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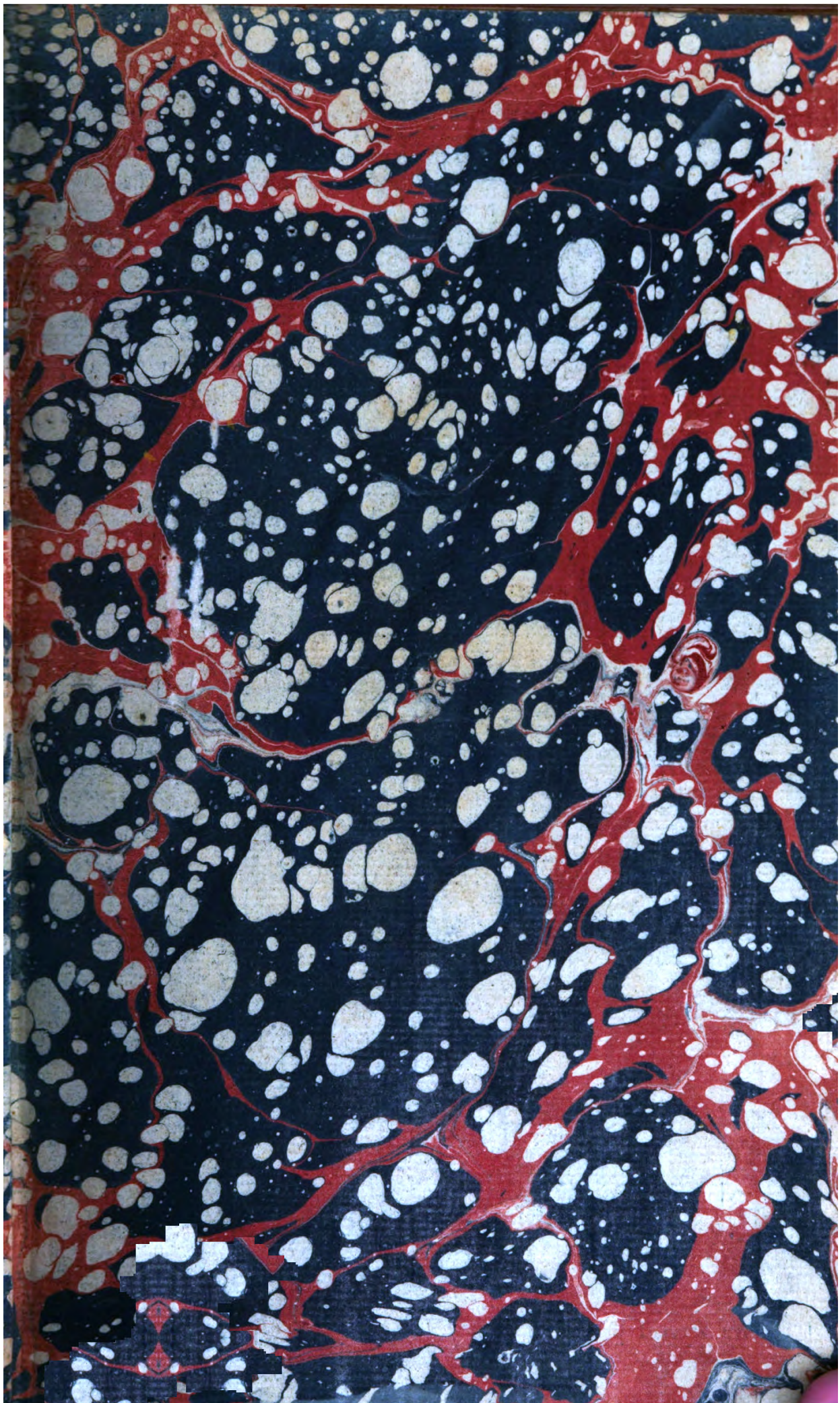
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NORRIS of Hackney.

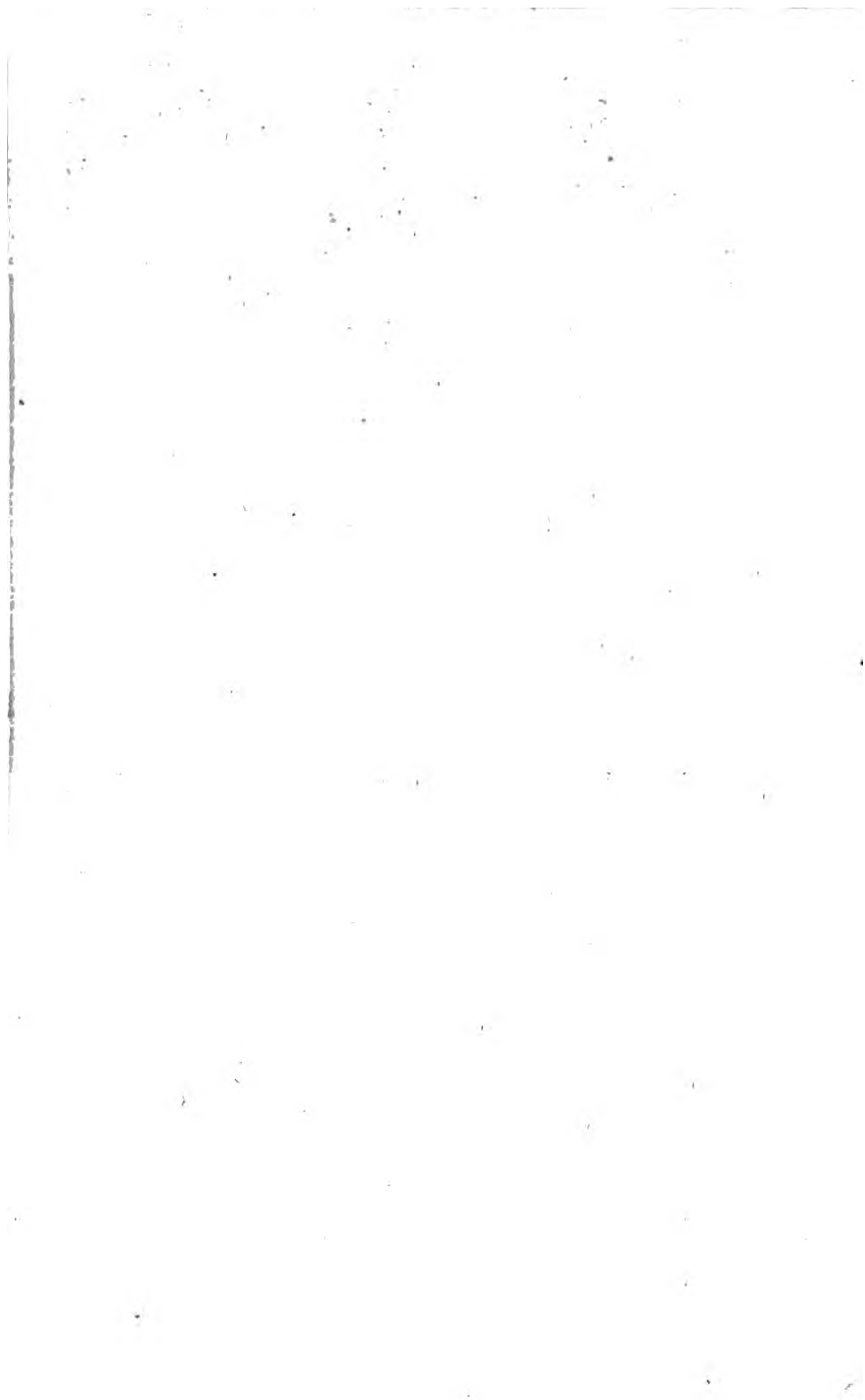


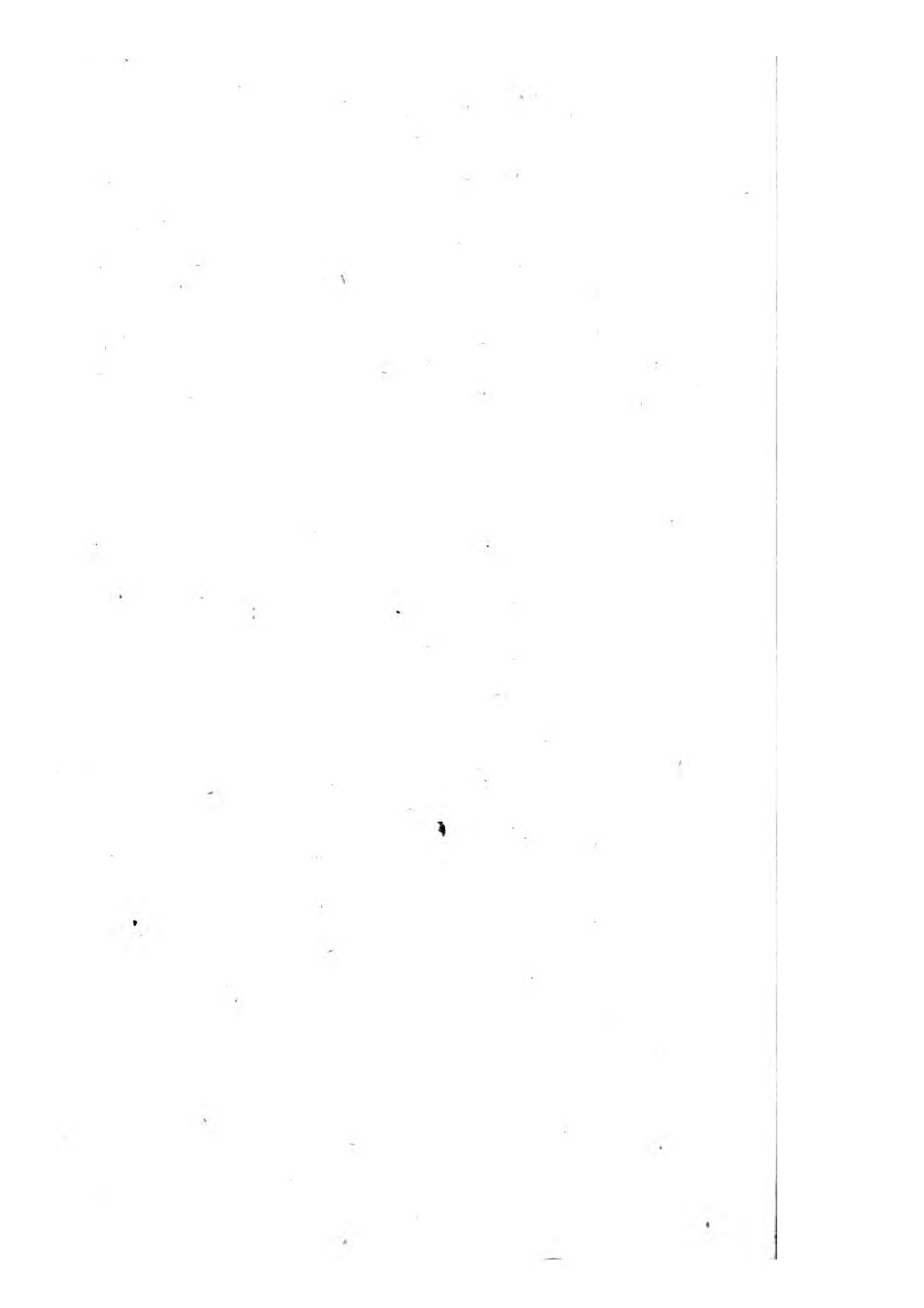


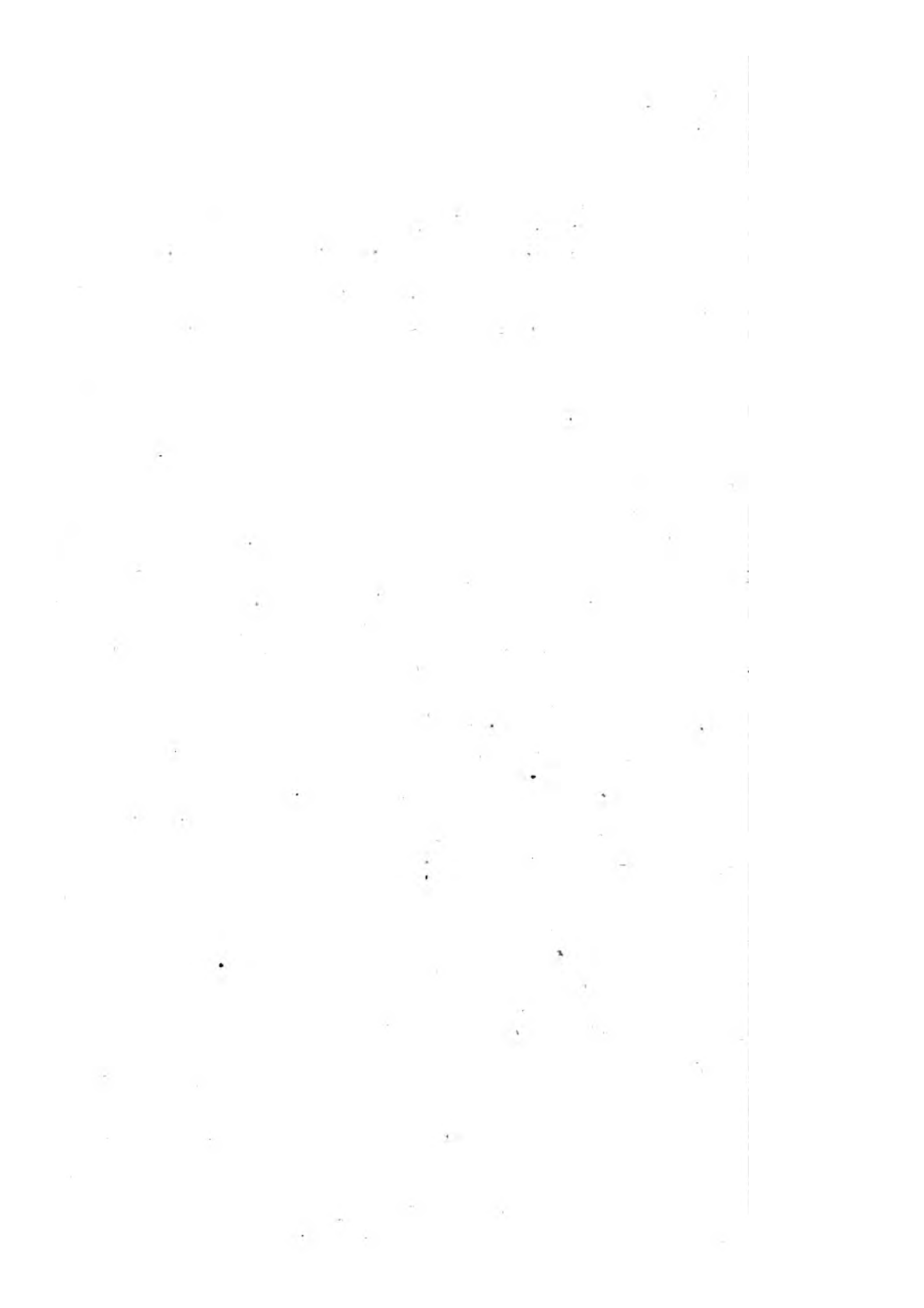
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~~Arch. G. III. 3.~~

994 e. 294







T W E L V E
S E R M O N S

P R E A C H E D U P O N

S E V E R A L O C C A S I O N S .

