. And infallible Truth is one of those Attributes, and one whose Acknowledgment God may be supposed especially to require in this Case, because the Authority of the whole Revelation depends upon it. And if the only Evidence we can give of our acknowledging the infallible Truth of God, be assenting to what He affirms upon his Authority, it is very reasonable to expect that God shou'd require this Evidence from us. Now in assenting to a Proposition, whose Truth we perceive from the Reason of the Thing, we do not assent upon any Authority at all : We should assent to such a Proposition, tho' it were affirmed by
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the most fallible Man, nay by the most notorious Liar in the World; and consequently, our assenting to such a Proposition, is no manner of Proof that we acknowledge the infallible Veracity of God. This can only appear, by our assenting to a Proposition, whose Truth we do not perceive by any Evidence from the Nature of the Thing. We here assent upon the Authority of God's Affirmation, and our Assent is a most explicit Acknowledgment of the infallible Veracity of God. If then it be reasonable to expect in a divine Revelation, that God should require our Acknowledgment of this Attribute, and such Acknowledgment can appear only by our assenting, upon the Authority of God, to such Propositions whose Truth we cannot perceive by any internal Evidence; it is reasonable to expect such Propositions in a divine Revelation: And what we may reasonably expect in a divine Revelation, can never be objected in Disproof of its being so. Propositions of this Kind, as I have observ'd, may be either Doctrines concerning the divine Nature, or Declarations

tions of the Will and Counfels of God. That there are many Truths, relating to each of thefe, beyond the Reach or Compafs of our Perceptions or Deductions, Reason it felf muft confefs. How many of thefe, or of which Sort God fhall at any Time reveal, depends wholly on his Pleafure. They are all equally unfearchable by us, and equally revealable by God. And fince 'tis reasonable to expect fome fuch inevident Propofitions in a divine Revelation, and no Rule of Reason determines either their Number or their Subject, neither the Quality, Number, nor Subject of fuch Propofitions can amount to a Difproof of the Revelation in which they are found. I go on then, and obferve

3^{ly}, THAT when fuch Articles are revealed by God, we are obliged by a clear Principle of natural Reason to believe them. And if, as foon as we fuppofe them revealed by God, they are very credible, their Incredibility before cannot be objected in Difproof of the Revelation. For nothing can be more unrea-
fonable,

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sonable, than to object that in Disproof of a Supposition, which the Supposition it self takes away.

THAT Authority is, in some Cases, a just Ground of Assent, cannot be denied. The proper Subject of this Assent is such Propositions as we can neither perceive to be true or false, from the Nature of the Thing. Where we clearly perceive Truth, we assent to it indeed, but (as I observed) not upon any Authority at all: And what we clearly perceive to be false, we cannot assent to upon any Authority, because no Authority can outweigh the plain Evidence of the Thing. But where the Matter of a Proposition is purely inevident to us, if it be affirm'd by a Person whose Knowledge and Fidelity we can rely on, we have just Grounds to assent to it; and our Assent, in this Case, is more or less firm and reasonable, in the same Proportion that our Presumption of the Person's Knowledge and Honesty is so: but where the Affirmer is a Person of infinite Knowledge and Truth, who can neither de-
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ceive, nor be deceived, we have the utmost Assurance of the Truth of such a Proposition that can be given; and we must act in Contradiction to Reason, if we refuse our Assent to it. The Matter indeed of the Proposition remains still in its natural Obscurity: We can no more perceive the Connexion of Ideas affirmed of each other, than we did before; but we are now assured there is such a Connexion, because God, who certainly knows whether there be or not, and who cannot deceive us, has affirm'd that there is: The Credibility of the Affirmation does not depend on the Matter of it, but on the Evidences we have of the Revelation: When that is proved credible, the Proposition is no longer incredible. Nay, tho' it were not only inevident, but even improbable before, yet, if it be not simply impossible, it becomes credible upon the Affirmation of so high an Authority. And therefore 'tis trifling to tell us, we ought not to proceed to the outward Evidences of the Revelation, till we have ascertain'd the Truth of such Propositions contain'd
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in it; because the Proof of the Revelation draws after it, by necessary Consequence, the Credibility of the Propositions; and therefore is in the order of Reasoning the first Question: And requiring us to reverse this Order, is requiring us to prove a Conclusion independently on the proper Premises whence 'tis to be infer'd.

WHAT has been offer'd, we hope, will supply us with a satisfactory Defence of the Gospel Revelation, from any internal Objection on Account of the Articles it proposes to our Faith. That it requires our Belief of any one which contradicts any clear Principle or Deduction of Reason, we deny. That it requires our Assent to several which exceed our Comprehension, *i. e.* whose Truth we cannot perceive from any internal Evidence, we confess. But then we contend that no Argument can be drawn from these in Disproof of the Revelation. Because, 1st, Reason must acknowledge, that beyond those Conclusions which are in its View, there may
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and must be many Truths relating to the Nature, Will, and Counsels of God, which we cannot comprehend; and that God may, if He pleases, reveal them to us. And therefore, tho' the Gospel does affirm such incomprehensible Conclusions to us, yet still we may believe it to be a divine Revelation, without contradicting that Principle, that God can affirm nothing but Truth. 2^{ly}. That 'tis reasonable to expect a divine Revelation should propose some Articles of this Kind to the Faith of Men; and therefore the Gospel's proposing such Articles to us, is no more than we must reasonably expect it should do, if it were a divine Revelation; and consequently can be no Disproof of its being one.

3^{ly}, THAT when such Articles are reveal'd, tho' they remain as incomprehensible as they were before, yet they are no longer incredible; but Reason it self obliges us to assent to them, as affirmed by the infallible Veracity of God; and therefore the natural Incredibility of such Articles of the Gospel, is no Bar to its

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its direct Proofs; but ceases it self, as soon as those Proofs are made good; and consequently ought to be suspended, and wait on the Result of that Inquiry.

THE positive Ordinances of the Christian Religion are another Part of the Matter of the Gospel, but Reason cannot from these raise any Objection, that can discredit the Revelation. It will not, I presume, be pretended, that outward Ordinances are inconsistent with the Nature of Religion: And those injoyn'd us are few, significant, and proper for the Intention to which they are directed. We are taught, indeed, to expect divine Graces, internal Works of God on the Soul, in Consequence of our Observance of them; but surely there is nothing impossible or improbable in this Doctrine. It is not pretended that they convey these Graces by any natural Efficacy, but purely by a divine Institution. And cannot God bestow His own Favours on what Conditions, annex them to what Actions He pleases? But I need not much enlarge on this Head, because, tho' some
Adversaries

Adversaries have with impious Scorn blasphemed these holy Rites, as Conjurations and ridiculous Superstitions; yet I do not remember, that they have been objected to in any serious Pretence of disproving our Religion. And for the same Reason I shall not detain you with vindicating either the Articles of our Faith, or the Rites of our Worship, as consistent with all precedent Revelations. For tho' much invidious Pains has been taken by a late Enemy, to invalidate the Appeal which the Gospel makes to the *Jewish* Revelation; yet nothing that he has offer'd affects the internal Matter, but only the Attestation, which is an external Proof. He does not pretend to shew that the Gospel contains any Thing contradictory or inconsistent with the Doctrines, Prophecies, or Prescriptions which God delivered to the *Jews*; and thence to infer negatively, that we cannot admit the Gospel Revelation, consistently with our Acknowledgment of the *Jewish*. But what he undertakes to shew is, that the Testimonies which the Gospel ap-

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peals to in the *Jewish* Writings as bearing Witness to it, do not conclude what they are alledg'd for; or do not prove positively that it is a divine Revelation. When the outward and direct Proofs of the Gospel are in Question, what he has objected has a Right to be consider'd; but in the present Argument, all we are concern'd to evince is, that there appears nothing in the Matter of the Gospel, which can render it irreconcilable with the *Jewish* Revelation; and therefore we may admit the one, without being obliged to contradict, or give up the other. The Gospel, it is confess'd, makes fuller and more particular Discoveries of the Nature, Will, and Counsels of God, than the former Revelations; but it teaches nothing inconsistent with them. And tho' God cannot contradict Himself, yet He may reveal more at one Time than at another; and therefore no Difference, but what implies a Contradiction, can render our Belief of a latter Revelation, inconsistent with our Belief of a former. And if, as I presume it might be shewn,
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there are in the former Revelations some Hints, tho' dark and imperfect, even of those Doctrines of the Gospel which are most objected to ; if many Obscurities of the *Jewish* Scriptures are made clear and intelligible by these Doctrines, This advances something towards a direct Proof of the Gospel Revelation. It does not, we confess, certainly conclude, because 'tis possible for human Skill and Cunning, so far to adapt what it offers as subsequent Revelation to one before receiv'd, as to give it the Advantage of this Appearance : But then such a Correspondence is a good Disproof of any pretended Inconsistency between them, with regard to these Doctrines ; which is all we have Occasion to infer in the present Argument.

So likewise, with respect to the Rites or positive Ordinances of the Gospel, all Institutions of this Kind being in their Nature indifferent, neither morally good nor evil, they must be confess'd alterable by God. He may annex his Graces to what Ordinances He thinks

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fit ; their Efficacy depends meerly on his Pleasure , and therefore He may , without any Inconsistency , abrogate one Scheme , and appoint another in the Place of it. - But if there be a relative Harmony between those of a former , and those of a latter , Institution ; if it be among the Predictions of a prior Revelation , that the Rites prescribed under it shou'd cease , and be succeeded by another Order of Worship ; such a Change is rather an Argument in Favour of a subsequent Revelation , than against it ; but from any Objection of Inconsistency on Account of such Change , it is a full Vindication.

UPON the whole , I hope , whoever attends to the preceding Reflections , will not want an Answer to him who shall attempt to disprove the Gospel Revelation , by any internal Objections , arising from the Matter of it : That nothing can be charg'd either on the Morality , the Faith , or the Ordinances of our Religion , that can render it incredible that God shou'd reveal it. This
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is all the internal Proof that any Revelation, in the Nature of the Thing, admits of. But then it must be remember'd, that, in consequence of these Proofs, we are got no farther than that it may be a divine Revelation ; whether it be so or not, depends on the Validity of its external and direct Proofs ; in Assertion of which I shall offer something in a farther Inquiry.





S E R M O N V.



J O H N X. 25.

The Works that I do in my Father's Name, bear Witness of me.

TH E many Impostures which have prevail'd on the Credulity of Mankind as divine Revelations, are just Reasons for examining the Credentials of any Person, and trying, by the best Scrutiny in our Power, whatever Doctrine or Religion offers itself to us under that Character. Now, the only Topicks whence we can argue in this Inquiry, are (as I have observed)

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ferred) either the internal Contents of the supposed Revelation, or the external Evidences of its Derivation from God. I have endeavour'd to vindicate the internal Proofs of the Gospel, (*i. e.*) to shew, that no Objection lies against the Matter of it, which obliges us to conclude that it cannot be from God: And am therefore at Liberty to proceed to its external Proofs, the Attestations of God to it. The Testimony of God to a Person proposing any Doctrine or Religion as from Him, must appear either by immediate Declarations of God himself, or by manifest Communications of divine Power or Knowledge to such Person; or, where a precedent Revelation is receiv'd, by the Testimony of that Revelation.

THE Gospel was proposed to the Faith of Mankind, with the Evidence of all these Kinds of Proof. The Mission of *Jesus Christ*, the first Teacher of this Religion, was more than once acknowledged by a Voice from Heaven. Both He and his Apostles after him, wrought such

such Miracles in Confirmation of it, as carry the clearest Evidence of *the Finger of God* *, Works such as *None cou'd do except God was with him* †. It was also attested by the *Jewish Revelation*, to which it succeeds; in whose Rites it was prefigured, and in whose Predictions it was foretold. The Argument from the *Jewish Prophecies* has been excellently vindicated by much abler Hands than mine, from the Attempts of a late || Writer to discredit it. But because this Adversary has by an insidious Sleight, endeavour'd to divert Mens Attention from the ** Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, as an improper Proof, and of no Weight in this Inquiry; and persuaded them to put the whole Issue of the Question on the Evidence he took upon him to examine, exclusive of this; It is my present Intention to assert the Force of this Proof, which our Lord in my Text appeals to,

* Exod. viii. 19.

† John iii. 2.

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as bearing the most unexceptionable Witness to his Mission. And if, in stating the proper Extent and Application of this Proof, how far it concludes, and by what Objections it is barr'd, I am obliged to recal some Things which have been before observ'd, I hope the Repetition will be excused.

I. Now, 'tis confess'd, that Miracles are not a sufficient Proof that what is proposed as a divine Revelation really is so, when it contains such Doctrines as 'tis impossible should proceed from God. If, for Instance, it represents God as unjust, unholy, &c. as commanding or approving such Actions, as natural Conscience condemns; or affirming any manifest Untruth, natural or moral: Because nothing can appear to us with greater Evidence than the Truths which such Doctrines must contradict; and consequently whatever contradicts them, must appear false; neither is it possible for any external Proof to convince us, that God, whose very Idea includes essential Goodness, and essential Truth,
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can command what we manifestly perceive to be evil, or affirm what we manifestly perceive to be false. He may indeed affirm what we cannot perceive to be true, and if we have sufficient Evidence that He does affirm it, Reason will oblige us to believe it upon his Authority. But we cannot, upon any Authority, assent to what we clearly perceive to be false. And therefore, whenever his Authority is vouch'd for an evident Falshood, we are assured, even to Demonstration, that the Person who vouches it, is either deceiv'd himself, or intends to deceive us. Neither can any Appearance of Miracles overrule this Assurance ; because 'tis more reasonable for us to suspect either the Imposture of Men, or the Delusion of the Devil in such apparent Miracles, than to believe that God can affirm an evident Falshood.