By *J O H N R O G E R S*, D. D.
Late Vicar of ST. GILES, CRIPPLEGATE, Sub-
Dean and Canon of WELLS, and Chaplain
in Ordinary to his Majesty.

A N E W E D I T I O N .

L O N D O N :

Printed for *G. ROBINSON*, in Paternoster-row.

M. DCC. LXXXIV.



T H E



P R E F A C E.

I CAN'T give a greater Commendation of the following Sermons, than to assure the Reader that they are what they pretend to be; and that they were all design'd and prepar'd for the Prefs (as several others are, which may follow in due Time) by the ingenious, learned, and judicious Dr. *Rogers* himself, whose Name is prefix'd to them.

But indeed every Reader, who is in any Degree acquainted with the Writings of this excellent Author, or who has read, with any Attention, his *View of the visible and invisible Church*, or his most admirable *Review* of the same Argument, will soon be convinced, from the internal Marks of these Discourses, that the Author of those va-

luable Treatises was indisputably the Author of the following Sermons. That clear and just Manner of arguing, that Niceness and Accuracy in distinguishing, that true Solidity of Judgment which he always shewed in guarding and limiting every Proposition, and that great Propriety and Elegancy of Stile, which so eminently distinguished his other Writings, and which gave so much Satisfaction to every judicious and unprejudiced Reader, appear so evidently in every Page of these Discourses, that they soon discover the great and masterly Hand they were finished by, and render it unnecessary for me to inform the Reader who was the Author of these Sermons, after he has once given himself the Pleasure to peruse them.

Several of the Discourses contain'd in this Volume are upon the Subjects of those Controversies, which gave Occasion to the excellent Books he oblig'd the World with in his Life-time; and

THE PREFACE.

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and which, I presume, will be read, when most of the Pieces wrote in that Controversy are forgot. And no Doubt it will be a great Pleasure to the Reader, to see some Particulars relating to those Controversies more fully enlarged upon, and farther open'd and pursu'd in these Sermons, (by an Author who had thought so well and so much upon those Subjects, and who, from the Merit of his former Performances, had the singular Felicity to receive the Commendations of the greatest Writers on both Sides of the Question) than in the Books themselves, which he had before published: And other Cases again stated and determined with his great Exactness of Judgment, which he had not then perhaps so proper an Occasion to touch upon.

There are few Writers of this or any Age, who were blessed with greater natural Talents of all Kinds, and who had acquired and laid in a greater
Store

THE PREFACE.

Store of useful and solid Learning, and who could apply it to better Purposes, than our late excellent Author. The learned World, by the Manner in which they have received his former Writings, have done Justice to his Character, as a Writer in Controversy: And the following Sermons, as well as those which were publish'd by himself,* will continue as a lasting Monument of his great Abilities for the Pulpit, and that Controversy was neither his only, nor his greatest Talent. Had God been pleased to have continued Dr. *Rogers* longer amongst us, what might not the World have expected from a Writer who had so early made himself a perfect Master of all that Learning which is necessary to the finishing a great Divine! and who return'd to Town, where he was recalled in so honourable a Manner, with such firm Resolutions to confe-

* See the Necessity of Divine Revelation, and the Truth of the Christian Revelation, in Eight Sermons.

crate his whole Time and Leisure to the Defence of the Christian Religion, as it is taught and professed in the Church of *England*; and which he saw with great Concern attack'd in so rude and uncommon a Manner from every Quarter! What Service, I say, might we not at this Time (when it seems to be so much wanted) have expected, from the Labours and Writings of so judicious and accurate a Scholar! through all whose Works, already published, there runs such a Vein of clear and just Reasoning, and where the Reader is sure to have the Satisfaction (it is the Character which a great and learned Prelate gives of his *Review*) * *to meet with Conclusions drawn from plain and simple Principles, in a Chain of regular Deductions, adhering to each other by an immediate and evident Connection; and Objections not evaded, but answered; the Knots of them not violated, broken or*

* Scripture vindicated, by Bishop *Hare*, Page 124.

cut in sunder, but unravelled and untied by an accurate and skilful Hand.
---But this great and good Man is gone to receive his Reward from God: And as I am very sensible that it requires a much abler Hand than mine to do Justice to his Character, I will detain the Reader no longer, but refer him to the excellent Treatises published by himself, and to the following Sermons in particular, which I think will give a better Description and Character of Dr. *Rogers* than any Hand is able to do.

April 10,
1730.

T. C.

T H E
C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I, II.

Upon reading the Scriptures.

2 TIM. iii. 15.

*And that from a Child thou hast known
the Holy Scriptures, which are able
to make thee wise unto Salvation.*

Page 1, 25.

S E R M O N III, IV, V.

The Duty of proving our Religion.

I THESS. v. 21.

*Prove all Things : hold fast that which
is good.* 51, 83, 121.

a

S E R-

THE CONTENTS.

SERMON VI.

Of the different Offices in the Church.

I COR. xii. 28.

*And God hath set some in the Church,
first Apostles, secondly Prophets,
thirdly Teachers, after that Mira-
cles, then Gifts of Healing, Helps,
Governments, Diversities of Tongues.*

149.

SERMON VII.

Of Peace and Submission, Religious
and Civil.

I THESS. iv. 11.

*That ye study to be quiet, and do your
own Business.*

191.

SERMON VIII.

The Folly of making a Mock at Sin.

PROV.

THE CONTENTS.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a Mock at Sin. 219.

SERMON IX, X.

Virtue and Piety our best Security.

I PET. iii. 13, 14.

*Who is he that will harm you, if ye
be Followers of that which is good?
But, and if ye suffer for Righteousness
sake, happy are ye.* 243, 269.

SERMON XI.

The Difficulty of St. Paul's Choice.

PHILIP. i. 22, 23, 24.

*What I shall choose I wot not. For I
am in a Strait betwixt two, having
a Desire*

THE CONTENTS.

a Desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: Nevertheless, to abide in the Flesh is more needful for you. 303.

The Advantages of Humility.

MATT. xi. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart; and ye shall find Rest to your Souls. 333.

S E R-

S E R M O N I.

Upon reading the Scriptures.

2 T I M. III. 15.

And that from a Child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation.

WHOEVER with a serious SERM. I.
Conviction believes that
there is a God, infinite in
Goodness, Wisdom, and Power, the
Creator and Governor of the World,
and that there is another Life after
this, in which all human Ac-
tions

SERM. **IONS** shall receive an eternal Allot-
 I. ment of Reward or Punishment from
 his Justice, cannot but find himself infinitely concerned to render his Conduct agreeable to this Almighty Being, this Sovereign Disposer of Happiness or Misery ; and consequently to apply himself with the greatest Care and Attention, to discover what Actions will recommend us to his Favour, and what will expose us to his Displeasure.

How dark and uncertain a Progress we could have made in this Inquiry, upon the Strength of natural Reason, we may judge from the Errors and Superstitions of the Heathen World. We have there a sad Conviction of the Inability of Man to trace out the Lines of Duty, and prescribe to himself an acceptable Service of his Creator. How absurd were their Conceptions, and how ridiculous, and even impious, was their Worship of
 the

the Deity! And tho' some thoughtful Spirits carried their Inquiries beyond the common Stupidity of the Vulgar, and retrieved a tolerable Body of moral Precepts; yet the most accurate of these Systems are chargeable with great Imperfections, and at best were confined to the Studies of a few speculative Persons; while the far greater Part of Mankind, who had neither Leisure nor Abilities for these Philosophical Researches, were left to be carried on in the Stream of popular Superstition, without any other Rules of Action, than either their Passions and natural Temper, or the prevailing Fashions or Laws of each Country prescrib'd to them. How invaluable a Blessing then must it be to us, to have so exact and infallible a Direction of our Conduct as the Holy Scriptures! To have all our Doubts and Scruples remov'd, and the Measures of our Duty ascertain'd

SERM.
I.

SERM. in a full and distinct Revelation of the
 I. whole Will of God! A Direction so
 complete as to reach every Occasion
 of Action, so clear and perspicuous
 as to be intelligible to all Capacities ;
 and which we are encouraged to com-
 ply with, by an Assurance that it will
 secure to us our most important In-
 terests, will make us wise, even wise
 unto Salvation. In treating the Scrip-
 ture before us, I shall shew,

I. The Obligations we are under to
 apply ourselves to the Knowledge of
 the Holy Scriptures.

II. The great Advantage that will
 attend this Study.


III. The particular Happiness of
 an early Education in this Know-
 ledge.

IV. I shall recommend some Rules
 to your Observance, which may ren-
 der your Applications to this Study
 successful.

And

Upon reading the Scriptures.

5

And I. We are obliged to apply SERM.
ourselves to the Knowledge of the Ho- I.
ly Scriptures, because they are the 
Word of God.

The very first regular Deductions of our Reason tell us, That since there is an Almighty Being, who made and governs the World, 'tis of the utmost Concern to our Happiness to engage the Favour of this Supreme Power, by doing such Things as please, and avoiding such as offend and provoke him. Nay farther, since God has by Right of Creation a sovereign Title to our Obedience, it is not only our greatest Interest, but our indispensable Duty, to submit all our Actions to his Pleasure and Direction : And since it is impossible for us to obey this Will of God without knowing it, it follows, That the first necessary Branch of our Duty is to enquire what is his Will, and endeavour to acquaint ourselves with the particular

SERM. Injunctions of it. These Deductions
 1. are so natural, that all the Religions
 which have ever appeared in the
 World have been founded on these
 Principles; and have been recom-
 mended to Mankind from the Autho-
 rity of a real or a pretended Declara-
 tion of the Divine Will. Since there-
 fore God, who communicated his Will
 unto the Fathers by the Prophets, has
 in this last Dispensation of the Gos-
 pel fully revealed himself unto us by
 his Son, and has demanded our Obe-
 dience to the Rules there prescribed
 to us, on Peril of eternal Damnation,
 it becomes a Duty of the highest Im-
 portance and Obligation to us, to ac-
 quaint ourselves with the Extent and
 Meaning of that Revelation. If the
Gentile World, who had no other
 Knowledge of God and his Will, than
 they could collect from his visible
 Works of the Creation, and the Light
 of unassisted Reason, were left with-
 out Excuse, for not attending suffici-
 ently

ently to the Directions of that Light ;
how shall we escape, if when God
has full revealed to us his Will, by
the Ministry of his Evangelists and
Apostles, and given us his full and
final Instructions concerning our Duty,
how shall we escape, if we neglect to
improve so much greater Means of
Salvation? Since the Almighty has
spoke from Heaven, let the Earth
keep Silence, and tremble at his
Word ; since God has lift up his Voice,
let no Man shut his Ears, nor turn
away his Heart from attending to it.
In vain has the Son of God come down
from Heaven, and declared the Will
of his Father ; in vain did he send
his Apostles, and in vain have they
preached in Obedience to that Missi-
on, and committed to Writing that
Gospel which they preached : In vain
has the Providence of God preserv'd
and continu'd down to the Church
that sacred Treasure of Wisdom, if
after all, Men are at Liberty to
B 4 flight,

SERM.

I



SERM. flight, or attend to it at their Plea-
 I. sure.



God indeed may by an immediate and particular Revelation make known to us his will, without our Application to this written Declaration of it: But since he has now given us a standing, complete System of all the Truths he requires us to believe, and of all the Duties it is his Pleasure we should practice; it is a most unreasonable Presumption in any Man, to expect that God should miraculously convey that Knowledge to him, which it was in his Power by an easy Application to have obtained. God has now written his Will in fair Characters, and it is our Duty to acquiesce in this Revelation, to seek thence the Directions of our Creator, and the Measures of that Obedience we owe him. This Obligation indeed is not equal to all Men, for there is an Order set apart for this Purpose, separate and removed from common Uses,
 and

Upon reading the Scriptures.

9

and by the Office most especially de- SERM.
dicated to this Employment. And tho' I.
it is an universal Duty on all Christi-
ans to be conversant in the holy Scrip-
tures, yet some Men have added far-
ther to this general Obligation, by a
solemn Devotion of their Lives to this
Service.

But tho' the Priests be the Messen-
gers of the Lord of Hosts, tho' their
Lips should especially preserve Know-
ledge, and at their Mouths the Peo-
ple should seek the Law; and tho'
their Office more eminently requires
them to be mighty in the Scriptures;
yet their Ministry is not intended to
excuse the Negligence, or render use-
less the Application of others; but to
assist their Weakness, direct their Ig-
norance, and encourage their Affi-
duity in so excellent a Study. Every
private Man is also obliged, by Name
and Character, as a Christian, to set
before his Eyes this Word of God, to
search the holy Scriptures for the pro-
per

SERM. per Motives and Directions of Duty,
 I. and apply his Attainments to the Pro-
 motion of his own and his Neigh-
 bour's Happiness. When the Almighty gave a Law to the House of *Israel*, by the Hand of his Servant *Moses*, tho' one Tribe was taken and separated from the Congregation for the Service of the Sanctuary, to bless in the Name of the Lord, and to teach the People; yet the Rest were not therefore excused, much less excluded, from the Study of his Precepts. God did not take from them the Key of Knowledge, nor shut up the Kingdom of Heaven from any who were inclined to enter in. *Hear, O Israel, (says he) the Words which I command thee this Day shall be in thy Heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine House, and when thou walkest by the Way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon*

Upon reading the Scriptures.

II

upon thine Hand, and they shall be as SERM.
Frontlets between thine Eyes, and thou I.
shalt write them upon the Posts of thy
House, and upon thy Gates. And agreeably we find our Saviour, in his Disputes with the *Jews*, generally appealing to the Scriptures, and referring his Hearers to the Books of *Moses* and the Prophets, as Writings of common and public Recourse, and such as every one was not only allowed, but bound to be acquainted with. And I think it may very justly be inferred from my Text, that the Scriptures were permitted to the People in the *Jewish* Church, since they are here said to have been known and studied by *Timothy* from his very Childhood: For I imagine the Scriptures here referred to by the Apostle, to have been the Books of the *Jewish* Canon; because the Time in which he is mention'd to have known them, was probably before his or his Mother's Conversion, and when few, if any

SERM. any of the Christian Scriptures, were
 I. publish'd or written. But if any one
 will understand the Apostle of any
 Evangelical Writings, the Conclusion
 will be that St. *Paul* allowed, and
 commended *Timothy's* Application to
 the Knowledge of the Scriptures, when
 he was yet but a Child, many Years
 before he was ordained to the Mini-
 stry. But at present I infer no more
 from it, but that in the *Jewish* Church
 there was no such Thing as a Prohi-
 bition from reading the Scriptures;
 but that all, even Women and Chil-
 dren, were allowed, encouraged, and
 commended in that Study. And that
 no such Restraint was intended to be
 laid upon Men by the Gospel, is plain
 from several Considerations.


First, It is observable, that the
 Scriptures of the *New Testament* were
 written in a Language, at that Time
 the most universally read and under-
 stood of any in the World, and that
 by

by Men whose native Language it was not. Now, if the Apostles and Evangelists had designed to have excluded any Number of Men from reading the Scripture, they would never have made Use of any universal Language, but have lock'd it up in some of those unknown or uncommon Tongues they were Masters of. Or, if their Books had been written even in their own Tongue, they would indeed have been of popular Use in *Judea*, and a few of the Eastern Regions; but in all the Rest of the World the Knowledge of them would have been confined to a small Number of Persons. Few would have taken the Pains to learn a difficult foreign Tongue, without the least Affinity to their own; and few would have had Leisure or Capacity for such laborious Applications. But, on the contrary, we find that the Apostles, as they designed the Salvation of all, so they wrote the Books which were to direct Men to
Salva-

SERM.
I.



SERM. Salvation, in a Language at that Time

I.  spoken by almost all the World; and that the lowest Education should not be excluded from the Knowledge of them, these Books were in a short Time translated into several Languages, and every Nation heard them speak in their own Tongue wherein they were born the wonderful Works of God.

2dly, If the Apostles had designed to restrain any Number of their Converts from reading their Works, they would have left some express Prohibition of it. Had it been a Thing of so much Danger to Christianity as the Church of *Rome* pretends, the Qualifications had been defined of those who were to be trusted with this perilous Liberty; and the Rest excluded or at least discouraged from the Attempt, by proper Representations of the Hazard that would attend it. But on the contrary, their Writings are directed

rected to all, and particularly the SERM.
Evangelist St. *John* directs his Gospel, I.
not only to a few select Disciples, but
to all Christians, for the Instruction
and Confirmation of their Faith; that
they might believe that Jesus is the
Christ, the Son of God; and that be-
lieving they might have Life, thro' his
Name. The Epistles of St. *Paul* were
intended, most of them for the Use
of all the Saints, in those Places to
which they were sent; and are ex-
pressly inscribed to all the Faithful in
Christ Jesus.---*To all that in every
Place call on the Name of Jesus Christ-
as well as the Bishops and Deacons---*
St. *Peter* indeed tells us, that there
were many Things in his Brother
Paul's Epistles, which they who were
unlearned and unstable wrested, as they
did also the other Scriptures, to their
own Destruction. But this can never
be interpreted as a Prohibition; on the
contrary, it is plain from this, that
those holy Writings, even the most dif-
ficult

SERM. difficult of them, were not in the Apo-
 I. stles Time taken out of the Hands
 even of the Ignorant and Unlearned,
 since they are here charged with the
 Abuse of them. Neither does the
 Apostle exclude them from any future
 Access to these Writings, but only
 gives Men of inferior Capacities this
 prudent and reasonable Caution, that
 they should have a Care in reading
 these Scriptures, lest they should mis-
 interpret any Place, to the under-
 standing of which more Learning is
 required than they are Masters of. But
 they should be especially careful, lest
 from Want of Stedfastness in their
 Faith, they let themselves loose to
 raise new Doctrines and Opinions
 thence, and so disturb the Peace, and
 divide the Unity of the Christian
 Church.

But it is unreasonable from this,
 or any the like Caution, to conclude
 they ought wholly to be denied look-
 ing

ing into these Writings. The great SERM.
and necessary Truths of the Gospel, I.
and the main Lines of our Duty, are
drawn there fair and strong, and he
that runneth may read them. The
meanest Capacity, as it is concerned
to know, so it is very well able to
comprehend the Import and Extent
of them. And if they will not be
too forward of themselves, to deter-
mine the Sense of the more difficult
Places, but either leave it to those
whose peculiar Study it is, or apply
themselves to them to be informed in
the Meaning of them; with these Cau-
tions, they will be secured from all
Danger, and blest with such a Know-
ledge of their Religion, as is abso-
lutely necessary to a rational Profes-
sion of it. On the contrary, totally
to prohibit the reading these Treasures
of eternal Life is like taking away
a Traveller's Chart and Compass, be-
cause there is a Possibility that in some
Parts of his Journey he may mistake

C


the

SERM. the Use of them, and so lose his

I. Way: The proper Remedy his Guide should apply in such a Case, is to give him good Directions, to point out to him the Places where he is most apt to be misled, and shew how he may avoid the Dangers of them: But taking away his Rule is either obliging him to sit still, or leaving him to the casual Direction of those he meets on the Way, where he will be infinitely more exposed to Error, from their Ignorance or Knavery, than he could be by following a Rule, which is every where pure and intelligible, in all the most material Parts of it: And where it is not so, we are easily secured from much Danger in our Mistakes. In Sum, the holy Scriptures are the only sure Guide to our Feet, and a Lanthorn to our Paths; and it is not only the Priviledge, but the Duty of every Christian, to follow the Direction of this Light: A Light which discovers to us all we are concerned

Upon reading the Scriptures.

19

concerned to know, in order to be SERM.
happy; a Study, which is able to make I.
us wise in our most important Interest, 
even wise unto Salvation. Which
is the

II. General I proposed to speak to.
And the Proof of this will irresistibly
infer both our Duty and Liberty to
apply ourselves to this Study. For if
it be every Man's Duty to endeavour
to attain Salvation, and the reading
and studying the Scriptures be the rea-
diest Method to secure to us that At-
tainment; it follows that it is every
Man's bounden Duty, as well as great-
est Interest, to apply himself to this
saving Knowledge, these Words of
eternal Life.

Now this was the only End of
God's revealing his Will, that Man-
kind who had long wearied themselves
in dark and fruitless Searches after
Happiness, should be directed to a
Felicity, suited to the Dignity of our
C 2 Nature,

SERM. Nature, and equal to the Desires of
 I. an immortal Being. In vain had Men
 trod all the intricate Mazes of Philo-
 sophy, seeking Rest but finding none.
 Inextricable Difficulties perplexed all
 their Speculations; and in the Result
 of all their Disputes and Enquiries
 after Happiness, they were left as lit-
 tle satisfied either what to wish for,
 or how to pursue it, as when they be-
 gan. They felt and lamented Weak-
 nesses, for which they had no Reme-
 dy; were conscious of Sins, for which
 they knew not where to apply for
 Pardon; were without Assurance in
 their Hopes, and without Comfort in
 their Fears. But now, that Life and
 Immortality, which was in vain sought
 after in the Paths of natural Wisdom,
 is brought to Light by the Gospel.
 In the Scriptures, the Prospect is clear-
 ly opened to our Faith, and the Du-
 ties that lead to it distinctly proposed
 to our Practice. We are there inform-
 ed, what spiritual Enemies we are ex-
 posed


posed to in our Journey; what Attempts we may expect from their Power; and by what Arms and Conduct we may defeat their Malice. We have there Remedies prescribed, and adapted to all our Infirmities; the weary may there find Refreshments, and the heavy laden Relief; and every weak and dejected Spirit is supplied with proper Consolations: Our Repentance is there assured of Pardon, and our Sincerity in the Duties of our Religion of eternal Salvation.

SERM.
I.



And methinks, a Christian should want no Exhortation to apply himself to so important and excellent a Study. Were the Gospel proposed to us only as a great Speculation, as a Discovery of the Nature of God and spiritual Beings, as an Hypothesis that decided those great Questions, of the Rewards of Virtue, and the Immortality of the Soul, accounted for all the Mysteries of Providence, and proposed Remedies for all the Weaknesses

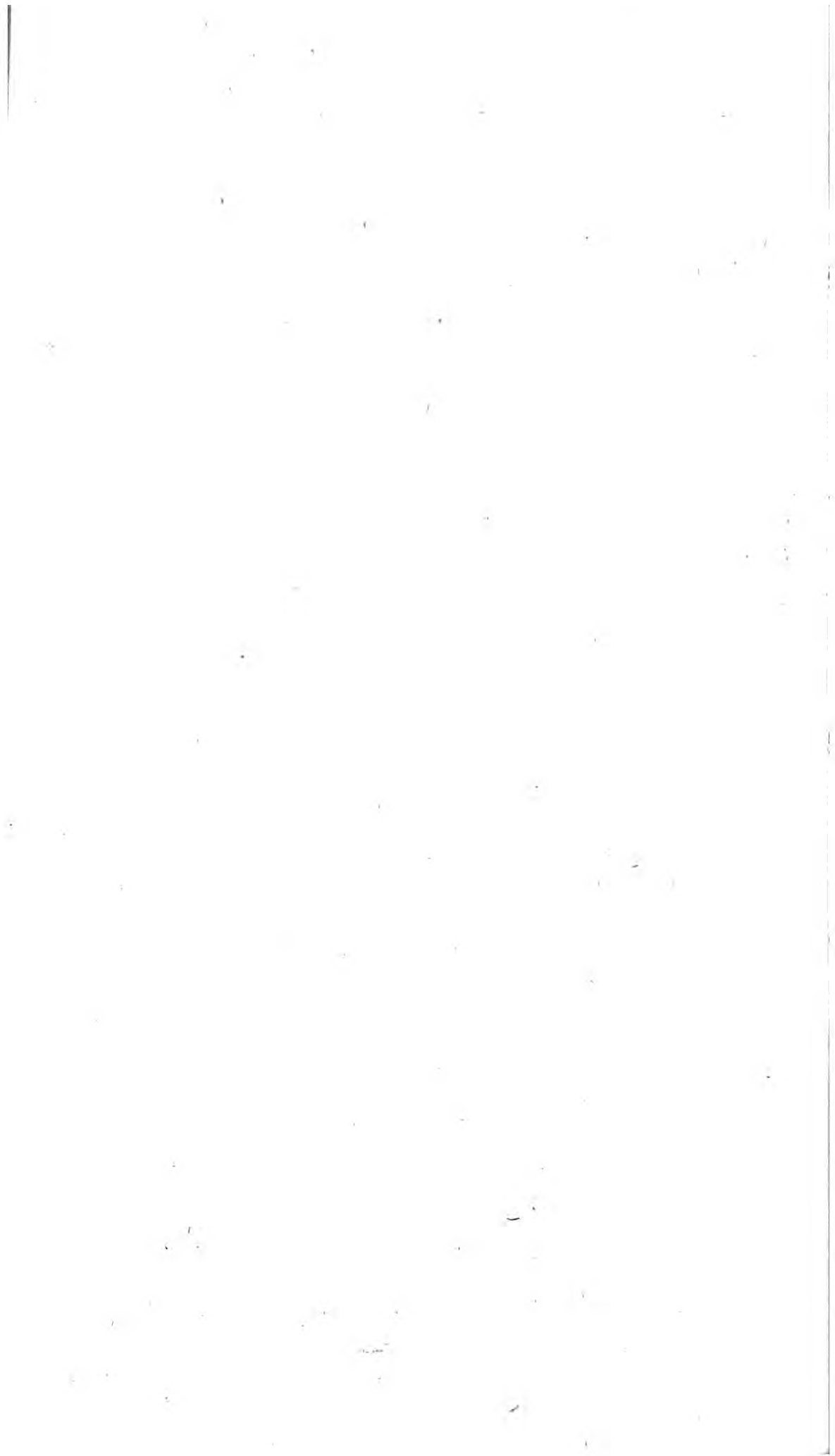
SERM. of our Nature, methinks our Curio-

I.  fity itself should find Entertainment enough to engage us in so noble a Theory. But when we consider it as the Word of Life, as a System proposed to our Faith and Observance, on Peril of everlasting Damnation ; with what Zeal and Assiduity should we apply ourselves to a Study of such Moment to our Happiness, of such infinite Concern to our Souls ! All other Researches, when compared with this, will appear but as impertinent Amusements of our Time. Tho' we have read and digested Volumes of Philosophy : tho' we are acquainted with the Histories of all Ages, and are able to judge of the Interests and Policies of Kingdoms ; yet, if we are ignorant in this one necessary Part of Knowledge, our Wisdom is but Folly, and all our Learning but a reputable Vanity : We have laid out our Money for that which is not Bread, and toil'd for that which will profit us nought.

Let

Upon reading the Scriptures. 23

Let us then labour to be wise for
ourselves, to be wise unto Salvation. SERM.
Let our daily Study be in the Statutes I.
of God, and let his Testimonies be
our Delight and our Counsellors. Let
us read and meditate on the Words of
that Wisdom which came from above,
the Wisdom of the Father of all
Lights, whom to know and obey is
eternal Life.



S E R M O N II.

Upon reading the Scriptures.

2 T I M. III. 15.

And that from a Child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation.

IN my former Observations on SERM. II.
this Text, I endeavoured to convince you,
1st, Of the Obligations incumbent on all Christians, to read and study the Holy Scriptures.

2^{dly},

2dly, To encourage you in these Applications, from the great Advantages derived to us by them: They will make us wise, even wise unto Salvation.