II. WHERE a prior Revelation is acknowledged, Miracles are not a sufficient Proof of a subsequent, if the Matter of it contradicts, or is inconsistent with

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with that former Revelation. For the Contents of that former Revelation being all assented to as undoubted Truths, upon the Authority of God, 'tis impossible for us, while we so assent to it, to admit a second upon his Authority, which is contrary to or subversive of That ; Because God cannot contradict himself; and therefore we cannot, upon any outward Evidences, admit Inconsistences, as affirm'd to us by his Authority. And this is the Ground of that Caution given by *Moses* to the *Israelites*, * *If there arise among you a Prophet — and he giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other Gods and serve them ; Thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet.* And agreeably *St. Paul* requires from all who had receiv'd the Christian Revelation, which he had taught, that even the greatest Appearance of a Mission from God, even an † *Angel from Heaven*

* Deut. xiii.

† Galat. i. 8.

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shou'd not be heard in Contradiction to it. And the plain Reason is, because, as I have said, 'tis impossible that God shou'd affirm to us Inconsistences: If therefore, in such a Case, we admit the latter as a divine Revelation, we must necessarily give up the former; if we adhere to the former, we must reject the latter: And which ever we reject, we shall also reject the Miracles which appear'd to attest it, as Delusions or Impostures.

It is then confessed, that Miracles cannot convince us of a divine Revelation, where the Matter proposed as such is inconsistent with any prior acknowledg'd Truth, natural, or reveal'd. And thus far I can agree with the foremention'd Writer, That * *where the Foundation of a Revelation is invalid, Miracles cannot make it valid.* Till these negative Objections are removed, no positive Proofs can be admitted. But then it must be remember'd, that when they are removed, we are got no farther

* *Grounds and Reasons, p. 32.*

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than this Conclusion, That what is proposed may be a divine Revelation ; Whether it be or not, must be determin'd by positive Proofs : Which, if we set aside immediate Revelation to our selves, can be no other than either the Testimony of a precedent Revelation, or some manifest Communication of the Knowledge, or Power of God to the Person who proposes it to us ; (*i. e.*) either a Spirit of Prophecy, or a Power of working Miracles. I can imagine no other external Proof, by which it can appear that any Person is sent by God, and speaks to us by his Authority : And the most unexceptionable of these is Miracles. For as to the Testimony of a preceding Revelation, this can arise only from the Application of certain prophecy'd Marks and Characters ; and 'tis easy for a Man of any Skill and Foresight who has these Marks before him, so to accommodate his Life, Actions, and all Appearances to them, as to deceive even an attentive Judgment : And therefore this is a Proof, when single and alone, the least to be depended

of the Christian Revelation. III

ed on of any. A Spirit of Prophecy must appear to us, either by the Persons telling us Things past, or foretelling Things to come. Now the Knowledge of Things past may be acquired by so many other Ways besides Revelation, that tho', where we cannot presently account for it, it may surprize us; yet it can hardly leave the Mind without some Distrust of Imposture; and, without the Concurrence of other Proofs, a very imperfect Assurance can arise from this. The Prediction of remote Events, in their Nature perfectly contingent, is indeed, when fulfill'd, a clear incontestable Evidence of a Spirit of Prophecy; but then this affords no present Conviction, we must wait, perhaps a long Time, for our Conclusion. The Person whose Faith is to be engaged by this Argument may be dead, before its Force commences. But Miracles carry with them a clear, positive, present Evidence of the Finger of God. Where the Action is such as manifestly exceeds human Power, we cannot help acknowledging the Concurrence of some superior,

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riour, invisible Agent. We can imagine none but good or evil Spirits. If we suppose good Spirits, the Action terminates in God, and is under his special Direction: If evil Spirits, the Doctrine it attests will betray their Character. If therefore such supernatural Actions are wrought, and the Doctrine attested by them is free from all such negative Objections, as assure us it cannot be from God, we have the utmost Evidence of a divine Revelation that can be given us.

LET us then apply what has been observed in general, to the Christian Revelation. If it contradicts, or is inconsistent with any prior Truth, natural, or reveal'd, this is confess'd a fundamental Defect, which no Appearance of Miracles can over-rule, or supply. But this, we presume, never has been, nor ever can be proved against it. Neither is there in the late Attempt to disparage its Evidences, any Thing of this Character objected to it. All that is pretended, is that some of its Proofs
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of the Christian Revelation. 113

from the precedent Revelation are insufficiently deduced.

Now I might observe in general, that 'tis not in the Nature of the Thing necessary, that a subsequent Revelation shou'd derive any Proof from a former. That it must be consistent, is acknowledg'd ; But God may certainly make two Revelations as well as one, and, if they are reconcileable, we are obliged upon equal Evidence to admit both ; and Miracles are as good a Proof of the one, as they were of the other : Neither is there any Necessity, that before we admit the latter, we should first be convinced of the former.

BUT I am sensible it may be, and is insisted, that the Christian Revelation supposes, and is built upon the *Jewish* as its Foundation : That the Character which *Jesus Christ* assumed, was that of the *Messiah*, a Person promised and delineated in the Law and the Prophets : And accordingly, both Christ and his Apostles appeal to these Prophecies,
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and apply them as giving Evidence to his Pretensions: And consequently the Trial of Christianity is in Effect put upon this Issue; and unless the Validity of this Appeal can be supported, Miracles, exclusive of this Testimony, will not be a sufficient Evidence.

IN Abatement of this Plea it has been sometimes observed, that this State of the Question concerns only the *Jews*, who had received the former Revelation. That to the rest of the World, the first and most proper Evidence of the Christian Revelation, were the Miracles which attested it, which no Reason obliged them to postpone to any other Consideration. This is undoubtedly true, with Regard to the first Reception of Christianity. The Converts, for Instance, whom *St. Paul* gain'd at *Athens* upon the single Force of this Proof, had certainly sufficient Grounds for their Belief. But then, whoever upon this Evidence had acknowledged the Gospel Revelation, when he came to find that *Christ* had taken upon him the particular

lar Character of the *Messiah*, and that both He and his Apostles had appealed to the Law and the Prophets as bearing Testimony to this Pretension, might reasonably demand to have this Pretension supported, and their Veracity in these Allegations made good. Upon the whole therefore, this State of the Question cannot be refused : And I am content to proceed upon it, and consider, whether Miracles are so useless an Evidence in this Inquiry, as has been pretended.

N O W, where a former Revelation has prepared Men, to expect some particular Person to be sent from God, with a farther and more full Commission from him ; Miracles are not a sufficient Proof that any one is that Person, unless he also answers the particular Characters under which that Person was foretold. Thus when *Moses* had told the *Israelites*, that God would * *raise up unto them a Prophet, from the midst of them, of their Brethren, like unto Him*, to whom they

* Deut. xviii. 15.

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should *hearken* ; If any one who was not *of their Brethren*, of the House of *Israel*, had pretended to be *that Prophet*, whatever Appearance of Miracles had attended him, He could not have been acknowledg'd under that Character. When the Expectation of *that Prophet* was afterwards confined to the House and Lineage of *David* ; that, and, for the same Reasons, all other particular Marks under which He was described, might justly be insisted on, before any Person was acknowledg'd to be *that Prophet* : Neither could Miracles prove him to be so, in Contradiction to those Circumstances. But these Circumstances being applicable to considerable Numbers, they could not of themselves determinately point out the promised Person. To him indeed it was foretold these Marks should agree,—— He should be an *Israelite*, of the House of *David*, born at *Bethlehem*, &c. and he who was not so, could not be that Person. But among the Multitudes who would come within these Descriptions, something farther was requisite, to distinguish him who was to be receiv'd as the *Messiah*.

Messiah. It was first and primarily necessary, that he should appear to be sent by God. This the Nature of the Thing required; and this also the Jewish Predictions assign'd as a fundamental Part of his Character. Thus in that of *Moses*, He is described as one to be *rais'd up by God*; and how could that more evidently appear, than by the Power of God shewing forth itself in Him? He was to be *like unto Moses*: And how could that Likeness be visible, in any Character which could engage the Submission of the *Jews*, but in such a Power of Miracles as had engaged their Submission to *Moses*? In short, He must first appear to be sent by God, of which Miracles were a proper Evidence. That He was that particular Person whom God has promised to send, must appear from his answering those special Marks, under which that Person was described. A Concurrence of both these Proofs was necessary, to assure their Faith in *him*, whom they were to acknowledge as the *Messiah*; neither could the one be conclusive without the other. It is therefore a most unreasonable *Postulatum*, to
I 3 require

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require us in this Argument to set aside Miracles as no Evidence ; because, 1st, a very material Part of the Question before us is, whether *Jesus Christ* was a Person sent by God, of which no better Proof could be given than Miracles, or visible Effects of Divine Power attending him. 2^{dly}, Since, among the particular Predictions of that Person promised to the *Jews*, it was foretold, that He *should* * *be like unto Moses* ; That † *the Spirit of God should rest upon Him*. Miracles are also a proper and specifick Evidence in this Part of the Question, as the surest Mark or Proof of the Character here foretold. And accordingly it appears from the History of the Gospels, that the *Jews* expected their *Messiah* should be distinguish'd by this Power. Thus when *Jesus* persuaded them to believe on him, they reply, — † *What Sign shewest thou that we may believe ? what dost thou work ?* Upon the Sight of his Miracles they immediately cry out, — † *Is not this the Son of David ?* And they who

* Deut. xviii.

† Is. xi. 2.

† John vi. 30.

‡ Matt. xii. 23.

believed

believed on Him, profess themselves convinced by this Proof. Thus * *Many believed on him and said, When Christ cometh, shall he do greater Miracles than these?* And upon another Occasion, *When they had seen the Miracle that Jesus did,* they presently concluded— † *This is of a Truth that Prophet which should come.* It appears then, that the *Jews* expected their *Messiah* should work Miracles, and that this should be one discriminating Mark of him. If this was not foretold of him, how came they to require this Power in Him, more than in other Prophets? And if it was foretold of Him, then 'tis ridiculous to pretend that any one's Claim to this Character ought to be tried by the Prophecies, exclusive of Miracles, because the Prophecies themselves refer to Miracles, as a distinguishing Part of that Character.

BUT I go on to examine this Pretense farther. It is acknowledg'd that a Contradiction to, or even a want of other Marks assign'd in the Prophecies of the

* John viii. 31.

† John ii. 11.

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Messiah, would be such a Disproof of any ones Pretensions to that Title, as no Appearance of Miracles could over-rule: Because no one Mark could conclude without, or in Contradiction to, others equally requir'd: But then these Defects must be plain and apparent. The Prophecies, supposed to be contradicted, must be such as evidently related to the *Messiah*, and the Circumstances supposed to be defective, must be certain and determinate: If the Application in these Cases be doubtful and uncertain, no Objection suggested by it, can set aside so direct a Proof, as Miracles wrought in Attestation of any Person's being the *Messiah*. If the Author whom I oppose in this Conclusion, could have produced any plain Prophecy of the *Messiah*, or any plain Mark under which he was foretold, and shewn that it was either contradicted, or not answer'd by *Jesus Christ*, he would have offer'd something in Bar to the Evidence arising from his Miracles. But all he has attempted to shew, is that some of the Prophecies referr'd to by Christ or his Apostles, related to other Persons, and
other

other Events, and not to him. It will, I suppose, be said, that this is sufficient. For Christ and his Apostles having appeal'd to these Passages of the *Jewish* Scriptures as Proofs of his being the *Messiah*, their Credit depends on the Validity of these Allegations: And if they are found to falsify, or even mistake in them, they cannot be those inspired Persons we take them for, and must upon the whole be consider'd as Impostors. This I think is the full Force of this Objection; and 'tis confess'd, that the Inspiration of Christ and his Apostles, is a fundamental Point in this Question. But before this Objection can conclude against it, it must be clearly proved.

1st. THAT the Passages on which it is founded, were really appeal'd to by Christ, or his Apostles, as Proofs of his being the *Messiah*. And then,

2^{ly}. THAT they are not good Proofs of it. That Christ or his Apostles might apply many Sayings and Expressions occurring in the Law and the Prophets,
only

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only by way of Illustration, or Accommodation, is a very possible Supposition ; because 'tis a way of Writing and Speaking which has at all Times been used. Such Applications as these are not intended as Proofs, and therefore 'tis frivolous, from their not proving, to infer any Thing against the Credit, Skill, or Inspiration of those who make them. And where any Passage, apply'd by Christ or his Apostles, will *possibly* bear this Supposition, it ought to be admitted ; because where we have the best direct Proof of any Person's Inspiration that in the Nature of the Thing can be given, (and such Miracles certainly are) Reason will not permit us to give up such Evidence to any Objection, which admits but a *possible* Solution. But suppose there is no Room for this Solution ; That the Passage in Objection was plainly appeal'd to as a Proof that *Jesus* was the *Messiah*, and yet does not prove it : Yet if there be any Probability, that 'twas an Argument upon the Concessions of the *Jews*, it might be very proper for their Conviction, and
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such as an honest, a reasonable, and, I will add, an inspired Man might apply, without any Impeachment of his Veracity, Sense, or Inspiration. This is a Way of arguing, which has ever been allow'd; and why Christ and his Apostles should be debarr'd from it, no Reason can be given: That this Supposition is not only possible but very probable, will appear, when we consider that the *Jewish* Nation, for some Time before the Appearance of *Jesus Christ*, had strong Expectations of their Messiah. Under such a Persuasion it may well be supposed, that the Learned among them had with more than ordinary Attention search'd the prophetick Writings for the Marks and Designations of him, and might probably apprehend him to be delineated in some Passages, which had no Relation to him. If we consider the Obscurity of Prophecies before their Completion; How apt a Man, who reads such Writings with an Intention on one Point, would be to fancy a Relation to it, and with what Fondness he would entertain any Appearance of so reputable
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ble a Discovery, it can scarce be imagin'd but Instances of this Kind must have happen'd : And the same Reasons, together with the Character of the Doctor, would easily recommend it to general Persuasion. Now Christ and his Apostles might justly argue with them upon these Presumptions, however they were mistaken in them. Whatever they were in themselves, they were Proofs to them, and might successfully be urged for their Conviction. Unless indeed, we suppose Christ and his Apostles the weakest Men that ever lived, we cannot imagine they would argue with the *Jews*, upon such Principles as they were either known to deny, or if they would but barely deny, the Argument was at an End. Supposing then, not granting, that any of the Passages referr'd to by Christ or his Apostles, in Assertion of the Character he took upon him, do not prove it ; yet we see, that by a Supposition not only possible but probable, and supported by strong Presumptions of Fact, the Application becomes reasonable and proper, and consequen tly

frequently very consistent with the Inspiration of those who made it.

WELL, but if we have no Evidence from the Predictions of the *Jewish Revelation*, which attests *Jesus* to be *that Prophet* who shou'd come, independently on the Concessions of the *Jews*; then there is in Reality no Proof of that Conclusion; for 'tis confess'd that Miracles, without a concurring Testimony from the Prophecies, are not a sufficient Evidence of his being *That Prophet*.

WE admit it; and therefore tho' we observe, that every Allegation which the * Writer in our View has objected to, might be defended from all his Inferences upon the preceding Suppositions, which 'tis impossible for him to disprove, yet we acknowledge that the Nature of the Conclusion in Question requires some real Proof of this Kind. And such we are at Liberty to insist on, notwithstanding any Thing he has offer'd

* *Grounds and Reasons, &c.*

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to the contrary. For has he examin'd all the *Jewish* Prophecies which, we affirm, related to the *Messiah*, and were fulfill'd in *Jesus Christ*? Far from it. And therefore should we give up the Allegations he has examin'd, as Arguments only upon the Concession of the *Jews*, yet still there may be real Proof enough in others to support our Conclusion. But we give up none, and hope to shew that every Allegation of Christ or his Apostles, and even those he has consider'd, affords such incontestable Proof of our Conclusion, as over-rules all his Objections against them.

BUT first I would ask, Are there in the *Jewish* Writings, any Prophecies relating to the *Messiah*, or not? If there are none, how came it to pass that so confident, so universal an Expectation of such a Person prevail'd among that People? If there are any more certain and determinate in their Relation than these, let them be produced, and let the Pretensions of our Lord be examin'd by them. If there are none more determinate

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minate than these, then we must conclude, that the *Jews* saw enough in these, for the Ground of that most firm and general Expectation. The Relation must have appear'd very clearly and indubitably to them, tho' 'tis easy to imagine, that when so much of the *Jewish* Writings and Traditions are lost, the Lights which ascertain'd it to them, may not appear to us.

BUT to bring this Argument to a short, and, I think, a decisive Issue ; shou'd we admit that the *Jews* saw these Scriptures in no other Light than appears to us now, (more than this cannot be desir'd, nor can so much be demanded) yet we contend, that the Application of them by Christ and his Apostles was attended with such irresistible Proof of its Fidelity, as must overbear all Scruples and Objections against it. For let us suppose a *Jew* in our Saviour's Time had objected to any of his Allegations of the antient Prophecies, all that our *Free-Thinker* has suggested. The Point in Question
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between Christ and him, must have been, — Whether the Prophet in such Passage had any View to the *Messiah*, or not. For 'tis not pretended, that there is any Prophecy of the *Messiah* which cannot be apply'd to Christ; Nor is a sufficient Correspondence deny'd between the Places cited, and the Circumstances or Events of Christ's Life: But the Dispute is, whether those Passages had, in their first Intention, any relation to the *Messiah*. Now, could any Argument in the Nature of the thing, be more decisive of this Question, than the Testimony of God? And could the Testimony of God appear by any stronger Evidence, than the Power of Miracles supporting the Allegation? God certainly knew the Intention of every Prophecy deliver'd from his Spirit; and when the Person who apply'd this Prophecy to the *Messiah*, gave the best Proof which possibly can be given, that he was sent by God, and acted and spake by his Commission, God himself must be understood to affirm his Application. The Authority of the Exposition must, in such

such a Case, be equal to that of the Prophecy; for there cou'd not be better Proof that the Prophet was sent by God, than the Expositor gave of his Mission: And there must be altogether as good Reason to assent to One, as to the Other. To persuade us therefore to set aside Miracles in this Debate, is to persuade us to set aside the most decisive Evidence, that the Nature of the Question admits of, and which no Objection but a manifest Impossibility can render inconclusive. For if it be but *possible* that these Passages might relate to the *Messiah*, the Affirmation of a Person whose Mission from God is attested by Miracles, ought to assure us they did so. I shall observe only farther on this Head, that the Distance of Time at which we now consider this Argument, gives no Advantage to the Objection, nor takes away any from the Answer; because we have at this time as good Evidence for the Miracles, as we have for the Prophecies; or the Tradition of the Miracles is as well derived down to us, as the Tradition of the Prophecies.

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UPON the whole I hope it has appear'd, that the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles are in general a proper Evidence of the Christian Revelation ; and, in Concurrence with such other Proofs, as by plain Consequence follow from them, of that particular Conclusion of our Faith, that *Jesus Christ* was the *Messiah* promised to the *Jews*. And therefore our Lord might justly appeal to the *Works he did, as bearing Witness of him*. I have consider'd a late Objection, which pretends to supersede this Proof, and have endeavour'd to shew it insufficient ; And that the Conclusions which necessarily arise from our Lord's and his Apostles Miracles, do themselves discharge this Objection, and solve all the Difficulties it pretends to suggest.

ALL that remains to give this Argument its full Force, is an Inquiry of Fact, — Whether such Miracles were wrought, or not. And if we have as good Evidence of These, as we have of any other ancient Facts, or as it can be
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expected we should have, supposing them to have been perform'd, we have all the Evidence that a reasonable Inquirer ought to insist on. And if the Facts are allow'd, the Conclusions they suggest, are as certain to us, as they were to those who saw them perform'd. Our Belief, indeed, stands assured in our holy Religion by several concurrent Proofs of great Force ; But I look upon this from Miracles as the chief Foundation of our Faith ; a Proof equally adapted to the Conviction of all Capacities, and which cannot be set aside without weakening all the rest. To which therefore we ought firmly to adhere ; resolutely to defend a Station of so much Strength and Advantage to our Cause ; and not suffer ourselves to be cheated out of it, by the Sophistry of *those, who lie in wait to deceive* *.

* Ephes. iv. 14.



S E R M O N VI.



J O H N X. XXV.

The Works that I do in my Father's Name, bear Witness of me.



IN my preceding Reflections on this Subject, I inquired how far Miracles are in their Nature a conclusive Evidence of a divine Revelation ; and what Objections or Defects are a Bar to this Proof : And observed in particular, that no such Objection either barr'd, or postponed our Attention to this Evidence, as alledged for the Gospel. We are therefore now

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at Liberty to go on, and examine the Allegation its self. And if we have all the Proof that the Nature of the Subject admits, that Jesus Christ and his Apostles really perform'd Miracles in Attestation of their divine Mission, we cannot refuse the Evidence they give to the Christian Revelation.

N O W if there be any Defect in the Assertion of this Argument, it must arise from one of these Suggestions, either

Ist. W E have not sufficient Assurance, that the Facts reported of Christ and his Apostles were really Miracles. Or,

II^{ly}. W E have not sufficient Reason to credit the Reports themselves.

B Y *Miracles*, I understand sensible Effects of the special, and extraordinary Power of God. Every Action indeed which apparently exceeds the Power of the Agent who performs it, may in a general Sense be call'd a Miracle; but unless it appears, from the Nature or Circumstances

cumstances of it, to be wrought by God, it cannot be an Evidence of a divine Revelation. That we may not go back again into internal Objections, I will suppose, till the contrary is shewn in some Instance, that there is no Fact reported of Christ or his Apostles, which exceeds the Power of God to perform. And it will appear from the Facts themselves that they are such, at least some of them such, as must have been perform'd either by the extraordinary Interposition of God, or by the Assistance of some other intelligent Agent of superior Power to Man. That the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles were not wrought by the Assistance of evil Spirits, I think the Doctrines which they attest, are a sufficient Proof. It could serve no Interest of malicious wicked Spirits, to give Credit to so pure, so rational a Morality, so conducive to the private and social Happiness of Mankind; and to so holy, and spiritual a Worship of the Deity. A Religion, which recall'd the World from the Adoration of Demons; which taught Men to abhor their Worship,

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and profess the utmost Enmity and Detestation of them. And since the Doctrines and the Miracles must be refer'd to the same Author, if 'tis incredible that the Doctrine shou'd proceed from Devils, it must be equally incredible, that the Miracles shou'd be wrought by their Power. And if they were wrought by good Spirits, they must have acted under the Direction of God, and consequently their Power was his.

BUT I presume, we need not be much solicitous to defend our Lord's Miracles from this Suggestion, which supposes an Acknowledgment of Angels and Spirits. From our present Adversaries, we may rather expect to be told, that neither God nor Devil had any thing to do with them; but they were wrought purely by the Sleight, the Skill, or the Confederacy of Men. But we hope this Imputation will appear refuted, by the Nature and Circumstances of the Facts reported. Many of them are such, as manifestly exceed all human Power;
were

were perform'd in publick Concourses of the People; had several Thousands of Witnesses, and were in their Circumstances capable of such Trial and Examination, as no Imposture can be imagin'd to escape, or elude. The giving Sight, for instance, to a Man * born blind, without any other Application than washing in common Water, is an Operation which no human Skill can account for; neither can it admit any probable Suspition of Imposture. The Fact was † examin'd with the strictest Inquisition, and very unwillingly acknowledg'd, by those who would gladly have discover'd the least Colour of Objection to it. The Person must have been known to great Numbers from his Infancy, many Years before our Lord took upon him any publick Character: And therefore 'tis unimaginable, that he and his Parents should have acted in concert with Christ, and pretended this Blindness, to give him the Reputation of curing it. Neither was it possible for the Man to

‡ John ix. † V. 15, &c.

pretend

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pretend to see, when he did not: This must have been so silly, so discoverable a Cheat, that it could not have obtain'd Credit for a Day. Equally unaccountable from any human Power and Collusion, is the restoring the impotent Man at the Pool of * *Bethesda*. The Cure was perform'd, without any other outward Means than a bare Word spoken. It was attended by a Crowd of Witnesses, † *a Multitude being in the Place*. And the Person had labour'd under the Infirmary *thirty and eight Years*, long before our Lord was born. Many other of the Miracles which attest the Gospel, are equally acquitted from these Suggestions. I will mention only One more, the wonderful Gift of Tongues to the Eleven at Pentecost, a Time when *Jerusalem* was even thronged by a Concourse from various Nations. Was it possible, think you, that Persons of their low Education, should really acquire so many different Languages by any Industry or Application of their

* John v. † V. 13, 14.

own, even tho' they had attended to nothing else, from the first Day their Master call'd them? Or can we imagine they should be able to concert this Appearance with such a Diversity of Strangers, from Countries where they had no Correspondence; and that not only with a few, but with all and every one, of each Nation then present? And yet these moral Impossibilities must appear practicable, before we can suspect any Imposture in this Miracle. If therefore we allow the Facts as reported, since they are manifestly beyond human Abilities, and there is no just Suspicion either of the Assistance of evil Spirits, or the Collusion of Men, we must acknowledge the Finger of God in them.

THE Result then of the Argument rests on an Inquiry of Fact, antient Fact; which, in the Nature of the Thing, is capable of no other Proof but Testimony. And if we have the best Evidence that Testimony can give to such Facts, if we have as much as could be expected, supposing them to have been performed;

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form'd; if no antient Facts are better attested, no Testimonies better supported than these, we have all the Proof that any equitable Man can desire; and he must act against Reason, who refuses his Assent to it.

THAT the Scriptures, in which these Facts are related, were written by the Persons whose Names they bear; and that they are transmitted to us without any material Alteration, any that can affect the Credibility of these Reports, we have more and better Evidence than for any other Book in the World. If therefore these Reports are incredible, it must be for one of these Reasons; Either there is just Suspicion that these Relaters were deceived themselves; or that they intended to deceive the rest of the World, which is the Second Point I propos'd to clear. And

1st, We have the greatest Reason to believe, these Relaters were not deceiv'd themselves. They tell us, that † *what*

† Ep. of Joh. i.

their

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their Eyes saw, and their Hands handled, that declare they unto us. They were Witnesses not of one or two only, but of a vast Number of our Lord's Miracles; many more than they have transmitted to us: And had all imaginable Opportunities of examining the Reality of them. They attended their Master in all his Privacies; and if he had acted in Confederacy with any, they must either themselves have been the Persons, or must unavoidably have discover'd His Correspondencies: And if they had detected Him of Imposture in one Instance, they might reasonably have concluded the same of all others. And in that great Miracle, our Lord's Resurrection, they tell us, They were very incredulous, and look'd upon the first Reports of it as * *idle Tales*. That when it was yet farther confirm'd, several † *believ'd it not*. And One of them, who took upon him to think more freely than the rest, declared, That unless he saw the very same wounded Body which had suffer'd, and || *put his*

* Luk. xxiv. 11. † Mar. xvi. 13. ‡ Joh. x. 25.
Fingers

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Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and thrust his Hand into his Side, he would not believe. This sensible incontestable Proof was given them, and they profess themselves assured with the fullest Conviction, that the Body they saw, and handled, was the same they had before conversed with; the same Flesh and Bones they took down from the Cross, embalm'd, and buried. If we can suppose Men deceived in such Evidences as these, we cannot depend on the Reality of any Perceptions. But they were farther confirmed in their Belief of their Lord's Miracles, by finding the same Power, according to His Promise, communicated to themselves. And how possible soever we might imagine it, for them to be imposed on by their Master, they could not impose on themselves. They must be conscious to their own Fraud or Honesty, and must know with certainty, whether the Miracles they wrought in their own Persons were real or not. There cannot therefore be any Suspicion, that they were imposed on themselves. All that can be doubted

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ed is, whether they acted faithfully, and did not intend to deceive the World in these Relations.