But because some Rules are necessary to be observ'd by us, to render the Performance of this Duty effectual; to this great End, and to prevent those Inconveniencies which the Church of *Rome* pretends to remedy, by prohibiting Men from reading the Scriptures, I proceed,

3dly, To prescribe some Rules for our Direction in this Instance of Duty.

Now, tho' a great Variety of Rules may be given for this Purpose, it may be generally sufficient that we observe these:

I. That we read the Scriptures frequently.

II. With Attention.

III. With Reverence.

IV. Without Prejudice. And,

I. We

I. We must read the Scriptures frequently, because from hence we shall receive the greatest Assistances in understanding them. One of the best Lights, in interpreting what is difficult or obscure in these Writings, is the Comparifon of one Place or Expreflion with another. Now this cannot be done without a comprehensive Knowledge of the Scriptures, without being able to recollect the Similitude of Sense or Expreflion, and readily to refer ourfelves from one Place to another ; and this Ability can no other Way be attained, than by a frequent Attendance on this Study. Another Advantage we may expect from Affiduity in this Study, is, that that Reluctancy and Difaffection, with which Men are obferved to decline and fhift off this Employment, will, by an habitual Attendance on it, be worn off, and the Duty engage us to it with Pleafure and Delight. How often indeed

SERM.

II.




SERM. deed any one should apply himself to
 II. this Duty, or how long continue in
 it, it is impossible by any general
 Rules precisely to determine. The
 Variety of Circumstances and Condi-
 tions of Life is duly to be considered.
 One Man may deserve the Character
 of a diligent Reader, while another,
 who is not less constant, may be guilty
 of Remissness and Negligence, if his
 Manner of Life and Education give
 him more Opportunities of attending
 this Duty. Some Mens Calling, and
 constant Labour for the necessary Sup-
 plies of Life, engage so large a Share of
 their Time, that they have no Leisure
 for Reading or Meditation; whilst o-
 thers, by the Bounty of Providence,
 are exempted from the Necessity of la-
 bouring with their own Hands for their
 Support, and have consequently more
 Time for religious Employments. Now
 from him who has much given, much
 is required. But God has not made
 the Supplies of Life so difficult to
 any


any Station, but that the most engaged may find some Hours of Leisure for an Attendance on this Duty. One Day at least in seven the most necessitous is discharged from his worldly Employments, and required to devote himself to the Service of Religion ; and as the Intervals of divine Worship on that Day give us the fairest Opportunities for Reading and Meditation, so it is a Sacrilege without Excuse either to trifle them away in Idleness, or prophane them by secular Applications. In Sum, every Man must be faithful and true to himself ; his own Conscience will inform him whether he be any Time remiss in this Duty or not. If he finds it a Trouble to him to read and study the holy Scripture ; if he frames Excuses, and purposely engages himself either in Business or Diversion, to shift off this Duty, he has Reason to suspect himself of Disaffection to God and his Service ; his own Heart will re-
mind

SREM,
II.



SERM. mind him of his Guilt ; and God, who

II.  is greater than his Heart, and knoweth all Things, will not be imposed on by frivolous Excuses. One would imagine, since these Scriptures are acknowledged to be the Rule and Measure of our Actions, we should desire to have them always open before our Eyes, to fix them in our Minds by repeated Applications, and to be able in every Difficulty that occurs to refer ourselves to this decisive Standard of Good and Evil. But especially, since these Scriptures are the Words of eternal Life, and the sure Guide to Salvation, no Time should be thought too much, and no Labour too great, to acquaint ourselves with their Direction. This was the Study that employ'd the Royal Psalmist in all his Retirements. The Law of the Lord was his Delight, and all the Day long was his Study in it. This was the Knowledge he recommends to us, as more to be desired than Gold, and more earnestly
to

to be sought for than fine Gold. SERM.
And if the Law, which had only the II.
Shadow of good Things to come, 
deserved so high a Character, and
gave so much Encouragement to the
Study of it, how much more should
the Writings of the Gospel engage
our Applications, in which Life and
Immortality are brought to Light, in
which our Hopes are assured of ever-
lasting Felicity, and our Actions di-
rected to the Attainment of it! But
if we expect these Advantages from
the Study of the Scriptures, we
must,

II. Read them with Attention.
Without this, indeed, barely to run
over the Words of Scripture in a neg-
ligent, cursory Manner, is a profane
Disregard to the Almighty Author,
whose name they bear. We owe so
much Respect to every common Wri-
ter, whom we think ourselves con-
cerned to read, though the Subject he
treats

SERM. treats of be of less Importance to us,
 II. as to allow him a fair and attentive
 Reading; how much more then is this
 a Duty, when the Words we are reading
 are the Words of God, when the
 Matter they treat of is no less than
 our eternal Happiness or Misery!
 How little then do we regard either
 the Majesty of the Author, or the
 Importance of the Subject, when with
 a careless Precipitation we hurry over
 some Portion of the Scripture, merely
 because we are accustomed at such a
 Time and such a Place to do so, and
 dispatch it as a burdensome Task im-
 posed on us, which we want to get
 rid of as fast as we can! To what
 Purpose, or with what Prospect of
 Improvement, can we read a Book,
 the Sense of which we never attend
 to? It is indeed equally disrespectful to
 these sacred Oracles, entirely to throw
 them by, and to read them with such
 a negligent Indifference, as defeats the
 Ends for which they are written, and
 affronts

affronts that Holy Spirit, whose Authority they bear. A due Reverence, which is,

SERM.

II.

The III^d Qualification I prescribed, will indeed secure us from falling into these Abuses, of Negligence or Inattention. By Reverence, I understand that Humility of Mind, which is due from us to our Great Creator, that Submission and Subjection of our Hearts and Understandings to his divine Will, which disposes us readily to comply with whatsoever he proposes to us, whether it concerns our Faith or Practice. So that if God reveals any Truth, and commands us to believe it, we presently, and without Scruple, give our Assent to it, tho' the Proposition revealed be above our Capacities clearly to comprehend. To a good Christian, this is a sufficient Proof of any Article, that God, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived, has revealed it in his Word. He does not reply against God, and

D

raise

SERM. raise Doubts and Questions within
 II. himself, and too curiously enquire,
 how can these Things be? because it is
 impossible our finite Capacities should
 have an exact and adequate Idea of
 the Nature and Attributes of an infi-
 nite Being. It is therefore our Duty
 to submit our Scruples to the Autho-
 rity of the Revealer; the Proposition
 may be true, notwithstanding our Ob-
 jections; and since God has command-
 ed our Assent, we are bound to believe
 it. Should the Authority of divine
 Revelation indeed be pretended for
 any Thing directly contradictory to
 the plain Principles of Reason, such
 as the Doctrine of Transubstantiation,
 it were Superstition, and not Faith,
 to assent to it. This is a Subject of
 which our Faculties are proper Judges;
 and if we cannot be sure that this is
 false, we cannot be sure that any Thing
 is true; and therefore it is Rudeness,
 and not Reverence, to interpret the
 divine Words in such a Sense as ex-
 poses

poses them to the Contempt of all considerate Enquirers. Where there is a Possibility of the Proposition being true, the divine Authority must decide the Question. This Grace of holy Reverence is that Temper of Soul to which God has promised to impart himself in the freest Communications. To the Meek, Mysteries are revealed ; to him will God discover the hidden Treasures of that Wisdom which is from above. *Thus saith the Lord, Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth my Footstool ; but to this Man will I look, to him who is poor, and of a contrite Spirit, and trembleth at my Word.* We must not exalt ourselves against God, and make our finite Reason the Measure of Truth and Duty. We must not search for the complete Law of our Faith and Actions in our own Understandings, but in the holy Scriptures, which are to be look'd on and reverenc'd by us, not as the Words of Men, but,

SERM.
II.

SERM. as they are in Truth, the Word of
 II. God.


But besides this Reverence to God the Author, there is a farther Instance of our Humility to be shewn, in not being too hafty and peremptory of ourselves to determine the Meaning and Sense of the holy Scriptures. They were indeed, every Part of them, written for Instruction, and every where contain something useful, and fit to be known. But then, what is absolutely necessary to be known by all, is easy to be understood by all, *and is obvious and intelligible to ordinary Capacities.* In the mean Time, there are not a few Places which the wisest and best Men cannot readily explain; and others which they shall never be able to interpret, till the appointed Time shall come, when God shall think fit to open our Eyes, and let us see clearly these sacred Mysteries. With great Caution therefore and Humility should the Ignorant and Unlearned proceed,
 to

to whom many more Places must be difficult and unintelligible than to those who have greater Capacities, and who have applied themselves to the Study of them. I am far from desiring that any one should implicitly resign himself to the Sentiments of another Man, how great or how knowing soever. He cannot by any Authority be oblig'd to understand any Words in Scripture in such a Sense as makes the Proposition evidently false, because no Authority can be Argument of equal Weight with the plain Evidence of the Thing. But then it is manifest, that he who has not Learning, must in many Instances of his Enquiry into the Sense of difficult Places, be, in the Result, determined by some Authority or other. And when there is an Order of Men qualified with all the Learning that is necessary for such Enquiries, and who have set themselves apart to this particular Study, and are by proper Authority appointed to be Guides to other

SERM.
II.
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SERM. Men, it is but reasonable that those  
 II. of less Abilities and Opportunities of  
 Knowledge should first consult them,  
 and prefer their Authority to any  
 other, to Persons not so qualified, or  
 not so appointed.

Upon the Whole, this general Rule  
 should be observ'd ; whatsoever is ne-  
 cessary for every Man to understand, is  
 plain to every Man ; and if Persons  
 of inferior Capacities would content  
 themselves with understanding and  
 practising what is plain in the Scrip-  
 tures, they would perhaps do all that  
 is strictly required of them. But if  
 they will be curious, or have a real  
 Occasion to enquire into the Meaning  
 of more difficult Places, it certainly be-  
 comes their Humility to consult those,  
 whom they may modestly presume to  
 know more than themselves. Let e-  
 very one apply himself first to the Stu-  
 dy and Practice of the most plain and  
 obvious Scriptures ; and if his De-  
 sire of divine Knowledge carry him  
 farther,


farther, let him with the Modesty of SERM.  
the Eunuch in the *Acts*, desire some II.  
one of more Capacity to lead and keep   
him, lest he wander out of the Way.  
The Apostle assigns this very Reason  
to the *Ephesians*, of God's establishing  
the several Orders of the Ministry in  
the Church, that they should no more  
be carried about with every Wind of  
Doctrine, but have a rational, tho' not  
infallible Recourse in their Know-  
ledge, for the Solution of their Doubts,  
in any Question of Faith or Practice.

The IV<sup>th</sup> Rule to be observed in  
consulting the Scriptures is to read  
them without Prejudice. A Fault we  
shall never avoid, unless we observe  
the former Rule, and approach those  
sacred Oracles with Reverence and  
Humility, with an open Heart, and  
a teachable Disposition.

The Word of God must have its free  
Course. To put a Force upon the  
Scriptures, and constrain them to de-

SERM. clare on our Side, and speak what they  
 II. never intended, is fighting against God,  
 and doing Violence to the Holy Spirit.  
 And of this every one is guilty, who  
 comes to those Writings with Preju-  
 dice and Prepossession. He gives a Law  
 to the Scriptures, instead of making  
 them the Rule of his Faith and Actions.  
 He is desirous that some beloved Opi-  
 nion should be true, and is therefore  
 determined to find it there written; or  
 he is unwilling to part with some fa-  
 vourite Sin, and therefore resolves to  
 find no Law against it. Be the Precept  
 never so plain, he has still some Dis-  
 tinction in Reserve, which avoids its  
 Force, and eludes its Meaning. This is  
 a Vice of the greater Danger to us, be-  
 cause it slides insensibly into our Mind,  
 and often prevails there most, when it  
 is least perceived. He is happiest who  
 is least enslaved; for I am afraid no  
 one is wholly free, and out of its  
 Power.

Who


Who is there who does not incline SERM.  
one Way or the other, and would not II.  
be glad that this or that Side of the   
Question was true, antecedently to  
the Consideration of any Law, or  
Reason, to determine his Judgment?  
Who is there that does not take up  
something without Ground, and upon  
Trust; which, because he has once ef-  
poused, he is resolved at all Adven-  
tures afterwards to maintain? To a  
Man thus prepossessed, it happens well  
if by Chance he is in the Right; for  
if it be otherwise, he is hardly to be  
reclaimed; in every Line he reads he  
finds something that sounds like an  
Argument for his Cause, and favours  
his Opinion; and when the Scales are  
held thus partially uneven, the flight-  
est Probabilities have the Weight of  
Demonstration.

Thus large and absolute is the Do-  
minion of Prejudice. And what is still  
the worst Circumstance of this Disease,  
the Infection is found most, where it  
least



SERM.  
II.

least of all should appear, in the Enquiries of Religion. With what Obstinacy may we see the Heretick persist in his Mistake! And how unwillingly is he brought to retract what he has once asserted! With what Shifts and Evasions will he put by the Evidence of Truth! And what weak Pretences will he lay hold of to maintain an Opinion he has undertaken to defend! And even at last, when he can support it no longer by Argument, he is often as far from owning his Error as before; he will hold out against the clearest Light, and resist even Conviction itself. But this is a Temper which must unavoidably deprive us of all the Advantages of our Reading and Application; and how far soever we are under the Dominion of this Passion, so far we are unqualified for the Study of the holy Scriptures. To these Qualifications I will add but one Thing more as necessary, and that is, fervent Prayer to Almighty God, that he

he would assist our Applications with SERM.  
his holy Spirit, that he open our Un- II.  
derstanding, enlighten our Ignorance,   
and lead us into the Knowledge of  
his Truth ; and give us Grace that  
we may in such wise hear, mark, learn,  
and inwardly digest his holy Word,  
that the Fruit of them may appear in  
an Orthodox Faith, and a regular  
Practice of all Christian Graces.

But there is still one Thing farther,  
the Apostle recommends to us in the  
Words of my Text ; and that is,

*4thly.* An early Education in this  
Study.

The first Advantage I shall mention,  
of being applied to this Study when  
we are Children, is, that then we  
generally read under the Direction of  
a Guide, who can explain the Doc-  
trines, recommend the Precepts, pre-  
serve us from Error, and encourage  
us in Duty.