Now, before we can reasonably entertain so hard a Suspicion of any Persons, we should be able to assign some Motive, that might induce them to it. If the Apostles of our Lord, the original Witnesses of these Facts, and some of them the Authors of those Histories which report them, proposed any temporal Advantages in this Design on the World, they were miserably deceiv'd in the Event: For Scorn, Poverty, and Persecution attended them where-ever they went. They left their Friends and Country, and, after all the Varieties of Misery and Distress that Men could be expos'd to, they chearfully gave up their Lives, even on Racks and Crosses, in Confirmation of their Report. And is it imaginable, that so many Persons should thus resolutely persist, in asserting what they knew to be false? That they should endure all that can be terrible and afflictive to human Nature, merely for the
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the Sport of imposing on the Credulity of a few Converts? And that not one of all the Number should ever be prevail'd on, either by Interest, Honesty, or Fear, to impeach the Cheat, and discover an unprofitable, persecuted Imposture?

It may perhaps be said, that Vanity is a strong Passion; and the Ambition of being Authors of a new Religion to the World, is a Motive that may account for all this. No doubt these Passions, when rais'd to their utmost Height, are able to carry Men into as great Extravagances as any other. But such Excesses of Vanity are very uncommon, and rarely found in single Examples: Neither can any Thing be more incredible, than that this Spirit should possess such a Number of Men in so equal, so uniform, so invincible a Degree of Obstinacy, as appeared in every one of the Apostles. And when we observe the Characters of the Persons, we must surely even hence acquit them of so improbable a Suggestion. They
were

Were poor, illiterate Men ; of low Education and Employments ; bred in a Way of Life, which render'd them the least apt to entertain, and the least qualify'd to execute so great a Project. But supposing them all of the most active enterprising Genius ; yet can we imagine Persons of their mean Rank in Life, capable of digesting, and concerting such a Design, in such exact Harmony and Consistency with each other ? That they should all, separated in distant Countries, agree in the same Relations, propose the same System of Doctrines, and every one act his Part with such Firmness and Constancy, as not even to be tortured into a Departure from his Professions ? Such were the Apostles of Christ ; the Relaters and Witnesses of His Miracles, and such their Conduct. Now, I say, that Persons of this Character, void of Learning, and all those acquired Accomplishments, which might be suspected to infuse an Ambition of becoming Teachers of the World, should engage in so vast a Design, as changing the Religion of all Nations on the Earth ;

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That

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That they should carry it on with such unmoveable Patience and Resolution, against the fiercest Opposition of all the Powers of the World, and all unanimously persist in it, even to Death; can be imputed to no Principle, but a firm Conviction of the Truth of what they asserted; a Conscience of Duty towards God, and the Expectation, they profess'd, of being rewarded by him in another Life. These are Circumstances which put their Fidelity beyond all reasonable, I think, beyond all possible Question; such Proofs of Honesty, as no Historian besides themselves ever gave. We may also add, in Confirmation of their Report, that many Particulars of it are attested both by Heathen, and *Jewish* Writers: And some of the earliest Opposers of Christianity, of whom we have any Remains, acknowledge the Fact, that our Lord wrought Miracles. It may be farther observed, that the same miraculous Powers which are reported of Christ and his Apostles, were transmitted to their Successors, and continued for some Ages in the Church. A Fact
so

fully proved by Miracles. 147

so notorious that * *Tertullian*, so late as the End of the second or Beginning of the third Century, appeals to it in a publick Apology, and gives a solemn Challenge to his Heathen Adversaries, to put the Question between them upon this Issue. No reasonable Man can imagine, that a Person of Learning and Character, would have exposed himself and his Cause to the Shame of so easy a Refutation, as must have attended it, if the Facts had not been known and incontestable. Now suppose, if common Sense will suffer us to suppose it, that the Apostles and Writers of the Gospel, had agreed to report of their Lord and themselves false Facts, or counterfeit Miracles; Could they transmit the same Art, or the same Insincerity to others, to many Thousands, in a long Succession after their Death? Can it be believed, that none should reveal the mighty Secret, and discover the Application made to him to carry on the Intrigue? They went on, it seems, from Age to Age, handing down the Art of Jugling, and imposing fictiti-

* *Apolog. pag. 22. Ed. Par. 1675. & ad Scap. pag. 69.*

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ous Miracles on the World; and not one, of all the Multitude that must have been intrusted, could be prevail'd on, by all the Discouragements that Malice and Power could put them under, to betray his Confidence, and own the Imposture. Sure such Improbabilities need no Refutation. And if Miracles were really wrought in the Christian Church, after the Death of the Apostles, by those who succeeded in their Commission and Doctrine, then the Evidence is plainly carry'd on; and God in these Miracles bore Witness, both to the Doctrine of Christ, and his Apostles, and to the Miracles related of them.

IN sum then, if there appears no probable Suspicion, that the Historians of the Gospel were deceiv'd themselves, or acted insincerely, and with an Intention to deceive the World, but all the Evidence of the contrary that the Nature of the Thing admits, their Relations have all the Credibility that any History can have; more, indeed, than any other History in the World can pretend to:

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to: And consequently if we refuse our Assent to these Relations, we must reject the Credit of all History, and believe nothing that was done before we were born, or which we did not actually see with our own Eyes: An Absurdity, to which if our Adversaries will be content to be driven, we need not, I think, trouble ourselves to follow them any farther.

AND if these Histories are true, the Miracles they report were actually perform'd. And if we can have no Suspicion of Imposture in them, we must acknowledge them to have been wrought by the Power of God. And if they were wrought by God, then the Doctrine they attest must be the Doctrine of God. For 'tis a Contradiction to the Goodness, Justice, and Veracity of God, to suppose he could give the Testimony of his Power, to any Doctrine but what he approved, and required to be believ'd upon his Authority.

THUS then the Argument from Miracles stands. If there be any just internal Objection to the Doctrine they attest; if it be such as cannot consist with the Attributes of the divine Idea; if it contradicts any manifest Truth, natural or moral, no Appearance of Miracles can convince us, that such Doctrine is a divine Revelation; because we are sure God cannot affirm a manifest Falshood. And, for the same Reason, if 'tis irreconcilable to a precedent Revelation, we cannot believe it to be from God, because God cannot contradict Himself. Either of these Objections, if clear and evident, must necessarily outweigh any Appearance of Miracles; because the Supposition of God's affirming such Doctrines is simply impossible, and implies a Contradiction. But in all Appearances of Miracles, how highly *probable* soever, there is yet a *Possibility* of our being deceived: And 'tis more reasonable for us to believe we are deceiv'd, even where there is but a bare Possibility that we may be, than to believe

lieve that God can affirm a Falshood, which is impossible. But where there is no such internal Objection against the Doctrinē, and we have as full Satisfaction in the Reality of the Miracles as the Nature of the Subject admits, we are obliged, upon their Attestation, to receive the Doctrinē as a divine Revelation; because we have in that Case the utmost Evidence that can be given us of a divine Revelation.

AND since, as I have shewn, there lies no such internal Objection against the Doctrinē of the Gospel; and there is as good Proof as the Subject is capable of, that the Miracles reported in it were really wrought; I may resume my Conclusion against the *Deist*, — That we have all the Proof that any reasonable Man can expect, or require, that the Gospel is a divine Revelation: The utmost, indeed, that could have been given us, supposing it to have been from God.

BUT I am concern'd to obviate an Objection, which I apprehend from another Quarter. — That, by this way of arguing, I make the Grounds of our Belief of the Christian Revelation to be but *probable*, and not absolutely *infallible*. I confess I do so ; and think the Nature of the Subject capable of no higher Evidence. But what is so highly probable, demands the Assent of every reasonable Man. But then, I say farther, that he who upon this, tho' but *probable*, Evidence, admits the Revelation, must afterwards acknowledge an *infallible* Authority in that Revelation.

TO clear this, let us suppose a Person in our Saviour's Time had not seen his Miracles, but believed them on the Report of some credible Friends, and, in Consequence of them, had acknowledg'd his divine Mission, as he very reasonably might do. It is plain, the Foundation of his Faith would have been but *probable*, the Testimony of fallible Men,
and

and such, as if, when he came to hear our Lord's Doctrine, he had found Him affirm a manifest Falshood, must have been over-weigh'd. But if no such Objection appear'd against his Doctrine, the Evidence of his Miracles, tho' but *probable*, was sufficient to convince him of his Mission from God, and consequently of his *infallible* Authority.

SUPPOSE, in another Instance, — I am in general convinced of the Christian Revelation, and that the Scriptures in which it is contain'd are infallibly true. — I find in these Scriptures a Passage, whose Meaning I do not understand. — I consult, as in Reason I should do, some Person more knowing than myself. If my Guide gives me a manifestly false Proposition as the Sense of that Scripture, I cannot, upon his or any Authority, admit this to be the Sense of Words, which I acknowledge to be a divine Revelation. If this be really the Sense of those Words, I must retract my Belief of their divine
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Authority; and if I believe their divine Authority, I must reject this Interpretation of them. But if no such Objection arises against his Exposition, and the Construction of the Words will bear it, I may reasonably, upon his Authority, admit it as the Sense of that Scripture. The Evidence I have that this is the Sense of it, is but probable, the Judgment of a fallible Man: But when, upon this probable Evidence, I receive the Proposition he assigns, as the Sense of that Scripture, I believe that Proposition, not as affirm'd by him, but as affirm'd by the infallible Authority of God.

THUS it is in the Assent we give to the Christian Revelation, upon the Evidence of the Miracles which attest it. The Ground of our Assurance that such Miracles were wrought, is but probable. The Credibility of the Relaters, and even the Tradition of the Books in which they are recorded, is no more than probable; and would be overbalanced by any manifest Falshood in the
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Doctrines of the Gospel. But since the Doctrine is free from any such Objection, and we have more and better Evidence for the Fidelity of the Gospel-Historians, and the Tradition of their Books, than appears for any other Books or Historians; we must act unreasonably if we deny, or even doubt, these Reports. So high a Probability demands a certain Assent. We every Day believe upon less, and he would justly be esteem'd a Madman, who should refuse to do so. But when upon this Evidence, tho' but *probable*, we believe the Miracles, and consequently the Revelation which they attest, we then believe the Contents of that Revelation with divine Faith, as *infallibly* true because affirm'd by God.

IT is therefore a vain Fallacy, by which the Emissaries of the Church of *Rome* sometimes puzzle weak or confused Understandings; — That unless we admit the Infallibility of the Church, we have no infallible Grounds for any Article of our Faith: Because, as we have
seen,

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seen, a probable Evidence may lead us to the Acknowledgment of an infallible Authority. We receive the Books of Scripture as written by the Authors whose Names they bear, and believe the Fidelity of the Relations they contain, upon the same Kind of Evidence on which we receive the Books, and credit the Relations of *Livy* or *Tacitus*; tho', we presume, we have stronger and better Evidence of this kind for the Books and Relations of Scripture, than for the other. The concurrent Tradition of the universal Church, is a very high Degree of Evidence of this Kind, and the very best we have; because it extends to all Parts of Scripture: But still 'tis in its Nature only probable. And to convince any one of this, I need only observe, that a like Concurrence of Testimony, from the Enemies of the Christian Religion, confirming any Relation of Scripture, is in its Nature stronger Evidence than this; for the same Reasons that the Concurrence of an Author, who professedly wrote against any Historian, would more strongly confirm any Relation

lation in him, than the Concurrence of one who was known to favour him, and may be suspected to copy after him.

THE Confirmation indeed which the Gospel-Writings receive from the Testimony of Enemies, reaches but to few Parts of them; and therefore upon the whole we receive them infinitely less upon this Evidence, than the Testimony of the Church: But still I contend, that so far as This reaches, 'tis in its Nature stronger Evidence. And if this Evidence is in its Nature only probable, it can with no Reason be pretended that the other is more than probable. But so probable it is, that no Man acting rationally can resist its Force. Whereas the Romanists Way of proving the Authority of Scripture from the Infallibility of their Church, can never convince any Man, who is disposed to deny it. And 'tis certain, an Argument which will not do that, is good for nothing. For how is this Infallibility of their Church to be proved? Why
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by Scripture. So that the Authority of Scripture is to be proved by the Infallibility of the Church; and the Infallibility of the Church by the Authority of Scripture. Which is just as good a Proof, as a Mahometan might give for the *Alchoran*. ——— I believe the *Alchoran* to be true, because the *Mufti*, who is infallible, affirms it to be so; and I believe the *Mufti* to be infallible, because the *Alchoran* says he is so. Only this Advantage the Mahometan may have in his Argument, that he might, for what I know, produce an Affirmation of the *Mufti's* Infallibility in the *Alchoran*; but the Church of *Rome* will never be able to shew her Infallibility affirm'd in the Christian Scriptures. They may delight themselves, and amuse their Converts with this Dance in a Circle, if they please; but they must excuse us, if we choose rather to ground our Belief of the Scriptures, and of the Divine Revelation contain'd in them, on such rational Proofs, as may enable us to *resist Gainsayers, and give an Answer, to any Man who*
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asketh us a Reason, of the Hope that is in us.

THAT we have such rational Proof of the Christian Revelation, I have endeavour'd to shew. — That no Objection appears against the Matter of it, which can bear the Evidence of the Miracles which attest it; — That we have all the Proof that these Miracles were really perform'd, which the Nature of the Subject requires, or admits that we have no reasonable Suspicion that the Relaters were deceiv'd themselves, or intended to deceive us; — That we have better Assurance of the Fidelity of their Reports, than for any other antient History. These we think as full Evidence of the Facts related, as any rational Man can insist on, and we desire no more. And if the Facts are allow'd, they are such as prove the Divine Authority of those who perform'd them, and, consequently, of the Revelation, in Confirmation of which they were perform'd.

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OUR Faith, as I observ'd, is assured in the Gospel-Revelation, by the concurrent Support of several other Proofs of great Force. Such is the swift and wonderful Propagation of Christianity, by Instruments in their natural Powers weak and contemptible, not only without the Assistance, but against the most enraged Opposition of secular Power. And such especially is the exact Completion of our Lord's Prophecy, in such a Destruction of the Country, and such an utter Dissipation of the People of the *Jews*, as no human Sagacity can be imagin'd to foresee, and which never had an Example in any other Nation under Heaven.