For tho' God has appointed the  
Ministers of his Word to be as Foun-  
tains

SERM. tains of Knowledge, for the Recourse  
 II. of his People, to be at all Times ready  
 ~~~~~ to assist their Ignorance, in whatever  
 Difficulties may occur to them in the
 Study of these Oracles; yet when Men
 are arrived to the Age of Manhood,
 they are either too much ashamed to
 own their Ignorance, to apply for these
 Assistances, or too confident of their
 own Abilities to believe they want
 them; it is therefore of great Advan-
 tage to us to be inured to these Di-
 rections, when the Mind is humble
 and modest, and disposed to receive
 and obey Instruction.

But the Happiness of an early Edu-
 cation in this Knowledge will more
 distinctly appear, if we consider its
 Tendency to qualify us with those
 Dispositions I have recommended, as
 necessary to give Success to this Study.
 And,

1st, What we apply ourselves to in
 our early Years, will particularly en-
 gage our Attention. The first Passions
 that

Upon reading the Scriptures.

45

that appear in the Soul are insatiable Desires of Knowledge and Happiness. While the Capacities are empty and unfurnished, the Novelty of every Thing proposed to us, and the Authority of the Teacher, imprint the Subject on our Mind in the deepest Characters, and command the Attention of every Faculty; but especially if it is represented to us as a Subject of great Importance to our Felicity, the Mind is then eager and importunate in its Enquiries, and every Capacity of the Soul is opened to receive its Direction to Happiness. But when this Study has been neglected in our Minority, our Thoughts are distracted by a Variety of other Speculations, we are prepossessed in Favour of other Schemes of Happiness, and it is with Reluctancy we are brought to hearken to any fresh Proposals. And as what we are employ'd in when Children particularly engages our Attention; so,

SERM.
II.

2dly,

SERM.

2dly, It is received with peculiar

II. Impressions of Awe and Veneration.

{ Father and Master are Names of so much Authority with us, in that governable Part of our Life, that whatever System of Religion or Rule of Action they propose to our Observance, is revered as infallible. It is then the Scriptures are most effectually recommended to us under the venerable Character of the Word of God; and the natural Force of Education will incline us to treat them with the same Respect in the future Part of our Lives. If indeed we consider the Force of an early Education in the Knowledge of the Scriptures, with regard to the third Qualification I prescribed for reading them, a Freedom from Prejudice, the same Arguments that recommend it as a Foundation of Reverence seem equally to dissuade it, as the Occasion of all those Prejudices which afterwards obstruct the Freedom of
 our

our Enquiries. But this only is an accidental Effect, and may be very much prevented by the Care of our first Directors. Or if it be impossible (as I am afraid it is) to preserve the Mind clear from all Prepossessions, this indeed is an Argument for chusing Persons of Knowledge and Honesty to be employ'd in this Province, and eminent for their Care and Assiduity in the Discharge of it. But when this is provided for, it is certainly an estimable Happiness to the Child to be pre-engaged on the Side of Truth, and furnished with a Set of Principles, which the strictest Examinations of his Reason must afterwards approve and confirm.

But it is farther observable, that the ill Effect of these early Prejudices appears chiefly in the speculative Points of Religion. The practical Rules indeed of the Scripture are so clear and obvious, that neither the Instructor nor the Pupil can easily mistake them. It is only from Habits of
Vice,

SERM.
II.

SERM. Vice, and an Unwillingness to find a
 II. favourite Passion disapproved, that we
 are induced to prevaricate with the
 Precepts of Scripture ; and conse-
 quently, since an early Education in
 the Knowledge and Esteem of them
 is the most effectual Method to inure
 us to the Practice of those Duties they
 prescribe, it must be acknowledg'd as
 the likeliest Means to secure us from
 Mistake, in assigning the Meaning of
 them. Nay, farther ; if we examine
 into the Reasons of Mens Obstinacy
 in the Defence even of those specu-
 lative Errors, it will be often found,
 that either the Errors themselves are
 such as tend to palliate some practical
 Immorality, or that Men adhere to
 them rather out of Pride and Affecta-
 tion of Singularity, or a Disdain of
 retracting what they have once assert-
 ed, than from a serious and rational
 Persuasion of the Truth of them. And
 consequently since, as I observed, an
 early Education in the Study of the
 Scrip-

Scriptures, is the most probable Method to engage us to practice that Meekness, Humility, and the other moral Graces they prescribe ; it is a Remedy equally effectual to preserve us from the greater Part of these speculative Errors ; and whatever Mistake can consist with the sincere Exercise of these Virtues, is of no great Danger to our Happiness, and consequently of no great Concern whether it be prevented or not.

Upon the Whole, as the Study of the Scriptures is in general commanded to all Men, so an early Application to this Study is particularly encouraged and recommended to us. This is the proper Season of Discipline and Instruction ; and whoever, thro' Misfortune or Negligence, has wanted this Direction in his early Years, must return back to the Modesty and Humility of that Age, before he is qualified to receive the Doctrines of the Gospel. *Verily, verily* (says our Saviour) *whoso-*
E ever

SERM. *ever shall not receive the Kingdom of*
 II. *God as a little Child, he shall not enter therein.* To conclude :

The Holy Scriptures are the noblest and most entertaining Employment of every Period of our Age, and every Condition of our Life. We may there hear God speak to us, and live. We have there the most infallible Directions to Duty, and the most animating Encouragements in the Performance of it. Every Infirmary of our Nature is there prescribed its proper Remedy, and every Affliction of Life is supplied with proper Consolations. The Just is there confirm'd, the Sinner reclaim'd, and the Penitent revived with Offers of Pardon; and every sincere and faithful Servant of Jesus Christ is supported in all the Difficulties and Labours of Obedience, with the Assurance of a glorious Immortality.

S E R M O N III.

The Duty of proving our Religion.

2 T H E S S. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast that which
is good.*

THIS general Direction to SERM.
the *Thessalonians*, the Con- III.
nection of the Place restrains
to Doctrines taught, or offered to
them. In the 19th and 20th
Verses the Apostle had commanded
them not to quench the Spirit, nor
despise Prophecies ; which Words re-
late

SERM. late to the supernatural Graces in that
 III. Age vouchsafed to the Church, by
 which some Persons were extraordinarily called to teach the Gospel, both in and out of the public Assemblies. We have a pretty large Account of this Matter, 1 *Cor.* Chapters xii, and xiii. With regard to these Gifts, the Apostle here directs, that they who found themselves so inspired should not suppress the Gift, but communicate what the Spirit suggested to them, for the Edification of the Church; and that others should not think slightly of the Persons thus distinguish'd, but honour their Character, and attend with Reverence to their Instructions. But because the Subtilty of Satan was such, that he could transform himself into an Angel of Light, and mimick the divine Infusions, and at a Time when the real Vouchsafements of the Spirit were frequent, many were fond of thinking themselves thus favour'd, and the Attention of all Men prepared
 to

to expect Instruction in this Way, there was great Danger of their being imposed on, and mistaking the Suggestions of the Devil, or the Persuasions of a strong Imagination, for the Dictates of the Holy Ghost. Therefore the Apostles were careful to arm their Converts with the utmost Caution in admitting these Inspirations. So St. *John* commands them not to believe every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they were of God. And agreeably St. *Paul*, with respect to the same Subject, here requires the *Thessalonians* to prove all Things, (*i. e.*) all Presumptions of Inspiration in themselves, or Pretensions to it in others; to try the Doctrines before they admitted them, and hold fast that only, which in the Result of such Scrutiny appear'd to be good. This seems to have been the first Intention of the Words: And since Enthusiasts are not yet wanting, who pretend to immediate Calls and Inspirations, and challenge our Regard to

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III.

SERM. their Doctrine as to the Dictates of
 III. the Holy Ghost, the Caution here
 given is still applicable, even in its first
 View. But it is evident that the Reason and Analogy of the Preecept holds good, with respect to all Doctrines by any Persons, or under any Pretensions taught among Christians. They may as well be imposed on by false Collections of Reason, and false Expositions of ancient Revelations, as by false Pretences to present Inspiration, and therefore are equally concern'd to guard against both; to prove and examine all Things, lest they be led into Error by the Delusions of Satan, the Vanity of their own Mind, or the cunning Craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive. To assist you in the Application of this Scripture, I shall distinctly consider,

I. The Duty here enjoined, of proving all Things.

II. The

II. The Rule by which this Trial
must be made.

SERM.

III.



III. The subsequent Duty, or the
End of this Trial, that we may hold
fast that which is good.

Now, I. The Duty is founded on
the Faculties and Distinctions of our
Nature. God has made us reasonable
Creatures, capable of Deliberation and
Choice, of examining the Good or
Evil, the Truth or Falshood of what
is proposed to us, and therefore with
the greatest Justice demands a Con-
duct from us agreeable to these Advan-
tages. “ The Duty is still heightened
“ by the Directions he has given us
“ in the Use of these Faculties, the
“ Assistances he vouchsafes us, and
“ the Means of improving them he
“ has put in our Power. All these are
“ Talents committed to our Trust, for
“ the Management of which every

SERM. “ Man is accountable to God, the
 III. “ Donor of them. We are bound to
 “ act under a due Sense of these Ob-
 “ ligations in every Part of our Con-
 “ duct, carefully to examine what is
 “ proposed to our Choice or Assent,
 “ and be determined by such Induce-
 “ ments as ought to prevail on a ra-
 “ tional Agent in our Circumstances.
 “ But the Neglect of this Duty must
 “ be more or less criminal, in Propor-
 “ tion to the greater or less Importance
 “ of the Subject before us.” And con-
 sequently, we are more especially ob-
 liged to this Care and Scrutiny in En-
 quiries of Religion where the Subject
 is of infinite Concern to us, the Mea-
 sures of our Duty to God, and the
 Conditions of engaging his Favour.
 “ And if it be the bounden Duty of
 “ every Man, as a reasonable Being,
 “ to prove and examine what he ad-
 “ mits under the sacred Character of
 “ his Religion, it is needless to en-
 “ quire whether he has a Right to do
 “ it;

“ it ; for every Man has a Right to do
“ what God requires from him. This
“ Examination indeed is a natural
“ Duty, or, which is all one, a na-
“ tural Right, which no positive Insti-
“ tution can supercede. For before
“ any Man can submit to such an In-
“ stitution, it must appear reasonable,
“ and his Duty so to do, which sup-
“ poses a Trial and Examination of
“ the Reasons upon which it is offer'd
“ to him, and upon the Result of his
“ Search, a Conviction from those Rea-
“ sons, that he ought to submit to it.
“ And it is sufficient Ground to suspect
“ and withhold Assent from any Insti-
“ tution, that it declines such Trial,
“ and refuses an equitable Examinati-
“ on. Upon what Evidences we are to
“ admit any Institution, or general
“ System of Doctrines, and how far,
“ when admitted, they are a Rule for
“ our farther Search, will be consider-
“ ed under the next Head.” What I
would here observe is, the great Care
and

SERM. and Attention with which we ought
 III. to proceed in our Trial. To convince
 us of this, we need only consider the
 Extent and Difficulty of the Work,
 and how much the due Discharge of
 it imports our Happiness. Now, tho'
 we set aside all other Professions of
 Religion, and begin our Enquiry un-
 der the Acknowledgement of the Chri-
 stian Revelation, the Extent and Diffi-
 culty of this Work must still appear
 very great to us, when we observe the
 Multitude of Sects and Parties, the
 different and contradictory Schemes
 and Doctrines even of that Religion.
 Amidst this distracting Variety of O-
 pinions, the Truth in every Question
 can be but with one ; and yet all with
 equal Confidence assume it to them-
 selves. Error indeed, as such, can no
 more engage our Assent, than Evil, as
 such, can engage our Choice ; but
 Good and Evil, Truth and Falshood,
 are often so blended in the same Sub-
 ject, that a careless or hasty Observer
 may

may easily be imposed on, and perceiving some Truth, be induced, for the Sake of it, to admit a long Appen-
dage of the most dangerous Errors. It is farther to be observ'd, that in many Steps of our Enquiry, the Assistance of some Guide or Director will be necessary to us, and the Success of our Search will very much depend upon this Choice. And amidst the various Pretenders to this Office, it is many times as difficult for an ordinary Christian to determine whom to follow, where he wants a Guide, as it is to distinguish Truth from Error in Questions more subject to his own Disquisition. This Event our Lord has particularly foretold, that false Prophets and false Teachers should arise, pretending his Name and Authority, crying, *Lo, here is Christ; and lo, there.* And at the same time he reminds us of the Difficulties that would attend their Appearances, and represents the Elect themselves as very hardly escaping their

SERM.
III.

SERM. their Delusions. Thus difficult is the
 III. Work which this Precept prescribes to
 us. And if to this Consideration we
 add the Importance to our Happiness
 of rightly discharging it, we can want
 no farther Argument to excite our ut-
 most Attention to it. The Subject,
 as I observ'd, is of infinite Concern
 to us. Ignorance, Inattention, or Mis-
 take in other Enquiries, is compara-
 tively of little Moment ; but here our
 eternal Interests are at Stake. And
 how studious and accurate soever we
 may be in other Researches, if we are
 negligent in this our Knowledge will
 be but Ignorance, and all our Wisdom
 Folly. To be remiss in this Case,
 and for Want of such Care as is in
 our Power, to receive as Commands
 of God what are contrary to his Will,
 must have fatal Consequences ; it is
 losing our Way to Happiness, and be-
 ing Fools in that Part of Knowledge
 which only deserves the Name of Wis-
 dom. And when we farther consider,
 how

how difficult it is to retreat from a wrong Step; how hardly we are brought to retract a Mistake we have once admitted; how fast Errors multiply, and how irresistibly we are led into a vast Train of false Inferences from one false Principle, we cannot but apprehend the Importance of our Care in trying every Doctrine, whether it be of God, before we receive it under that Character.

SERM.

III.



“ Much indeed has been taught in
“ Defence or Excuse of involuntary
“ Error; and doubtless much will
“ be indulged by God to Errors re-
“ ally of that Character. But that
“ Excuse has certainly been applied
“ much farther than the Reason of
“ the Thing, and the plain Decla-
“ rations of the Gospel, will bear,
“ Some Errors there are which con-
“ tradict such evident Truths, that
“ they cannot, in the most favourable
“ Judg-

SERM. “ Judgment, be presumed entitled to
 III. “ it; some which manifestly subvert
 } “ the Foundations of Christianity,
 “ and exclude from the Promises of
 “ that Covenant. And tho’ it is not
 “ for us to set Limits to the divine
 “ Mercy, yet this we may securely
 “ affirm, that whatever other Title
 “ the Person thus erring may have
 “ to the Compassion of God, they
 “ have none to the Promises made to
 “ Mankind in the Gospel-Covenant.
 “ But this however is universally ac-
 “ knowledged, that no Error can
 “ presume upon this Excuse; but what
 “ is the Result of a full, attentive,
 “ and impartial Examination, after
 “ careful Use of the most proper As-
 “ sistances and Means of Information
 “ in our Power; and consequently
 “ the Examination I am contending
 “ for is equally confessed a Duty by
 “ all Parties in this Dispute. And
 “ when it is considered how difficult
 “ it

“ it is to apply the Circumstances, SERM. III.
“ which by the most favourable Opi-
“ nion are required to excuse an
“ Error, and of how few Instances
“ they can with a just Confidence be
“ affirmed, I may be allowed to re-
“ sume my general Argument from
“ the Danger of Error, and persuade
“ you from that Consideration to the
“ greatest Care and Diligence in prov-
“ ing all Things, and trying every
“ Scheme and Doctrine of Religion
“ proposed to you.”

But as to the Case of involuntary Error, suppose I should enlarge myself a little more. I would observe then, that to a poor Heathen, who never heard of the Gospel, the Ignorance of it cannot be imputed as Sin; we may without Scruple conclude, what has not been proposed to him he cannot be said to have rejected; he is indeed without the Covenant of God,

SERM. III. God, and we leave him to his unde-
 III. clared Mercies. But he who has re-
 jected the Gospel upon the clear Pro-
 posal, is in very different Circumstan-
 ces ; he had the Means of Convicti-
 on offered to him, and resisted its Evi-
 dences, and is therefore in the Con-
 dition of *Chorazin* and *Bethsaidai* ; and
 our Lord has declared it will be more
 tolerable even for *Tyre* and *Sidon* in
 the Judgment than for them. In like
 manner, a Papist of ordinary Educa-
 tion, in those Countries where the
 Tyranny of that Religion prevails,
 is deprived of all Means of examin-
 ing and correcting his Errors ; the
 Scriptures are kept from him, lock'd
 up in an unknown Tongue, and all
 Books prohibited, but those which
 countenance and confirm his Mistakes ;
 and we may charitably hope, that
 for the Sake of those Foundations of
 Christian Religion which he holds,
 and in Compassion to the in-
 vincible Prejudices and Inabilities
 he

he lies under, God will pardon the SERM.
Hay and Stubble he builds upon the III.
them. But then the Case of one who
lives where he may with full Liberty
peruse the Scriptures in his own Lan-
guage, and has free Access to all Assist-
ances and Means of better Informa-
tion, is very different; it is plainly
his own Fault, if he does not examine
every Article according to the Oppor-
tunities before him, and judge for
himself what is right. And the same
Reasons will equally prove the Guilt
of Error in all Cases where the Means
of proper Examination were in any
Person's Power, and it was his own
Remissness, Neglect or Obstinacy, that
he did not make Use of them: This
he might have done, this it was his
Duty to do, and the Omission of it
will justly be imputed to him as a
Crime.

But I must observe here, in Re-
straint of the Generality of this Pre-
cept of trying all Things, that it can-
F not

SERM. not be understood to oblige every

III. Man accurately to examine every Scheme of Religion, every Doctrine or Opinion, that is or has been advanced by the various Pretenders to direct Mankind in Faith or Duty. For under this Exposition, the latter Part of the Precept would contradict the former: If we were thus to prove all things, we could hold fast nothing. A Man's whole Life would upon this Supposition be spent in the Trial: And the Folly of such a Conduct would be the same with that of a Traveller, who should bestow his whole Time in consulting Maps, and enquiring his Way, without proceeding one Step towards his Journey's End. The Office of those who are appointed to guide and direct others, will oblige them to a greater Compass and Extent in these Enquiries, that they may be prepared to resist Gain-fayers, and be ready upon any Occasion of Danger to the Flock, to instruct

struct the Ignorant, confirm the Wa-
vering, and recall those who are go-
ing astray. But to ordinary Christi-
ans, it is sufficient if they examine
carefully their present Persuasion; and
so often as they are solicited to admit
any new or contrary Doctrines, to
give them a fair Trial, according to
their Abilities, and the proper Means
of Inquiry and Information. In short,
he who will set himself accurately to
examine all Opinions, will engage in
an endless, distracting, unprofitable
Labour, and will find himself at Lei-
sure to do nothing else: And he who
will examine none, (but either retain
his present, or refuse or admit any o-
ther, without a cautious and rational
Trial) can be but by Chance in the
Right, and must want that Satisfacti-
on in his own Choice and Sentiments,
which alone can give him a just Confi-
dence towards God. The proper Con-
duct in this Case, lies in the Middle
between these Extremes: To prove

SERM.
III.



SERM. what we admit, that we may be able
 III. to give a Reason of the Hope that is
 in us ; and to adhere with Stedfastness
 to what we have proved, that we may
 not be perpetually tossed to and fro
 with every Wind of Doctrine, ever
 learning, and never coming to the
 Knowledge of the Truth. The great
 Difficulty is, what Examination is suf-
 ficient, when we may rest in any Doc-
 trine as sufficiently proved ; and this
 will principally depend on our pro-
 ceeding by the proper Rule of Trial.
 For the trying or proving any Thing
 supposes some Rule or Standard, by
 which we may judge of its Rectitude,
 or Obliquity : And if we take a false
 Rule, inadequate or disproportioned
 to the Subject we are to prove, what-
 ever Care we may use in the Appli-
 cation, it is impossible we should form
 a right Judgment by it. This Inqui-
 ry is what I

II. Proposed.

It

It has been sometimes affirmed, SERM.
That natural Reason is the proper and III.
only Rule, by which we are to proceed in the Trial here enjoined. Now if by Reason we mean the Faculty of Reasoning, it is very true that Reason is the only Faculty of our Nature, by which we are enabled to judge of the Truth or Falshood of any Propofition offered to us. But when Reason is considered as a Faculty, it cannot with any Propriety be called a Rule ; any more than the Sense of seeing is the Rule by which we measure the Length or Breadth of any Body ; by that Sense we are enabled to measure it ; but the Rule by which we do it is some Standard which we apply, and by a Comparison with which we determine the Dimensions of the Subjects which we measure. In like manner Reason, in examining the Truth of a Propofition before it, answers to the Power or Faculty of seeing in the other

SERM. Instance ; but the Rule by which
 III. Reason judges is some certain ac-
 knowledged Truth, with which it
 compares and measures the Propositi-
 on in Question, and determines on its
 Truth or Falshood. But sometimes
 by natural Reason we mean the Per-
 ceptions or Conclusions of natural
 Reason ; and these, it is confessed,
 are a Rule, our first and primary
 Rule : But then, in Consequence of
 this, we are led to admit other Rules,
 and therefore it is not our only Rule.
 When we would find the Quantity or
 Dimensions of any Body, we first ap-
 ply some certain acknowledged Mea-
 sure ; and when by such Application
 we have found the exact Dimension of
 that Subject, the Thing measured be-
 comes a Standard, or Rule, which we
 apply in examining others. Thus al-
 so our Reason proceeds in the Search
 of Truth. We begin with some sim-
 ple Maxims or Principles, whose Truth
 we

we immediately perceive as soon as we attend to them : When by the Application of these, we have found the Truth of other Propositions, these Conclusions of one Inquiry, become Principles and Rules to us in a farther Search. In general, Truth, perceived Truth, is the Rule by which we measure, or prove what we yet doubt of ; a Rule which must multiply upon us in the Progress of our Deductions ; and, though we set out with the simple Perceptions of natural Reason, will oblige us by necessary Consequence to admit a great Variety of other Rules, according to the different Nature of the Subjects concerning which we enquire. Thus in the Duty we are considering, the examining our Religion, our first Rule is the clear Perceptions of our natural Reason, as namely, That there is a God, the Author of all Things ; a Being holy, just, and good ; of infinite Wisdom, and Power ; That he is to

SERM.

III.

SERM. be worshipped, honoured and obeyed
 III. by his Creatures ; That their greatest
 Happiness must be the Consequence
 of pleasing him, and their greatest
 Misery of offending him ; these I may
 look upon as Conclusions of natural
 Reason, whose Evidence must appear
 to every Man who attends to them :
 And by these it is his Duty to exam-
 ine every Scheme of Religion offer-
 ed to him. Reason farther tells him,
 that if God shall at any Time com-
 municate his Will to him, he is bound
 to comply with it, and obey him in
 such Services as he is pleased to direct ;
 and consequently, whenever he re-
 ceives any System of Precepts as a di-
 vine Revelation, that Revelation be-
 comes a Rule for the Trial of all Doc-
 trines, so far as the Direction of it
 reaches : And his Reason goes no far-
 ther back in its Inquiry, than whe-
 ther what is proposed to him be agree-
 able to the Dictates of that Revela-
 tion ; being previously assured, that
 what-

whatever is there taught is infallibly true, and all its Commands of necessary Obligation. SERM.
III.

What I have here suggested will appear to us in a stronger Light, if we apply it more distinctly to the two Points, which in this Case require our Examination. The *first* of which is, whether what is proposed to us as a divine Revelation be really such. *Secondly*, What is the Import and Direction of that Revelation? As to the *First*, The Rule of our Trial must be some prior acknowledged Truths, which can be no other than the Perceptions, or Conclusions of our natural Reason. If what is proposed to us be inconsistent with those Attributes, which the natural Idea of God includes; if it cannot be reconciled to his Wisdom, Holiness, or Justice, Reason will oblige us to reject it, as not from God. Or if it contradicts any other plain Truth,
natural

SERM. natural or moral, we cannot receive it
 III. as a divine Revelation : Because then
 we must admit the same Proposition
 as true and false at the same Time ;
 as true, by evident Perception, and
 false, as contradicted by God. The
 greater Evidence indeed will necessa-
 rily overbear the less : And since we
 cannot have so great Evidence, that
 any Book or Doctrine is revealed by
 God, as we have in a clear Percep-
 tion of Truth, from the Nature of
 the Thing ; it follows, that no Man
 acting rationally can admit as reveal'd
 by God, what contradicts a clear Per-
 ception, or Conclusion of Reason. But
 then Reason will not permit us to re-
 ject what is propos'd, as not revealed
 by God, on Account of some Affer-
 tions, whose Truth we cannot per-
 ceive. A clear Perception of Fals-
 hood is indeed a just Objection ;
 but our not perceiving the Truth of
 what is affirmed is none at all ; be-
 cause that may be true, which we do
 not

not perceive to be so ; and where the Subject is confessedly above the Reach and Comprehension of a human Understanding, we cannot but acknowledge, that much may be true of it, which we cannot perceive to be so. Natural Reason in this Case can neither affirm nor deny any Thing. The Proposition before it may be either true or false ; and, whether it be one or the other, it cannot from its own Perceptions determine. At the same Time it must confess, that God certainly knows whether it be true or false ; and if God affirms it, Reason immediately requires our Assent to it ; not because we perceive the Truth of it from the Evidence of the Thing better than we did before, but because it is affirmed to us by an infallible Authority. And if God may reveal what we cannot comprehend, and is to be believed in what we shall so reveal ; it follows, that our not comprehending the Truth of any Proposition

SERM.

III.

SERM. III. fittion, in a System offered us as a divine Revelation, is not, even in the Views of natural Reason, a sufficient Objection against the Reality of that Revelation. Whether it be a divine Revelation or not must not be tried by our Perceptions in this Case, but by the external Proofs of the Revelation. And here, it is confess'd our Reason stands again upon its own Ground, and is to proceed by its natural Principles and Conclusions, as the proper Rule of Trial. Among these Principles, Reason tells us in general, that no man acting rationally ought to insist on greater Evidence than the Nature of the Thing in Question will admit of; that the best external Evidence any Man can give that he is sent by God, and speaks to us by his Commission, is doing such Works as none but God could enable a Man to do; and since God cannot be supposed to bear this Testimony to a Falshood, whatever Institution
or

or Doctrine we find thus attested, Reason will oblige us to receive as from God. It will also suggest to us, that when God has once declared his Will, that Revelation (without an express Restraint) will bind not only those to whom it was first made, but all succeeding Ages of Mankind, to whom it shall be communicated. But in the successive Tradition of this Revelation, the Evidence of those Facts, by which it was originally attested, must in the Nature of the Thing be less; and therefore, that no Man acting rationally can insist upon the same Proofs that were at first given, or refuse his Assent to such Evidences, as by one in his Circumstances could be expected, supposing such Revelation to have been made, and such Facts to have been performed in Attestation of it. Thus far natural Reason is the only Guide of our Enquiry, and the Principles and Conclusions of it the only Rule of our Examination.

By

SERM. By this Rule our blessed Lord offered
 III. his Religion to be tried by the World.
 He appeals as an internal Evidence to the Truth and Excellency of his Doctrine, and defies any Objection to be raised thence against admitting it to be from God ; and as a positive Evidence that it was so, he appeals to the Miracles he wrought, the Works he did from the Father, in Confirmation of it.