BUT the Evidence I undertook to consider, was that arising from the Miracles wrought in Attestation of the Gospel. A Subject indeed of too great Extent, to be fully treated in a Discourse of this Nature. But I hope, what I have offer'd, is sufficient to remove all material Objections, and lead any equitable Man,
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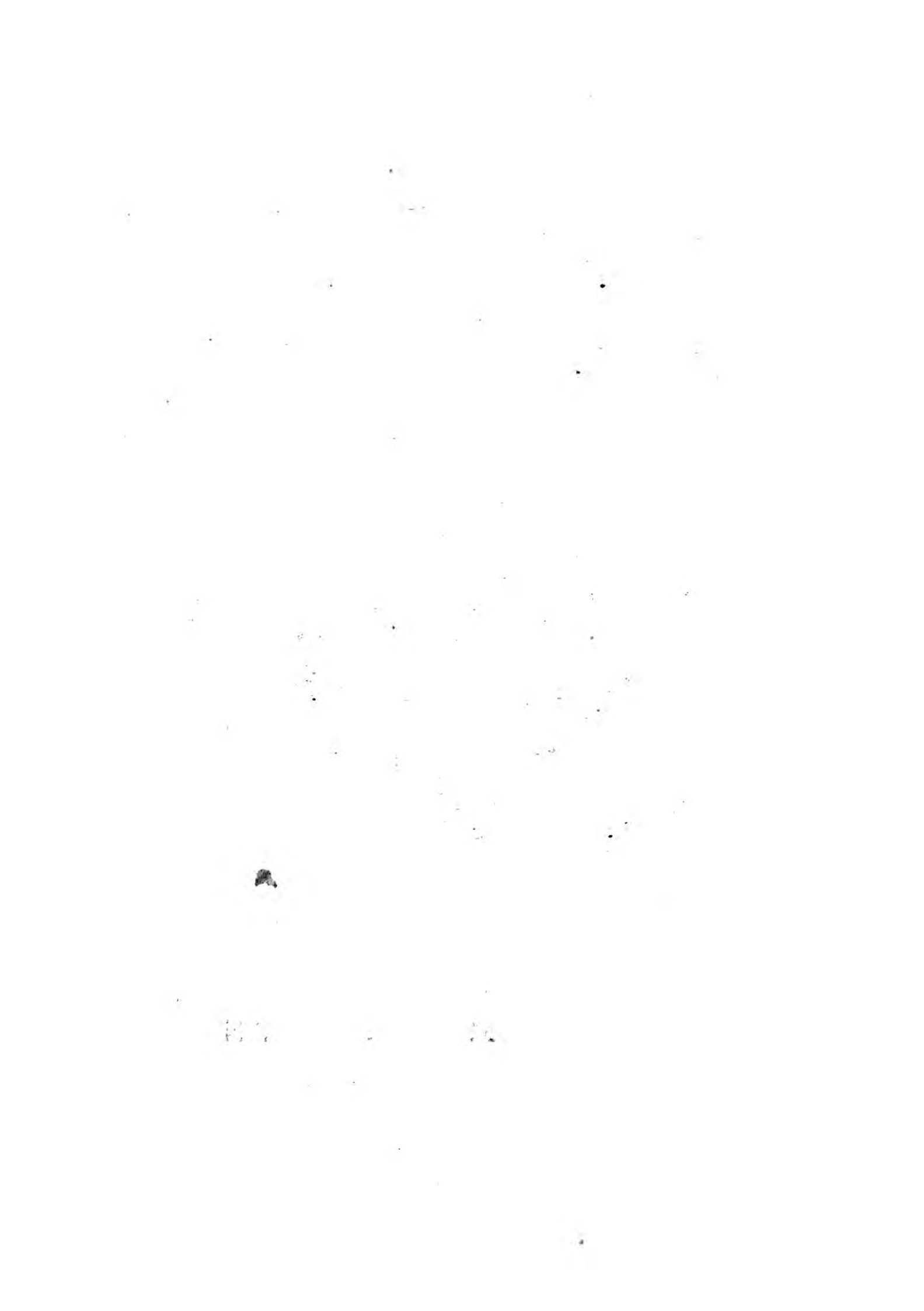
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to the Acknowledgment made to our Saviour, * *Rabbi, thou art a Teacher come from God, for no Man could do the Miracles that thou dost, except God was with him.*

* John iii. 2.

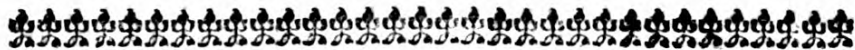


M **SERMON**





S E R M O N VII.



J O H N III. xix.

*This is the Condemnation, that
Light is come into the World,
and Men loved Darknes rather
than Light, because their Deeds
were Evil.*



WE have hitherto treated the Adversaries of Christianity as Men pretending to Reason, and seriously dissatisfy'd with the Proofs of its divine Authority; and have endeavour'd their Conviction under that Appearance.

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But if the Scripture before us has given us the true Account of Infidelity, we must now take leave to consider them in a different Character, as wicked immoral Men, prejudiced by their Vices against the Acknowledgment of Truth. For thus our Lord tells us, that his Gospel had all the Evidence of *a Light* from Heaven that could be required; but this Light made Discoveries unacceptable to the Passions of Men; and therefore they shut their Eyes against it. *They loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil.* To us, the Affirmation of our Divine Master, who ** knew what was in Man*, is a full Assurance that this is really the Case: But those who are Infidels to his Authority, we may expect to resent this as a partial invidious Suggestion, and demand our Proof of it.

Now, in this Argument, demonstrative Proof is not to be required. The Secrets of Mens Hearts, and the Mo-

* John ii. 25.

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tives they act upon, can be collected only from probable Presumptions : And if there appear in this Case, the strongest Presumptions that Mens Opposition to the Gospel, proceeds from the Contrariety of its Doctrines to their Lusts and Passions, we have all the Proof that the Nature of the Thing admits.

THE Position of our Lord, *That Light is come into the World*, we have endeavour'd to assert ; and, upon an attentive Examination, can discover no Defect in the Evidence of the Gospel ; but find it as fully proved, as any reasonable Man can require a divine Revelation should be. Hence therefore arises a just Suspition, at least, that want of Evidence is not the true Cause of Mens Opposition to it. And if it farther appears,

It. THAT the Cause here assign'd, an Attachment to vitious and immoral Interests, is every way proportion'd to this Effect ; if it be found, in other Instances, to suppress the Evidence of the clearest Truth,

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and over-rule the Convictions of Reason: And,

II. IF the Lusts and Passions of Men are more concern'd to oppose the Acknowledgment of the Gospel, than any other Conclusion, we have all the Proof that can be desired, that our Lord has here ascribed the Infidelity of Men to its true Principle. And having under these Heads supported the Charge, I shall then,

III. ASSERT the Justice of the Condemnation here pronounced, on those who reject the Gospel.

I. LET us inquire whether the Cause here assign'd to Infidelity, an Attachment to vicious and immoral Interests, be not proportion'd to it: Whether it be not, in other Instances, found to suppress the Evidence of Truth, and over-rule the Convictions of Reason.

THE

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THE two general Objects of human Pursuits, are Truth and Happiness ; but the Influence of the latter far exceeds that of the former. The first and governing Passion of the Soul, is a Desire of Happiness ; and the Love of Truth is only subordinate to it. And agreeably, we never find Men much concern'd about the Truth or Falshood of a Proposition, merely because 'tis true or false, but because their Interest appears to be, some Way or other, affected by it. 'Tis this Motive engages their Attention ; and, according to the real or imaginary Importance of the Interest in their View, and its Dependence on the Question before them, the Warmth of the Contest rises higher, the Prejudices of those who are mistaken appear stronger, and their Conviction becomes more difficult. Every Dispute we inquire into, every Book we read, and every Man we converse with, will, in some Instance or other, confirm to us the Truth of this Reflection. Take the most exact Reasoner on in-

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different Subjects, one who can accurately distinguish true from false, and judge precisely of the several Degrees of Evidence and Uncertainty; and let a Question be proposed to him in which he has a near Interest concern'd; the Clearness of his Discernment, and the Uprightness of his Judgment will be apt to forsake him: His Reason will bend towards the favourite Side, and very hardly be brought to acknowledge that false, which he passionately desires should be true. Where the Argument is against us, Demonstration will not convince; and where 'tis for us, the least Probabilities have the Power of it.

IF Men judged truly of their Interest, this Bent and Inclination of the Understanding towards it, in the Search of Truth, would be no Disadvantage to us. 'Tis certainly, in its self, a wise Provision of the Author of our Nature, to direct us to our proper Good. For there is a perfect Agreement and Correspondence between Truth and Happiness;

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neither can it ever be our real Interest to deny any Truth. But the Misfortune is, That Men propose false and imaginary Interests as their proper Happiness. These are always contrary to Truth, and by an Attachment to them, the Weight is put into the wrong Scale, and the Understanding is bias'd to Error, which alone can support such a Choice. And when we observe, that the Interests of Passion have the Advantage of early Prepossession, and offer present Ease and Satisfaction, we cannot wonder if they are often preferr'd to the Interests of Reason, which are long before they begin to appear to us; are then generally Reversions, and require Pains and Reflection to represent them in their proper Value. Suppose, then, a Man passionately engaged to vicious Pleasures, to the Satisfaction of any one irregular Appetite; this is his Point of Happiness, the governing End of all his Pursuits. Whatever promotes or encourages this Gratification, will have his Esteem and Applause; and whatever interrupts or opposes it, will be
sure

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fire of his Resentment. Let a Philosopher try, by all the Topicks of Reason and Duty, to convince him of his Error; his Truths will fall upon a Rock, impenetrable, and immoveable; the most fallacious Colour of an Argument, even a Jest, will be thought a sufficient Refutation. But let his Desires abate, and the Object he doated on become indifferent to him; the Man will presently be capable of Reason; and the Truths he was deaf to before, will have their due Weight and Impression. What is it that makes the Difference in this Case? Are the Arguments which now convince him, more conclusive than they were before? No; the Difference is in the Man. The Impediment that hinder'd his Acknowledgment of Truth, is removed: It no longer appears to oppose his Interest, and therefore he has no longer any Aversion from it.

UNLESS Passion could obscure the Light, and overbear the Remonstrances of Reason, there could be no such Thing as Vice in the World: For every Vice
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is contrary to right Reason, and reprov-
ed by it. And consequently, every vi-
tious Man is a Proof of the Conclusion
in Question: And tho' the Power of
Mens Lufts in corrupting their Judg-
ments, appears chiefly with regard to
practical Truths; yet if any specula-
tive Truth draws after it Consequences
equally repugnant to the Interests of a
Man's Passions, it will be equally op-
posed by them. Did Men enter upon
moral and religious Inquiries, with the
same Indifference as they do on mathe-
matical, they would acknowledge Truth
as readily in one, as they do in the
other. But the Conclusions of the for-
mer will not be reconciled to some
Pursuits in which the Man has placed
his Happiness: They oblige him to con-
demn some beloved of his Soul, which
he cannot be prevail'd on to part with.
Every Faculty stands upon Guard to de-
fend this Treasure; and will hear no
Reason, suffer nothing to approach, that
threatens to deprive him of it. Since
therefore, the corrupt Lufts and Passions
of Men, are so apt to blind their Judg-
ment,

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ment, and so strongly dispose them to resist and contradict the Evidence of Truth, whenever it cannot be reconciled to their Indulgences; if it appears upon our

II^d INQUIRY, That the Christian Religion is irreconcilably opposite to every vicious and immoral Interest, it is a just Presumption, that this is the true Cause of its being rejected.

THAT the Gospel is thus opposite to the corrupt Interests of Passion, we need no other Proof than an Appeal to its Doctrines. We there find every Lust restrain'd ; every Appetite of our Nature brought under Rule and Discipline, and confined to certain and those narrow Limits. Every Profelyte to this Religion is required, under a solemn Covenant, to abjure every Satisfaction that exceeds those Bounds ; to mortify every sensual Desire ; nay not only to renounce all irregular Pleasure, but the most innocent Enjoyments of Life, and even Life itself, whenever it stands in
Competition

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Competition with his Duty. And the chief Encouragement proposed to support his Compliance with these severe Terms, is a distant Prospect of Reward in another World, and the Comforts that may arise to him from that Expectation. And can it be wonder'd, that such a Religion as this should meet with Opposition? That Men devoted to the Interests of their Lufts, should unwillingly admit a Rule of Life, so irreconcilable to those Interests? What Evidence of Truth can you imagine, clear enough to over-rule such a Prejudice? Can you hope to convince a Man by Argument, that 'tis his Duty to be miserable? He has placed his supreme Felicity in the Satisfactions you would take from him: He prefers them to all that your Religion offers him, and thinks the Loss of them a more terrible Evil, than all it threatens. If you can find him a Religion that will indulge him in his Lufts, he may probably be your Convert: But to propose the Evidences of such a Religion as the Gospel, to a Mind thus prepossess'd against its Rules, is beginning at
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the wrong End. Before you can convince his Understanding of the Authority of the Teacher, you must reconcile his Affections to his Doctrines; make him sensible that he mistakes his Interest, and pursues his own Destruction; and that a Submission to the Discipline of Christ, will be attended with Satisfaction infinitely preferable to those he is fond of. Thus divine Wisdom addresses Mankind. *My Fruit is better than Gold, and my Revenue than choice Silver* *. Thus our blessed Master invites Men to become his Disciples. *Come unto me all that travel, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you* †. 'Tis by this Motive he sollicitates our Faith, *that He who believeth on him, shall not perish, but have eternal Life* ||. He first endeavours to convince us, that 'tis worth our while to attend to him; that 'tis our Wisdom and Interest to comply with the Terms he proposes; and according as he succeeds in this Application, the Proofs of his Authority will appear more or less conclusive. If the Prospects he opens to

* Prov. viii. 19. † St. Matt. xi. 28. || St. John iii. 15.

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our Faith, can recommend Virtue to our Choice, and render the Vices he reproves our Aversion, he will easily persuade us to acknowledge his Authority. As a good Man assents with Joy to the Christian Revelation, because it appears conducive to his supreme Happiness, and proposes a noble Encouragement to his Virtues; so a wicked Man rejects it, because 'tis contrary to his beloved Interests; cuts him off from all that is delightful to his Soul, and, like the unacceptable Prophet to the King of *Israel*, *prophesies no Good concerning him, but only Evil continually* *: And therefore he resolves not to hear its Reasons, nor own its Authority. But let his Notions of Happiness be changed; let the spiritual Pleasures of our Religion, and the Rewards of Eternity take hold of his Heart and Desires, and be confes'd an over-balance to the Gratifications of his Lufts, the Proofs of the Gospel will appear in a quite different Light; their Evidence be perceiv'd, and their Force submitted to.

2 Chron. xviii. 7.

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LET us, then, stand still a little, and consider what the Evidence we have produced amounts to. That a strong Attachment to a mistaken Interest, will render a Man impatient of hearing, and obstinate in resisting any Truth which is opposite to that Interest, is a Conclusion of common Experience. It is also manifest, that the Doctrines of the Gospel are irreconcilably opposite to the Interests of Passion: Interests, which are found, in daily Observation, to take such hold on Men, that no Advice, no Reason or Authority is able to reclaim their Affections from them. It is certain, that were the Gospel never so well proved, yet, by Men thus prepossess'd against it, the Force of these Proofs wou'd either not be seen, or not be confess'd. Here is then a Cause assign'd, sufficient to account for Mens rejecting the Gospel; and a Cause put in Action; provoked by the Doctrines of this Religion, to exert its utmost Force in opposing it. It is therefore a very just and a very strong Presumption, that this is the real ground
of

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of Mens Quarrel against it. Well, but the moral Rules of Gospel whose Contradiction to Mens Lust we assign as the Cause of their opposing it, are not objected to; but 'tis the Evidence of its Divine Authority is question'd. But if an Acknowledgment of the Authority of the Gospel, draws after it, by necessary Consequence, the Obligation of its Laws; the same Interests that withhold Mens Submission to its Laws, will equally dispose them to reject its Authority. And obvious Reasons may be given, why Men, whose Aversion from Christianity really proceeds from an Impatience of its moral Restraints, should choose to drop that Motive, and turn the Dispute, not against the Matter, but the Authority, of the Command. For a direct Patronage of Vice, is but heavy un reputable Work; and which, as bad as the World is, few will care to appear in. But in disputing the Authority of the Restraint; the Infidel assumes a Character of better Figure and Esteem: He here pretends to a deeper Penetration, and a more accurate Discernment

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than other Men. The attempt on this side will bear a better Face; and (which is considerable) may hope for more Success and Applause from the World. For Men are, generally, inclined to think the moral Commands of the Gospel reasonable enough, where they do not interfere with their personal Vices. Few, therefore, would concur with an open Defence of Immorality, any farther than their particular Passions gave them an Interest in the Argument. Where they were not thus prejudiced, they would declare against it. But an Attack on the Authority of this Religion, comprehends the Interest of every Passion. Every Vice will favour an Expedient which equally serves all, and sets every Man at Liberty, to pursue what each thinks fit to call his Reason. We can give, you see, plain Reasons, why Men, whose real Dissatisfaction arises from the Matter of the Command, should rather turn the Dispute against its Authority: And therefore a Profession to distrust the Evidence of the Gospel, does not in the least abate our Suspicion, that the true Motive to
that

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that Profession is an Aversion from its Discipline. And when we recollect, from a former Inquiry, that the Gospel is as fully proved, as any reasonable Man can expect that any Divine Revelation should be, our Suspicion is not only probable, but has all the Certainty that any Conclusion of that Nature admits of. For when the Cause pretended for this Opposition, appears to be without any just Foundation; and the Cause we assign, Mens Engagement to the Interests of their Passions, is every way proportion'd to this Effect, will overrule the Evidence of Truth, and is provoked to oppose, with its utmost Activity, the Truth of the Gospel, there can be no longer any reasonable Doubt, but this is the true Cause of that Opposition.

I cannot imagine what farther can be offer'd in Bar to this Conclusion, unless it be this — That this way of Arguing supposes every Man, who disputes the Authority of the Gospel, to be a wicked immoral Man. It does so; and

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what then? Why, they can produce, among the Opposers of Christianity, Men of a very regular unblameable Life. Some few perhaps they may; it is manifest, the far greater Number of their Adherents are of a quite different Character. And when these few are examin'd, are they sure we can find no Vice in them, capable of accounting for this Opposition? The Gospel is equally irreconcilable to every Vice; and if a Man be firmly attach'd to any one Point, which he cannot reconcile with that Religion, this one will certainly determine him to reject it. We have an Example of this in the young Man who came to Christ. He had lived, from his Youth up, in the most exact Regularity; and seem'd very well disposed to become a Convert to the Gospel. But when our Lord told him, that the Terms of his Religion went still farther, and obliged him, whenever he required it, to part with his great Possessions, this touched the tender Place in his Affections; he was presently offended, and would hear no more.

SOME

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SOME flegmatick Tempers may be free from the more impetuous Lust of Sensuality ; Or Men may, from Motives of Prudence, refrain from all infamous Vices, and practice many reputable Virtues : They may be chaste and temperate, just and charitable, either from Constitution, or out of secular Policy. Such a Character as this will shine in common Life, and appear not only without Blame, but with Credit and Esteem ; And yet may consist with such Vices, as tho' they make no Shew, may yet determine the Man to the most obstinate Opposition of Christianity. I will instance in spiritual Pride, or a vain Opinion of a Man's own Understanding. To a Man under the Dominion of this Passion, 'tis dull and undistinguishing to think in the common Road, and believe with the Vulgar. To engage the Attention of the World, he must pretend to see farther, to form his Judgment of Things with more Caution and Sagacity than other Men. Even the Shame of retracting what he has once asserted,

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is to such a Temper insupportable. He will contradict the clearest Evidence, and even sacrifice, almost, any Interest rather than submit to it. A remarkable Instance of the Force of this single Passion, we have in the famous *Vanini*, who chose to suffer Death, rather than own a God. Amazing! That a Man who profess'd to have no Prospect but in this Life, should give up his All, his very Being, rather than renounce an exploded, unprofitable Assertion. Whose Resentment did he fear, or from whom did he expect any Reward of his Perseverance? What possible Account can be given of such a Conduct, but the inflexible Stubbornness of his Vanity? To what Degree of Obstinacy, any of our modern Unbelievers are influenced by this Passion, we cannot discover, till publick Wisdom shall think fit to put them under greater Discouragements than they find among us. But if they pretend to disclaim its Impressions, I would only ask them, by what Motives they are induced to publish their Sentiments, and appear so sollicitous to proselyte Men
to

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to a Disbelief of the Gospel. Is it a mere speculative Love of Truth? But Truth (as I observ'd) barely as such, is seldom regarded with much Affection. If Truth were so amiable for its own sake, the most obvious indisputable Truths would be the most passionately affected; but, on the contrary, none are look'd on with more Indifference. We may be sure, some Interest or other depends on a Conclusion, when we find it eagerly contended for. We have seen, in the present Question, that every vicious Passion has an Interest in opposing the Gospel; and that Vanity, by its self, is sufficient to account for the most obstinate Infidelity: But to the Publication of this Infidelity, no Motive can be assign'd but Vanity. Every other Passion would be content with its private Gratifications. 'Tis apparently the Interest of the *Libertine*, that the rest of the World should be under the Restraints of Religion. He knows the Extent of their Rule, how far they can go, and where they must stop, and leave his Pursuits without any farther Com-

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petition. 'Tis his Vanity only that tempts him, to deprive himself of these Advantages. He must let the World see the Superiority of his Parts, the Depth of his Penetration, and his Skill in Disputation.

IF, to avoid this Imputation, they pretend a Principle of Charity for this Conduct; that 'tis Compassion to the Ignorance of a deluded World, a Zeal to rescue Mankind from Imposture and Superstition, that renders them thus solicitous to undeceive them; this is yet a more improbable Account than the former. For can they seriously think they consult the Happiness of Mankind, by endeavouring to take off the Obligations of this Religion? A Religion, which, under the Awe of a divine Command, and the Dread of eternal Misery, requires the Practice of every Virtue that can render Men easy in themselves, and useful to one another; and forbids every Action that may disturb the Order and Quiet of human Life. Can it be for our Advantage, that so
wise

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wife and beneficial an Institution should be discarded? Have they any Equivalent to substitute in the Place of it? Nothing, it seems, but natural Reason; which comes, in the Event, (as we have seen) to no more than this; that every Man must be left to do what he pleases.

AN admirable Provision, no doubt, for the Virtue, Peace, and Felicity of the World! We think ourselves happy in the Prospects, and even in the Restraints of the Gospel; and can conceive nothing more desirable in this Life, than that the Power of this Religion may more effectually prevail, and the Duties it prescribes be universally practiced. Suppose, then, these sagacious Gentlemen to be persuaded we are mistaken; yet unless they had something better to offer us, methinks, Charity would persuade them to let us alone to enjoy our Delusion. Do they expect, we should thank them for awakening us out of so pleasing a Dream, mortifying those glorious Hopes with which we entertain ourselves, and depriving us of
so

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so noble a Support under the Afflictions of Life; and, what is still worse, taking off all Restraint from the Lusts and Passions of Men, and turning loose such a Den of wild Beasts, to worry and distract the World? To some thoughtless Wretches, abandon'd to Vice and Wickedness, it may perhaps appear a Service, to discharge the Authority and Re-proofs of this Religion: But the wise and the virtuous, every Man who values his own, or wishes his Neighbour's Happiness, must resent the Attempt with Abhorrence and Detestation. Neither Charity nor Prudence, then, will advise such a Conduct; we must look for the Motives of it, among the Passions whose Interest it serves. And tho' (as I have observ'd) every Lust may incline Men to Infidelity, yet all but Vanity wou'd persuade the Concealment of it. 'Tis this Passion only that pushes them on to a Publication of it. They cannot be easy, without the Satisfaction and Support of Applause. Their Understanding must triumph in a Retinue of Converts, and appear in the Head of a Party. A Party indeed they have;

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have ; but when they observe the Characters that compose it, methinks their Pride itself should despise its Conquests, and be ashamed of the Admiration of Profligates and Fools.

UPON the whole, we have seen, how clearly Mens Rejection of the Gospel, and the whole Conduct of the Infidel in opposing it, is resolved into our Lord's Account, the Influence of some corrupt Passion or other. This Account cannot be at all surprizing, when we observe, with what Obstinacy any one Lust will dispute its Possession of the Heart ; by what Shifts and Evasions it will cover it self from the Reproach of Truth ; by what gradual Steps of false Reasoning it will lead a Man on from one Error, and one evil Resolution, to another. He cannot reconcile himself, to part with the Gratification he doats on ; but then the Terrors of the Gospel stand before him, threatening Damnation to such Indulgences. He may first, perhaps, try whether this hard and rigorous Law, be not capable of a more mitigated
Sense ;

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Sense; whether the Sentence be altogether so severe and peremptory, as 'tis represented. Perhaps his Obedience to other Precepts, may atone for his Violation of this; Or however, he may repent of it some Time hence, and secure his Title to the Promises of Christianity. And if he can cheat himself into any of these common Delusions, he troubles himself no farther. He thinks he has compounded the Matter, and brought his Sin to a very good Consistency with his Religion. But if he cannot satisfy himself with any of these Expedients, there is no farther Project of Mediation between Sin and Duty, and he is reduced to this short Dilemma, he must renounce either his Vice, or his Baptism. And here, perhaps, he may pause a little, before he takes the dark Leap; he may have some Struggle and Conflict with his Religion, before he can give it up: But if the Lust be firmly rooted, it will go on a Step farther, and suggest to him, that possibly he has been imposed on in the Authority ascribed to this severe Law; that
all

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all may be but a Device of Priest-craft, or a Contrivance of State to awe Mankind ; and when an eager Appetite and the Uneasiness of an unmortify'd Desire are Directors of the Inquiry, the Understanding overlooks the clearest Evidence, and the slightest Objection will appear a Demonstration. But still the Singularity of his Opinion, will give him some Trouble. For Vanity itself, tho' it finds a Pleasure in departing from common Sentiments, yet cannot well sustain the Reflection of being perfectly alone, and opposing the universal Judgment of Mankind. He must, therefore, persuade Others to approve his Reasonings, and concur in the same Conclusions. And if he has an Opinion of his Parts and Talent at Argument, he will venture into the Field, and engage in an open Dispute with Religion. And if either the Weakness of those he attempts, or the Aversion of their Lusts from the Gospel, gives any Success to his Applications, this he looks on as a decisive Confirmation of his Judgment. He has tried the Reason of other Men, and prevail'd

vail'd in their Conviction. He surveys with Pride the Conquests of his Understanding ; considers himself as the applauded Champion of a Party, and must not dishonour his Character, by receding from any Thing he has asserted. And thus, fix'd in the *Scorner's Chair*, he defies all Opposition, and triumphs in resolv'd Infidelity.

THIS, we see, is an easy, natural Process of our Corruption. A Man passionately engaged to any Habit of Sin, and prepossess'd against the Duties of Christianity, unless by the Grace of God he conquers that Aversion, will be drawn on to act and reason in the Manner I have described. And if none of those Remonstrances of Conscience, which arise in his Way, can awaken the Soul from this Delusion of its Lufts ; be the Gospel ever so true, its Evidence will not be perceiv'd, or will not be acknowledged. The Sinner will go on from one Degree of Blindness and Impiety to another, till at last he takes up with the
Per-

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Perfuation of the Fool, and *says in his Heart there is no God* *.