Where a precedent Revelation indeed is acknowledged, Reason requires us to take that also into our Rule, by which we examine a subsequent, because God cannot contradict himself; and what he declares at one Time must be consistent with what he has declared at another. And agreeably our Lord refers to the Revelations made to *Abraham, Moses*, and the Prophets, not only as consistent with his Gospel, but as bearing Testimony to it. Of the Arguments of this Kind occurring in the New Testament, Part
 are

are peculiarly adapted to the Convic-
tion of the *Jews*, and therefore in
the Examination of them, they ought
only to be considered in that View.
But others are of general Force, and
offer Proofs for the Revelation of the
Gospel, which unprejudic'd Reason
must acknowledge conclusive, to all
who attend to them.

SERM.
III.

By the concurrent Evidence of these
Proofs, Christianity prevail'd on the
Faith of *Jew* and *Gentile*; and upon
these it will stand to the End of the
World, against all the Artifice and
Objections of Infidelity. To fair and
impartial Reason it appeals; nor will
it ever decline this Trial, or desire any
other Favour from those who shall
make it, than that Men would allow
the Arguments asserting its Authori-
ty the same Strength and Weight, that
are universally given to the same kind
of Evidence in other Cases.

When

SERM.

III.

When Reason, in the Result of this Examination, is satisfied that the Gospel is a divine Revelation, it then (as I observed) refers us to this Revelation, as our proper Rule for the Trial of all Doctrines, pretending to direct us in Faith or Duty. It rests upon a general Conviction in the Truth of all that is there affirm'd, and has nothing farther to do, but to acquaint itself with the Imports and Contents of what is there delivered; and then either rejects or approves every Doctrine proposed to it, as it finds it agreeable or inconsistent with the Dictates of that Revelation.

Here indeed a fresh Difficulty attends it, how to ascertain the Sense and Meaning of that Revelation. For though the Scriptures are a Rule excellently fitted for the Trial of all Doctrines, yet unless we understand the Marks and Inscriptions upon the Rule, it will be of very little Service to us in the Application. If we mistake the Meaning and Direction
of

proving our Religion.

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of Scripture, we must consequently
mistake in judging of any Doctrine by
it. What Rules ought to govern and
determine us in the Application of
Scripture, is what I proposed in the
next Place to enquire.

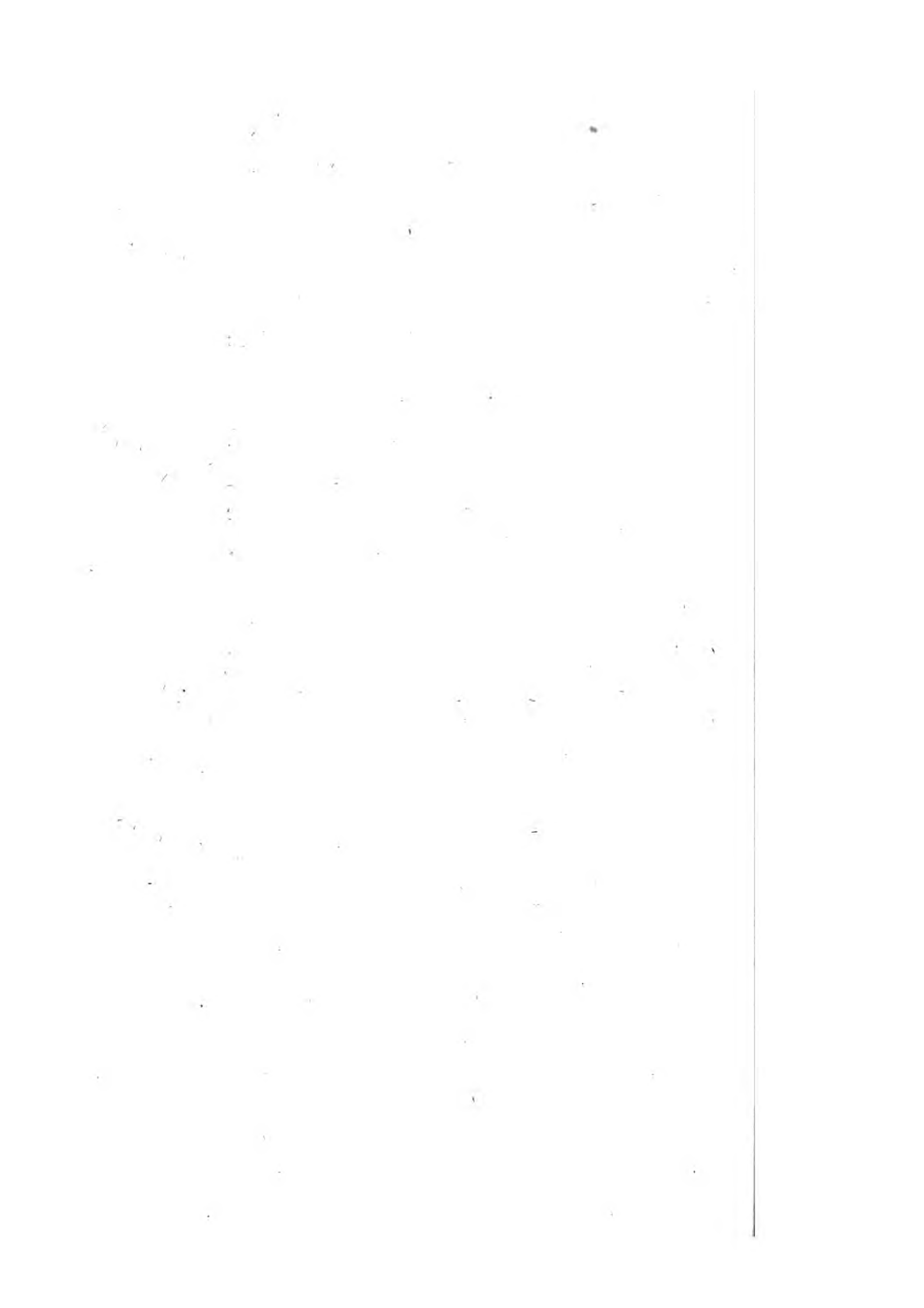
SERM.
III.

But this being a Point of great Im-
portance and some Difficulty, will re-
quire a larger Consideration, than can
now be allowed it: I shall therefore
reserve it for your farther Reflections.

*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the Love of God, and the Fellow-
ship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all
evermore.*

G

S E R-



S E R M O N I V.

The Duty of proving our Religion.

I T H E S S. V. 21.

*Prove all Things : hold fast that which
is good.*

IN my former Reflections on this SERM.
Scripture, I considered, IV.
1st. The Obligation and Extent
of the Duty here enjoined of proving
all Things, the Care and Attention
the Performance requires, and how
much it imports our Happiness faith-
fully to discharge it. I proceed then,

G 2

2dly,

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2dly, To consider the Rule, by which the Trial here prescribed must be made: For the Duty of trying any Thing supposes some certain Rule by which it is to be tried, and by the Application of which we may judge of its Rectitude or Defects. Upon this Aead I observed, That the only Rule, by which we can prove or examine the Truth of any Proposition in question, must be some prior acknowledged Truth. That therefore our first Rule in all Inquiries, is those simple Truths, which we immediately perceive by their own Light; and when, by the Application of these, we have found Truth in other Propositions, these Conclusions become Principles or Rules, which we proceed to apply and judge by in a farther Search, that this Process holds as well in Religious, as in other Inquiries. In the first and leading Question of this Search, whether what is proposed to us as a divine Revelation really is so, the

proving our Religion.

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IV.

the Rule of our Judgment can be no other than the Principles and Conclusions of our natural Reason, by Application of which to the Evidences offered to us, we form our Judgment, and either approve, or reject the Revelation proposed. But when in the Result of this Trial we are satisfied in the Revelation, the Contents of that Revelation become all acknowledged Truths, and as such, Principles and Rules, which we thenceforward apply in the Examination of all Doctrines pretending to the Character of Religion. To the Principles of natural Reason, the Christian Revelation submits the Evidences of its divine Original: By this Rule it is contented to be tried, and will ever abide this Examination. But to us who acknowledge its sacred Authority, the Precepts and Assertions it contains are Rule, to which every Doctrine must approve itself, before we can admit it into the System of our

G 3 Religion.

SERM. Religion. Doctrines of Men may be
 IV. believed, and the Commands of pro-
 per Authority ought to be obeyed by
 us, provided they are not repugnant
 to this Revelation: And if the one
 are taught only as Conclusions of Sci-
 ence, and the other enjoined only as
 fit and prudential, we have no Occa-
 sion to try them by Scriptures, nor is
 that the proper Rule of our Assent or
 Obedience. But if any Thing is pro-
 posed to us as a Doctrine or Command
 of God, it must be brought to this
 Test. Here the Bounds of what is
 strictly and properly our Religion are
 fixt, and whatever will recommend
 itself to us under that Character must
 abide this Trial. As Christians, we
 profess the Religion which Christ and
 his Apostles taught. That Religion
 the Books of the Holy Scripture are
 so far acknowledged by all to contain,
 that whatsoever is here delivered is
 certainly a Part of that Religion;
 and though some Doctrines have in
 all

all Ages pretended to derive themselves by unwritten Tradition from the Apostles, yet the Proofs of such Tradition are manifestly too weak to bear the Authority laid on them : And even the Asserters of them must confess, that if they contradict Scripture, they cannot be received on the Pretence of their Tradition. The Books of Scripture then are an original Standard, by which all Doctrines *pretending to teach* Christian Religion, and even these Traditions themselves, must be examin'd. But when we are agreed upon this Rule, there remains still a Difficulty in fitting and adjusting it to the Things to be proved by it. For all the various Sects and Divisions of Christians appeal to this Rule, and pretend to derive their several Schemes of Doctrine from it, or at least to reconcile them to it ; and consequently, unless we can fix and ascertain some Methods of applying this Rule, we shall still labour under great Per-

SERM. plexities, and be subject to great Mistakes in proving and judging of a
 IV. Doctrine by it. A new Doctrin (for Instance) and opposite to what we formerly received, is offered to us: The Precept of the Apostle requires us to prove it; and the Rule by which we must prove it is the Scripture; but both the former Doctrin and the new appeal to Scripture variously interpreted. How then shall we come to any Conclusion in our Trials without some Rule for ascertaining the Sense of Scripture?

The Consideration of this Point is what I reserved for our present Thoughts.

Two Opinions have been advanced, which undertake to shorten this Inquiry, and solve all the Difficulties of it at once. The

First is, that the public authoritative Explications of the Church, convey'd down by the appointed Teachers *in the Order* of that Society, are uni-

universally, and without any Hesitation or farther Scruple, to be received as the true Sense of Scripture; and consequently are the ultimate Rule by which all Doctrines are to be tried. In extreme Opposition to this, a

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IV.



Second Opinion has been taught; that in determining the Sense of Scripture, no Regard at all is due to the Expositions of any Man, or Body of Men, but every Man is to take his Bible, and pick out a Creed and a Religion for himself; and whatever thus appears to him to be the Sense of Scripture, whether right or wrong, is the proper Rule of his Duty, and he is justified in professing and acting accordingly.

Something of Truth there is in both these Opinions, when limited as Reason and the Nature of the Thing require; but if asserted universally, and without any Restriction, both are attended with the greatest Absurdities and Inconveniencies.

As

SERM. AS to the first it will fall under farther Consideration ; but I beg Leave
 IV. here to observe, that the Precept of the Apostle before us is delivered to particular Christians ; under that Direction I here consider it ; and am not enquiring by what Rule they shall try whether they profess and practise what is required from them, as Members of the outward Society of the Church, or whether any Doctrine proposed to them be agreeable to the Terms of that Union ; for under that Character the Rule of our Duty, and consequently of trying what is proposed to us as our Duty, is the public Declarations of the Community, and cannot in the Nature of the Thing be any other. But I here consider Christians as enquiring what is their immediate Duty to Christ, or what the Doctrines and Laws of the Gospel require every one who acknowledges that Revelation to believe and practise ; in which Search the Doctrines of the Church are subject to his
 Exami-

Examination as well as others. For SERM.
one of his first Questions will be, IV.
Which among the several Communi-
ties of Christians he shall associate him-
self with? And the Determination of
his Choice will principally arise from
a Comparison of the Professions and
Actions enjoin'd by each, as Terms of
their Communion, with the Doctrines
and Laws of the Gospel. In which
Examination the Expositions of Scrip-
ture given by any Church cannot be
the Rule of his Judgment, because
these are the very Things to be judg'd
of; and the Question before him is,
Whose Laws and Doctrines are most
agreeable to Scripture? Which cannot
be decided by the Affirmation of ei-
ther Party, but by some prior Rule, to
which both appeal; which can be no
other than the Conclusions of common
Reason concerning the Sense of Scrip-
ture. The Assertors of absolute Sub-
mission to the Expositions of the
Church, whenever they would per-
suade

SERM. suade you into their Communion, are
 IV. themselves forced to confess your own
 Judgment in the Explication of Scripture to be your Rule; for every Argument they offer from Scripture in Support of their Doctrines, is a manifest Appeal to this Rule, and supposes you no farther obliged to admit them than they are affirmed in Scripture, understood in such a Sense as common Reason must approve to be the intended Meaning of it.

In short, the Decisions of the Church *in foro externo*, or as prescribing the Conditions of Union with the outward Society, oblige the Submission of all its Members as such, and are the Rule of their Duty, as united in that Relation. They must either profess and act as the public Rules of the Society direct, or submit to the appointed Penalties of Refusal; and those we are to receive as the Doctrines and Decisions of the Church, which are derived

ved to us by those Persons, who by the Constitution of the Society are appointed to be our Guides. But *in foro interno*, or in the Consideration of what Christ in his Gospel requires every Christian to believe and practise as his Disciple, the Doctrines and Expositions of the Church are themselves to be tried, and have only the Nature of probable Arguments of the Meaning of Scripture. As such indeed great Regard is due to them, but not such an absolute Submission as must overrule our own clear Convictions. To assert this unlimited Authority to them, is in itself most absurd, and reflects great Dishonour on our holy Religion; for to be a Christian upon these Terms, a Man must cease to be a reasonable Being.

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IV.

As to the second Opinion, that no Regard at all is due to any Man, or Society of Men, in ascertaining the Sense of Scripture, but every Man is to take his Bible, and be his own Expofitor,

SERM. tor, and form a Creed and Religion
 IV. for himself : This, if asserted without
 any Limitation, as it sometimes has
 been, it is impossible to accommodate
 to the general State and Capacities of
 Mankind, and is manifestly inconsis-
 tent with any social Union, and sub-
 versive of the very Notion of a Chris-
 tian Church ; and I think a greater
 Absurdity need not be objected to it.

Under what Restrictions each of
 these Opinions is to be received, and
 how far, when thus restrained, they
 offer us our proper Rule for determin-
 ing the Sense of Scripture, and con-
 sequently of judging of any Doctrine
 by it, will, I hope, appear from the
 following Reflections.

When we consider this Subject with
 regard to the natural Faculties and
 general Capacities of Mankind, it is
 certain the Holy Scriptures are to be
 understood by the same Rules and or-
 dinary

dinary Means by which we understand any other ancient Book; only the Importance of the Matter requires a far greater Attention in the Use of these Means, and in the Application of these Rules to the Scriptures, than to any other Writing. Many Places occur in them so plain and perspicuous, that no Man who reads or hears them, in a Language he is acquainted with, can doubt of their Meaning; and to the understanding these, nothing but due Attention, and the ordinary Capacities of a reasonable Being, are necessary. The Sense of other Places we collect from rational Deductions, comparing one Scripture with another, &c. and in these Collections common Prudence will advise us to consult other Persons who have gone before us in this Study, and their Assistance will be of great Service to us. But the Sense we receive of Scripture in this Method of Enquiry, whether the Reasons whence it appears arise to our own Reflections,

or

SERM.

IV.



or are suggested by other Men, we do not acquiesce in upon any Person's Authority, but in consequence of those Reasons ; and our Assent is proportioned to the Evidence of those Reasons. But other Places there are which require the Knowledge of History, of ancient Facts and Customs, of early Tradition and primitive Acceptation, to determine their Sense ; and to him who is destitute of this Knowledge, and is unable by his own Study to acquire it, there is no possible Way to attain this Knowledge, and consequently the Sense of Scripture depending on it, but by consulting those whose Skill and Veracity he can best rely on, and receiving it from their Report and Authority. These are the natural Methods by which we arrive at the Meaning of any ancient Writing, nor can the Wit of Man devise any other.

But