AND since an Aversion from the Duties of Religion gives us so obvious, and so full an Account of the whole Conduct of the Infidel ; and we can discern no real Ground for his Dissent ; no probable Motive, but this, for his professing it ; we may justly conclude, with our Saviour, that the true Reason of Mens rejecting and opposing the Credit of his Gospel, is their Engagement to their Sins, and the Wickedness of their Lives. I shall, therefore, look upon the Charge in my Text as sufficiently proved, and proceed to assert the Justice of the Sentence here pronounced upon it.

* Psalm xiv. 1.



SERMON





S E R M O N VIII.



J O H N III. XIX.

*This is the Condemnation, that
Light is come into the World,
and Men loved Darknes ra-
ther than Light, because their
Deeds were evil.*

THAT our Lord has done no Injustice to the Rejecters of his Gospel, in the Assertion of my Text ; that He has imputed their Infidelity to the only Motive which can account for it, a corrupt Attachment to the Interests of Passion, has appear'd to us with as much Evidence, as a Con-
O clusion

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clusion of that Nature admits. And, I think, we might venture to conclude, without entring into any farther Argument, that rejecting a divine Revelation, so attested as the Gospel, in compliance with such base Motives, is a Crime deserving the Condemnation here pronounced upon it. But, among other Libertine Maxims, it has been much insisted on, — That Faith is an Act of the Understanding in which we are wholly passive, and which we can neither direct nor restrain: That he who believes a Thing cannot avoid believing it, and he who disbelieves cannot help disbelieving; and consequently, that a just God cannot charge him with any Crime in either; or inflict on him any Penalty, for a mere necessary, involuntary Action. Now, if this be admitted, our Saviour must here have acted without Authority, and pronounced a Sentence without Commission from God. It therefore concerns us to obviate this Plea, and shew from some natural Principles,

1st. THAT

Ist. THAT rejecting a divine Revelation, sufficiently proposed and attested to us, is a Crime which God may justly punish.

II^{ly}. THAT the Infidelity of those among us, who reject the Christian Revelation, is attended with all the Aggravations, that such a Crime can admit.

Ist. THEN, I assert, that the rejecting a divine Revelation, sufficiently proposed and attested, is a Crime which God may justly punish.

TO a Christian, indeed, who professes to believe the holy Writings of the Gospel, one would think, no other Proof need be offer'd for this Conclusion, than what arises from the great Promises there made to Faith. For if we are passive in disbelieving, we are also passive in believing ; and it can no more consist with divine Justice to reward the One, than to punish the Other. And if neither

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of these are capable of Punishment or Reward, those two great Laws of Christ — *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believeth not, shall be damned* *, are at once render'd insignificant Assertions. And, I think, when these are taken away, the Christian Religion is dismiss'd together with them. It is, therefore, surprizing, to find the Innocence of Disbelief contended for, by any who call themselves Christians. Whatever they are, I shall, in this Argument, take Leave to consider them as Infidels; and endeavour their Conviction from such natural Principles, as, I presume, every reasonable Man must assent to.

THAT we are accountable to God, for the Use of every Faculty he has given us, so far as we are free in the Exercise of it, is a Conclusion which necessarily follows from the Acknowledgment of a God, the Author of our Being, and the Judge of our Actions;

* Mark xvi. 16.

and

and is supposed in the Reasoning of our Adversaries themselves, who offer this only in Excuse of Infidelity, that 'tis an involuntary Act.

Now, tho' it be acknowledg'd, that we are wholly passive in the actual Perceptions of the Understanding, so that what we do perceive, we cannot but perceive; and what we perceive, we cannot, at that Time, perceive any otherwise than it actually appears to us; yet in the Exercise or Direction of this Faculty we are so far free, that we can either apply the Mind to any Object, or take it off from it at Pleasure; and be more or less attentive in the Consideration of it. These are voluntary Acts, and, as such, subject to Law; and since the Clearness and Distinction of our Perceptions, and even our Notice of an Object, depend on the Direction and Attention of the Mind to it, for the same Reasons that we are accountable for these Acts, we are also accountable for not perceiving what 'twas in our Power, by a due Application, to have perceiv'd.

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OUR Assent depends upon, and is proportion'd to, our Perceptions of Evidence ; and therefore, is influenced by our Attention or Inattention, in the same Manner as our Perceptions are. * A late Ornament of our Church, indeed, has learnedly, and, I think, plainly proved, Assent to be an Act of the Will, and not of the Understanding ; but nevertheless, it must be confess'd to be thus far necessarily determin'd, that what we clearly perceive to be true, we cannot help assenting to ; neither can we help dissenting from what we clearly perceive to be false. But then it cannot be denied, that we may assent to what we do not clearly perceive to be true, and dissent from what we do not clearly perceive to be false. Or if any Man be so vain, as not to acknowledge himself capable of these Defects, yet to others, to those who oppose his Conclusions, he will be ready enough to impute them. If Men act necessarily

* *Mr. Norris's Account of Reason and Faith.*

in these erroneous Assents, why does any one strive to convince them? Does not every Argument we use for the Conviction of another, suppose it in his Power both to attend to and perceive the Force of it, and that he is under an Obligation to assent to the Truth it proves? Whence then does this Obligation, so universally presumed, in every Dispute between Man and Man arise? Is it not plainly from this Principle — That every Man, as a rational Being, is bound to assent upon such Evidence, as, by a due Use of his Faculties, he may perceive to be conclusive? This then is a Law of our Nature, appeal'd to in every Argument, and which necessarily supposes

1st. THAT there are certain Degrees of Evidence, which, as rational Beings, we may, if we attend, perceive to be conclusive. And tho' our Estimate of these Abilities be various, according to the different Capacities of Men, and their Opportunities of Improvement, yet in every Man, with whom we think

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fit to dispute, we suppose a Capacity to apprehend the Force of the Evidence we offer him. And in every publick Argument, we appeal to the common Reason of Mankind, as enabling great Numbers to discern the Evidence of those Truths we propose. And some Degrees of Evidence there are, which we presume every one, whom we admit within the Character of a reasonable Nature, able to perceive. Now the Evidences of Truth may be distinguish'd into *Internal* and *External*. *Internal* are those, which set before us the Connexion or Repugnancy of the Ideas affirm'd or deny'd of each other, either by an immediate Collation of the two Ideas in Consideration, or by the Interposition of a third, which, as a Measure successively apply'd to each, shews the Agreement or Inconsistency of them, *External*, which does not pretend to shew us any Connexion between the Ideas, but calls upon us to admit there is such a Connexion, upon the Affirmation of a Person who certainly knows whether there is or not. This Evidence,

dence, in its proper Subjects, is as reasonable and conclusive as the former. And he who should universally reject this Kind of Evidence, would as justly be reputed an Idiot or a Madman, as he who universally rejected the former. In other Words, he who refuses to assent upon Authority, in a Subject incapable of other Evidence, and where neither the Knowledge nor Credibility of the Affirmer can justly be question'd, acts every Jot as unreasonably, as he who refuses to assent upon Evidence from the Reason of the Thing, to which he can make no just Objection. And when we consider how little the best Understandings do know, how very little the Bulk of Mankind can know, from the Reason of the Thing, even in Questions of great Concern to them, we cannot but perceive, what Confusion and Distress human Reason must be reduced to, what a Suspension of all Business and Action in Life must follow, if we wholly reject Authority as no Evidence of Truth. 'Tis also

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2^{ly} SUPPOSED, in that Law which every Argument appeals to, that every Man acts with Liberty, in the Use or Direction of those Faculties, by which he inquires into, and judges of, Truth. For if he were perfectly passive in the exercise of these Faculties, 'twould be to no more purpose to argue with him, than with a Clock or a Weather-Glass: He must go as he was set, and could go no otherwise. And as we have observed, with regard to our Preceptions, that tho' we are so far passive, that we cannot but perceive what is actually represented to our Mind, and cannot, at that time, perceive it otherwise than as 'tis represented; yet we can be more or less attentive to any Object; we can dwell longer or less Time upon it; and find, in continual experience, that by such Attention we can enlarge, multiply, and often correct our Preceptions: So also with respect to Assent; tho' we cannot help assenting to what we clearly perceive to be true, or dissenting from what we clearly perceive to be false; yet

yet whoever reflects on what passes in his own Mind, must observe, that he can with-hold or suspend his Assent, till he has fully try'd the Evidences of what is propos'd; till he perceives Truth or Falsehood, either from internal or external Evidence, according as the Nature of the Subject appears to require the One or the Other. That he often finds Reasons to recal his Assent, or Dissent: And, whether he will confess it of himself, or not, he will blame other Men for Assenting or Dissenting without due Examination; for suffering Prejudices or Passions to obscure the Evidence of Truth, or divert them from attending to it. These are plain Acknowledgments both of Freedom in these Faculties, and of a Duty attending us in the Exercise of them. It is suppos'd in every Argument, that, the Evidence we offer is sufficient for Conviction; that the Person we dispute with, is able, by a due Use of his Faculties, to perceive it to be so, and that he is bound by the Laws of Reason to assent upon it. And for the Transgression of these Laws, we
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are very ready to accuse and reprove one another. If then we are thus far free in the Use of these Faculties, if a due Application of them is an Act of Justice we owe to one another, much more must we be accountable for it to God, the Author of our Nature, and every Power of it. Every Law of our Nature must ultimately derive its Force from his Authority; and whatever Obligations we and our Fellow-Subjects mutually claim on one another, are, in their first most proper Consideration, Duties we owe to Him. And, therefore, when we appeal to Reason and Justice, as requiring Men to bestow such Attention on any Subject as is due to it, to suspend Assent or Dissent to any Proposition, till, according to their Abilities, they have examin'd the Evidence that supports it, and then to proportion their Assent to that Evidence; if we mean any thing reducible to any clear Principle, it must be — That God, the Author of our Nature, and Judge of our Actions, requires this Conduct from us. — And consequently, we must offend him when-
ever

ever we act contrary to these Rules; when we refuse such Attention to any Subject, as is due to the Importance of it; when we assent to any Error, which we might have discern'd, or resist any Truth offer'd to us with sufficient Evidence, and such as 'twas in our Power to have perceiv'd. But especially, when immoral Lufts and Prejudices are the Motives of such a Conduct; when, in Compliance with their Impressions, we turn away our Eyes, and will not attend to Truth, or shut them against the Entrance of it, such an Abuse of our Faculties must be displeasing to God, whatever is the Subject before us.

BUT where the Subject is of the highest moral Importance, the Rule of our Actions, and the Measure of our Duty, and the Evidence, which calls for our Assent, is so clear and obvious, that whoever has Eyes, and will but open them, may perceive it; to be remiss in our Attention, must be a great Offence. Even Ignorance must here be voluntary, and can offer no Excuse for Error. But to
suffer

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suffer any corrupt Motives to obstruct or over-bear such Evidence, and in such an Inquiry, is not only transgressing, but, in Effect, renouncing the Law of our Nature, and bidding Defiance to the Author of it.

FROM what has been reflected it appears, I think, in full Proof, that the Suggestion offer'd in Excuse of Infidelity is false: That Men are not wholly passive in Believing or Disbelieving, but have a great Compass of Liberty, in the Use and Direction of those Faculties, on which our Assent, and even our Perceptions, depend. So far as this Liberty reaches, they are voluntary Acts, and therefore naturally subject to a Law, for the Transgression of which we are accountable to God. And since the Obligation and Penalties of this Law, must rise in Proportion to the moral Importance of the Subject proposed to us, and no Question can be of so great Moment, as whether what is affirm'd to be a Revelation of the Will of God really is so, or not; it follows, that to act contrary

trary to the Laws of Reason in this Inquiry, either to dismiss the Proposal of it without due Attention, or to suffer any Lufts, or immoral Prejudices, to suppress the Evidence offer'd for it, is, even in the Accounts of Nature, the greatest Crime we can be guilty of in the Exercise of these Faculties; and consequently, such as must expose us to the just Repentments of God.

THE Plea offer'd in Defence of Infidelity from any natural Guilt, as an involuntary Act, has, perhaps, led me into a Process of Argument, which may seem too Metaphysical. But my Conclusion may also be directly inferr'd from the most obvious Principles of Natural Religion.

THAT whatever God affirms to us is to be believ'd, I shall look upon as a self-evident Principle. And that besides the Natural Dictates of right Reason, God may farther communicate his Will to us by special Declarations, either by immediate Revelation to our selves, or by
sending

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sending Others to us commission'd by such immediate Revelation, is what no one has yet thought fit to deny. And that 'tis possible for us certainly to know when such a Revelation is made to our selves, or when others are sent by his Commission, must also be allowed; because otherwise such Revelations would be in vain, and to no manner of Use, or Purpose. When, therefore, any Person produces the best Proofs, that in such a Case can be given, or expected, that he is sent to us by God, and speaks by his Authority; to refuse our Assent to what he affirms, is to contradict God, and call him a Liar. We are, indeed, not only at Liberty, but 'tis our Duty, to examine his Credentials, by the best Rules of Inquiry in our Power: But if there appears no Defect in the Proofs of his Commission, we are bound, under the strictest Obligations, to receive and believe him: And, to reject his Message, must be the greatest Affront to the Veracity and Authority of God; and, consequently, what his Justice will certainly punish.

THAT

THAT those, among us, who reject the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*, are guilty of this Crime, aggravated by all the Circumstances which can render it inexcusable before God, is what I in the 2d place asserted.

THAT they are guilty of rejecting a Divine Revelation sufficiently attested, we are at Liberty to conclude, from what has been offer'd in the preceding Discourses; in which I endeavour'd to shew, that we have all the Inducements to believe the Gospel to be a divine Revelation, that the Nature of the Subject requires or admits; as much, and as good, Proof as could be expected, supposing it had been reveal'd by God: And that the Objections, pretending to invalidate the Force of it, are weak and frivolous, and such as ought not to be allow'd any Weight in this Question. In sum, that we have all the Evidence, that any rational Man can desire, that our Lord and his Apostles acted by a Divine Commission; were themselves
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taught of God, and sent by him to declare his Will to Mankind: And therefore, rejecting their Authority is rejecting a Divine Revelation, as well attested as 'tis possible any should be.

FROM the same Proofs also it appears, that rejecting this Revelation is sinning against the clearest Light, the most effectual Means of Conviction that could be required. The Proofs of the Gospel are not only firm and conclusive, such as will bear the strictest Examination, but, in their Nature, so plain and simple, that no Capacity is below the force of them. Their Evidence does not result from a long Train of reasoning from remote Principles, but we are immediately led to our Conclusion by sensible Miracles; an Argument, which, whoever has the common Senses of Mankind, is as capable of apprehending, as the most profound Philosopher; and consequently, resisting the Evidence of such a Proof can admit of no Excuse: It must be owing either to Obstinacy, or a criminal Inattention, if it is not perceiv'd, and

acknowledg'd. And agreeably, tho' our Saviour allows, that *if he had not done among the Jews the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin*; * yet since he had actually done such Works *as none could do, except God was with him*, † and such, both for Number and Power, as none other, even of those who had been sent by God, had ever perform'd, he very justly concludes, That *now they had no Cloak for their Sin*. || And since we have at this day, all the Evidence that such Miracles were wrought, that the Nature of the Subject requires or admits; and, consequently, all that can in Equity be expected; 'tis as much our Duty to make the proper Inference from them as it was theirs, and we are as much without Excuse in the rejecting the Gospel, as they were.

'Tis, as we have observ'd, a farther Addition to the Guilt of any Error, that 'tis committed in an Inquiry of the highest Concern and Importance. Had it

* John xv. 24. † John iii. 2. || John xv. 22.

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been a mere speculative Question, whether the Gospel were a Divine Revelation or not; our Ignorance, Inattention, or Mistake had been excusable. The Theory had hardly been worth our debating, and 'twere no great Matter on which Side we determin'd it. But since this is in the Nature and Consequences of it, a Question of the greatest Moment to us, in the Resolution of which the Honour and Veracity of God are concern'd, and on which the Laws, the Measures and Event of our Actions, our eternal Happiness or Misery depend. To refuse it our most serious Consideration, or to resist the Evidence of its Proofs, must be fatal to our Happiness; must be a high Contempt of so awful a Message, and an unpardonable Disregard to that Sacred Majesty, in whose Name it is proposed.

BUT the Circumstance of greatest Aggravation in this Crime, is the Motives it proceeds from. Could it, with any Reason, be presumed, that the Infidels we contend with, were induced to oppose the Gospel by a sincere Love of
Truth,

Truth, a Concern for the Honour of God, or the Happiness of Mankind, such laudable Motives might, in some Measure, excuse their Incredulity. One of the greatest Apostles of our Religion tells us, that he himself not only deny'd, but persecuted this Faith, which he afterwards preach'd. But the Integrity of his Zeal alleviated the Mistake of it, and recommended him to the Compassion of God. And could these Gentlemen pretend to act under the same Disadvantages, and be influenced by the same Motives that he was, they might, with some Reason, hope to obtain the same Mercy from God that he found. Could they plead, as He might, that the Evidences of the Gospel had never been distinctly offer'd to them, that their Disbelief of it proceeded from their Reverence to a former acknowledg'd Revelation, in which they were confirm'd by the Authority of their proper Teachers, and all the Prejudices of Education, this might be allow'd something in Mitigation of the Crime. But alas! in their Case, there is no Colour for any of these Pleas.

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They cannot pretend Ignorance in the midst of Light. The Evidences of Christianity lie all open before them, and they are even prepossess'd in their Favour by all the Influences of Education and Authority. Neither an Affection for Truth, neither Zeal for God, nor Charity for Men can give us any rational Account of their Conduct. But (as it appear'd to us upon Examination) the real Cause of their rejecting and opposing the Gospel, is an Attachment to those Vices it forbids. *They love Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds are evil.* Their Infidelity is the miserable Refuge of such Crimes, as right Reason and natural Conscience condemn. They cannot bear the Reproofs of our Religion, and therefore will not own its Authority. Now to reject a divine Revelation so fully proposed, and so evidently proved, as the Gospel, upon such Motives as these, argues an impious Hatred and Defiance of God; a Disposition of Soul so alienated from Truth and Virtue, so apostate from Good, and so abandon'd to
Evil,

Evil, as cannot but provoke, and deserve, the utmost Indignation from the Justice, the Holiness, and the Majesty of God.

SINCE, then, the rejecting the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*, is a Crime heighten'd by so many Aggravations, so utterly incapable of any Mitigation or Excuse, from the Circumstances of the Persons guilty of it: We are in Justice bound to affirm the Sentence of Condemnation here pronounced by our Saviour; and confess, in the Words of the Psalmist, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy Judgments; for the Testimonies, which thou hast commanded, are exceeding righteous and true* *.

PERMIT me, then, to recollect and apply, what has occur'd to us in the preceding Reflections. And,

* Psalm cxix. 161, 162.

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1st. SINCE *Light is come into the World* ; since the Gospel appears by such evident Proofs to be a divine Revelation, let us rejoice in this Light, and adore the infinite Compassion of God, who has vouchsafed this inestimable Favour to us miserable Sinners, *who sate in Darkness and the Shadow of Death*. And let it confirm our Faith and Perseverance in this holy Religion, to observe, how precarious and unsupported those Objections are, which the Skill or Malice of its Enemies have been able to raise against it ; how inconsistent with their own Conduct in other Cases ; how destructive of the common Principles of Reasoning, and Measures of Truth.

2^{ly}. SINCE the corrupt Interests of Lust and Passion, are proved to be the real and only Motives, that provoke Men to resist and oppose the Light of the Gospel, we cannot but reflect with Abhorrence on a Crime, so base in its Principles, and so pernicious in its Consequences

sequences to our present, as well as future, Happiness. For if, even under the Restraints of Religion, we have so many Occasions of Complaint from the un-govern'd Lufts of wicked Men, how dreadful an Abode, what a Scene of Horror and Confusion would our Land become, if all Bonds of Conscience and Religion were taken off, and every Man were left to act as his Passions shall suggest? And, yet, this is the very Scheme of the Infidel; this must be the Effect of its Success; since, as we have seen, the only Motive by which he is determin'd himself, and by which he can prevail on others to concur with him, is an Impatience of the Restraints and Discipline of the Gospel.

3^{ly}. SINCE it also appear'd to us, that Sin, as 'tis the only, so 'tis a very effectual Motive to Infidelity; since it leads us on, by gradual and almost imperceptible Advances, from one Degree of Hardness and Impenitence to another, and can find no Rest to its Fears, till it determines in resolv'd Apostacy, let us

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us fly with trembling from this dreadful Evil. For, as the wise Man says, it will *bite like a Serpent, sting like an Adder* * : Tho' the Wound at first appears but small and inconsiderable, yet the Poison, infused with it, will spread itself insensibly thro' the Soul, till it destroys the very Vitals of our Religion. We may, perhaps, for a Time, by some little palliating Arts, suspend this fatal Consequence of Sin, and shift off deciding that great Question, Whether we will serve God, or serve him not : But this we must at last be forced to resolve. An Indulgence to Sin, and the Acknowledgment of the Gospel are, in their Nature, so perfectly irreconcilable, that, if ever we seriously reflect on the Event of our Actions, we shall find ourselves under a Necessity of renouncing the one, or the other. And if the Lust has establish'd its Dominion over the Soul, and will not be refused its habitual Gratifications, 'tis easily seen, it must preside in the Debate, and will

* Prov. xxiii. 32.

deter-

determine against Religion. Let us then mortify betimes every corrupt Desire, while there is yet some spiritual Life and Strength in the Soul. Set a Watch on all our Appetites, and suppress every Inclination to offend. And to this Resolution it must especially quicken us, to reflect

4^{ly}. ON the Condemnation here pronounced by our Lord, on all who deliberately reject his Gospel. A Sin against the Goodness, the Truth, and the Authority of God; A Sin against the clearest Light, and all the Motives that can influence a reasonable Nature; upon which, therefore, God will assuredly do Honour to his Justice, in the most severe Inflictions. And I cannot but suggest one Consideration of great Terror to the Infidel, and of equal Support to the Christian, That supposing, in the Event of Things, the Gospel should prove an Imposture, as the Infidel pretends; yet the Arguments, upon which we believe it, are so fair and conclusive, the Miracles that support its
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divine Authority, so well attested, and in their Nature such evident Proofs of God's Approbation ; and the Morality it prescribes so pure and excellent, that our Submission to it cannot be imputed to us as a Crime. He who believes and obeys it, may appeal to the strictest Judge, with a just Confidence that he has done all that could be required from a rational Creature : That he has assented to nothing, but what carried the fairest Marks and Characters of Truth, nor done any Thing but what right Reason assured him was his, and every honest Man's, Duty ; which, therefore, a just and upright God cannot punish. But, on the contrary, if the Gospel be, as we firmly believe it is, a divine Revelation, the Infidel who rejects it is eternally, irrecoverably lost, and ruin'd. His Crime admits no Excuse, no extenuating Plea, which can offer itself to the Compassion of the Judge.

How alas ! will he appear ? With what Astonishment will he come forth, in the Day when he shall see that de-
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spised *Galilean*, the meek and holy *Jesus*, whose Name he has blasphemed, whose Altars he has profaned, whose Religion, Laws, and Servants have been the Scorn of his wanton Railleries, exalted now in the Majesty of his Kingdom, Angels, Authorities, and Powers being made subject unto him? With what Confusion will he behold Him seated on his Throne of Judgment, and the Fate of every Creature suspended on his Sentence? When he shall see the Heavens and the Earth pass away at his Word, and every Jot and Tittle of that Gospel he despised, confirm'd, and fulfill'd? With what Agonies of Guilt and Despair, must he approach the offended Presence, and hear that terrible Sentence from his Judge, — *Those mine Enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring them out and slay them before me* *.

LET us then prepare ourselves for that Day, by a steady Perseverance in

* Luke xix. 27.

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the Faith and Duties of our Religion. Then shall we be able to meet with Joy that Redeemer in whom we have believ'd, and receive the Reward promised to our Faith, *even the Salvation of our Souls.*

F I N I S.





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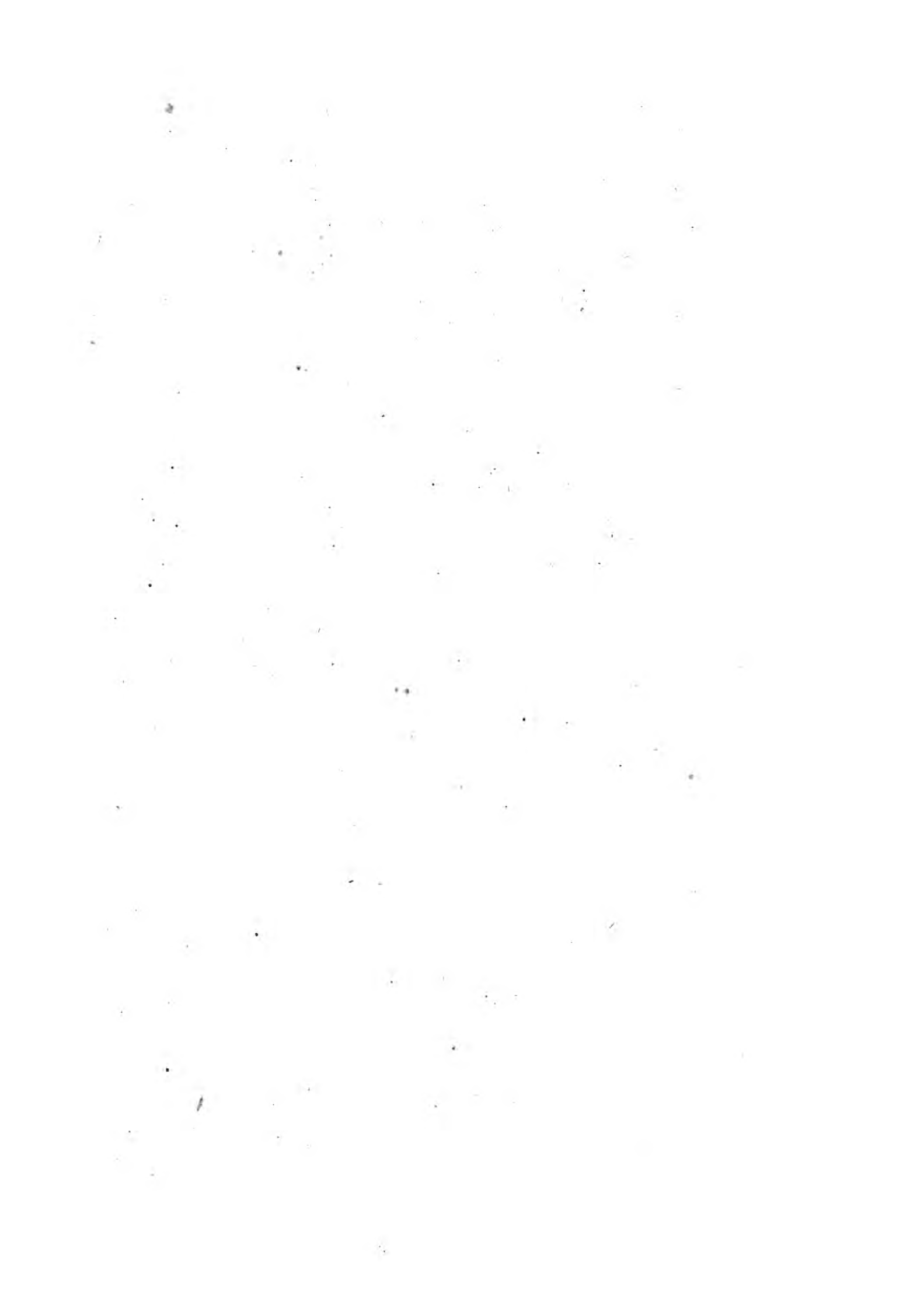
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