But between the Scriptures and any other Book, this Difference is to be observed, that common Authors being subject to mistakes themselves, and capable of Designs to impose upon their Readers, whatever by any of these Methods of Search appears to be the Sense of their Words, we are at Liberty to admit as intended by them : But the Inspiration of the Scriptures, and consequently the Truth of every Proposition in them being supposed, we cannot consistently with this Supposition either from the Construction of the Words, or from Deductions of Reason, or from Authority, admit any Proposition as the intended Sense of Scripture, which contradicts any manifest Truth : Either can we admit contradictory Expositions of the same, or different Places of Scripture ; because we are previously resolved, that every Thing taught in Scripture is true, and Reason tells us, that all Truths must be consistent

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SERM. With each other. In these Cases we
 IV. conclude negatively with the clearest
 Assurance, that what is offered us cannot be the intended Meaning of Scripture. But when we go on to ascertain positively what is the designed Sense of it, we do and must proceed by the Rules and Methods before suggested, and are more or less assured in our Conclusions, according to the Nature and Degree of Evidence offered by each. The Sense of Scripture, which we receive in the first Way, by an immediate View from the plain obvious Construction of the Words, according to their ordinary Acceptation, appears to us with greater Evidence, than what we collect from our own or others Reasoning: And the Sense we collect by rational Deductions is more evident, and we assent to it with greater Assurance, than what we receive from the Affirmations of Authority: And consequently we cannot admit upon Authority what
 con-

contradicts the plain Conclusions of Reason, nor any Deductions of Reason contradicting our evident Perceptions of Truth; the greater Evidence must, in the Nature of the Thing, over-rule the less, and determine our Adherence to it. Where the Import of Scripture is plain and clear, from the common Use and obvious Construction of the Words, we have no Occasion to infer it by Deductions of Argument, nor is any Guide or Director wanting to lead us into the Meaning of it. Where the Sense must arise from rational Deductions, these indeed the Assistance of other Men may be of Service to us; but our Assent is not determined by a Defe-
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ference to their Judgment, but by their Arguments. But where the Sense of Scripture neither appears to us by im-  
mediate Inspection, nor in Conse-  
quence of any Deduction, there re-  
mains but one Application farther,  
which is consulting other Men: And

SERM. if the Reason on which the Sense of  
 IV. the Place in question depends, be such  
 whose Force we cannot apprehend; if it arises from Facts, Customs, &c. the Allegation of which we are incapable of examining ourselves, these Reasons can be of no Weight with us, and our Assent can be grounded only on Authority. And since this is the only possible Application for the understanding these Scriptures, and this Application necessarily leads us to acquiesce in Authority; if we are at all concerned to understand these Scriptures we must receive the Sense of them from Authority. In these Cases Authority is the Reason, and the best Authority the best Reason. If it be said that no one is concerned to understand these Scriptures; let it only be considered that if upon the reading any such Place, any Doubt arises in any Man's own Mind, relating to his Faith or Practice; or if any Doctrine be raised from such Place by any  
 other

other Person, it becomes then necessary to inquire into the Meaning of it : Both these Cases must frequently happen. It was common even in the Apostles Time, for unlearned and unstable Men to wrest Places hard to be understood : And since many more Places must at this Distance from the Apostolick Age be hard to be understood, this Event must much oftner happen than it did then. Enthusiasts indeed, and Deceivers, will principally argue from such Places, where the Weakness of one is more easily misled, and the Sophistry of the other more easily concealed : And therefore the Duty of trying Doctrines prescribed in my Text, will more especially oblige us to the Consideration of these Places ; and if we cannot ascertain the sense of them from our own Perceptions, or from Deductions of Reason, we must receive it from Authority. In these Cases it is necessary for us to be determined

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SERM. one Way or other ; and since we can  
 IV. only be determined by Authority, Au-  
 thority must be our proper Rule, and  
 such as we are warranted to act by ;  
 and the only Question remaining be-  
 fore us must be, whose Authority we  
 ought to prefer ; now this Preference  
 we assert to the Pastors and Leaders of  
 the Church.

Christ, the Author and Founder of  
 this Society, appointed in it certain  
 Orders of Men, with this express In-  
 tention, that they should watch over  
 the Flock, that they might not be  
 tossed to and fro with every Wind of  
 Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men, and  
 the cunning Craftiness of those who  
 lie in wait to deceive. To this In-  
 struction of Christ, every Christian  
 owes such an Obedience as may pro-  
 mote the declared Ends of it. And  
 what Obedience does he pay to it, and  
 how does he serve the professed Inten-  
 tions of it, who leaves his appointed  
 Guides, and follows others in Contra-  
 diction

dition to them? To the clear Per-  
ceptions or Conclusions of Reason, all  
Authority, theirs as well as others, we  
confess to be submitted: Neither can  
we admit any Exposition of Scripture  
upon their Authority, which, in Con-  
sequence of the negative Rules above  
suggested, we are assured cannot be  
the Meaning of it; because no Au-  
thority can be of equal Weight with  
the plain Evidence of the Thing: And  
thus far we agree with those who con-  
tend that every Man's private Expo-  
sitions of Scripture are his proper  
Rule. But where we are not and can-  
not be determined by Evidence from  
the Reason of the Thing, but must  
in the Event be resolved by some Au-  
thority or other, there we contend  
that a Preference is due to those, who  
by an Ordinance of Christ are ap-  
pointed to be our Guides, and more  
especially to their united Judgment  
in the public Resolutions of the So-  
ciety. Reasons of Prudence would

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SERM. persuade our Recourse in all Difficul-  
 IV. ties to Persons qualified to be Teachers  
 by a proper Education, and long At-  
 tention to the Study of the Scriptures,  
 and tried by the best Methods of Scrutiny before they are admitted to that Office ; and where we must be resolved by some Authority, to prefer theirs. But the Regard we owe to the Institution of Christ, and the Stipulations we are under as Members of his Church, bind it on our Conscience as a Duty. And therefore we thus far concur with those, who assert the Expositions of the Church to be the proper Rule for determining the Sense of Scripture, that in these Cases, and within the Limitations which the Reason of the Thing sets to all Authority, their Expositions are the proper Rule of our Duty, and consequently of trying all Doctrines pretending to direct us in our Duty.

Thus far then I think we are clear, that the holy Scriptures considered as  
 a Rule,

a Rule, to be applied by all Ranks and Capacities of Men, according to their natural Faculties, *are*, by such Methods of Enquiry as Reason in other like Cases prescribes to be understood according to the Rules I have suggested ; and since the Generality of Mankind must unavoidably want Direction and Assistance in these Enquiries, and in many Cases depend on Authority, and Christ has appointed in his Church an Order of Persons for the Guidance and Direction of others, the Reason of the Thing, the Nature of Society, and Regard we owe to the Institution of Christ, will demand all that Deference to their Authority which I have asserted as due to it.

But it has been pretended, that the Books of Scripture are not to be understood by the same Methods and Applications, to which common Reason directs us for the understanding any other accient Writing ; but that  
the

SERM. the Holy Spirit, the Author of them,  
 IV. is the only Interpreter of them. This,  
 when reduc'd to any Principle, is the  
 Ground on which the Church of *Rome*  
 claims an absolute unlimited Submis-  
 sion to her Expositions of scripture.  
 Her Defenders argue with us, that we  
 grant Authority to be in some Cases a  
 proper Rule; and that the greater the  
 Authority is, the greater Regard is  
 due to it. Now, say they, the Autho-  
 rity of the Church is infallible, its Doc-  
 trines and Decisions the immediate  
 Dictates of the Holy Ghost, and there-  
 fore they ought absolutely, and in eve-  
 ry Thing, to be submitted to, without  
 the Examination of Particulars, as an  
 Authority which we are previously as-  
 sured cannot deceive, or be deceived.  
 This also is the Pretence of Enthusiasts;  
 they with equal Confidence claim our  
 Attention and Submission to their Doc-  
 trines, as the infallible Dictates of the  
 Spirit of God speaking in them, and  
 will not suffer any carnal Reasonings  
 (as



*proving our Religion.*

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(as they call them) to be offered in  
Restraint of Authority.

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These Pretensions, in the Nature of them, require our strictest Examination, because we are here to determine once for all ; and if these Claims are once admitted, they preclude all farther Search, and deliver us up blindfold to be led, not knowing whither we go. The Rules I have before asserted, and the Boundaries they set to all Authority, may, I think, furnish any one who attends to them, with a sufficient Answer to both these Pretensions. But because they are urged with great Confidence, and have prevailed with too much Success, I shall beg Leave more distinctly to consider them. And,

1<sup>st</sup>, As to the Claim of the Church of *Rome* to an infallible Direction of the Spirit ; before it can rationally be admitted, it must clearly be proved,  
either

SERM. either by such Evidences as Christ and  
 IV. his Apostles gave of their Inspiration,  
 or deduc'd from Scripture, whose di-  
 vine Authority we acknowledge. Proofs  
 of the former kind are not insisted on,  
 and in the latter Method of Proof we  
 may require it to be clearly shewn, that  
 the Scriptures appeal'd to imply a Pro-  
 mise of that infallible Direction of the  
 Spirit, which is claim'd under them.  
 And in the Examination of this Proof,  
 we must necessarily judge of the Sense  
 of Scripture by some other Rule than  
 the Expositions of that Church ; be-  
 cause the very Point in Question is,  
 how far her Expositions of Scripture  
 are to be submitted to? Her Exposition  
 of Scripture in this Case has no more  
 Weight than her own Affirmation,  
 which is no better Proof than the con-  
 fident Assertion of an Enthusiast, that  
 he is inspired. It is manifest, that the  
 Judge appealed to for the Sense of  
 those Scriptures which are argu'd from  
 in this Dispute is the common Reason  
 of

of Mankind, and can be no other; and by the way, it will be difficult to shew, why its Judgment should be allow'd in the Explication of these Scriptures, and yet exclude from all others. But if the Scriptures appeal'd to, should upon Examination appear to imply such a Promise, it will yet remain to be prov'd (and good Evidence it will require) that the Church claiming under it is the proper intended Object of that Promise. But after all, there is still behind another Method of Trial, which Reason in this Case will require us to apply; and that is, a careful Examination of the Doctrines taught by such Church. To this Rule of Trial the Revelation of the Gospel itself is submitted; for it is impossible in the Nature of the Thing for any Man to admit that as a divine Revelation, which affirms what he evidently perceives to be false. And for the same Reason, should any Church produce never so much apparent Proof from  
Scrip-

SERM.

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SERM. Scripture that she is infallible; yet if  
 IV. she affirms such Propositions as contra-  
 dict any manifest Truth, natural or  
 moral, it is impossible for me to be-  
 lieve her to be so; because I cannot  
 have so great Evidence that the Sense  
 in which she applies the Scripture she  
 argues from, is the true Sense of it, or  
 even that the Scripture itself is a divine  
 Revelation, as I have, that what I  
 clearly perceive to be false, cannot be  
 true. Mere Inevidence indeed, or my  
 not perceiving the Truth of what is  
 affirmed, as it is not a good Objection  
 against the Revelation of Scripture, so  
 neither is it against my admitting any  
 such Proposition as the Sense of Scrip-  
 ture: but as in the former Case I am  
 bound to admit the Revelation, if it  
 be otherwise sufficiently prov'd, not-  
 withstanding such Objection; so in the  
 present Case I am bound to admit such  
 inevident Proposition as the Meaning of  
 of Scripture, if, in Consequence of the  
 proper Rules of Enquiry, it appears to  
 be

be the Sense of it. And if the Place SERM.  
be such, as I must rely upon Authority IV.  
for the Explication of it, I must, for  
the Reasons before given, prefer the  
Authority of the Church to any other;  
neither is the Inevidence of the Propo-  
sition any good Objection against  
my Assent upon such Authority. But  
the Case is far different, when I am  
required upon her Authority to receive  
a Proposition evidently false as the  
Sense of Scripture ; because if I be-  
lieve her in this, the natural and ne-  
cessary Consequence arising to me is,  
that this Scripture cannot be a divine  
Revelation. No Authority, not even  
divine, can require me to believe a  
manifest Untruth ; before I can assent  
upon these Terms, I must renounce all  
my Faculties, give up all Criteria of  
Truth or Falshood, and acknowledge  
myself unable in any Instance to dis-  
tinguish the one from the other.

Equally



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IV.

Equally strong is the Objection against the Infallibility of such Church, from any Doctrine she teaches contradicting the plain Assertions of Scripture; neither is it possible for her to convince me that she is infallible in the Exposition of Scripture, while she affirms any Doctrine contrary to what I manifestly perceive the Scripture to affirm. The Sense of Scripture in that Case I perceive as clearly as it is possible for me to perceive the Sense of any Proposition in the World; and the Truth of the Doctrine there affirm'd I cannot but believe, as firmly as I believe the Inspiration of Scripture; and therefore cannot believe any Church an infallible Expositor of Scripture who contradicts that Doctrine. It is as if a Man should, in consequence of some Reasons which he pretends prove him infallible, persuade me to believe against my Senses, that the same Body is in two Places at once; or that a Part of that  
Body

Body is equal to the Whole ; and may puzzle me perhaps with his Sophistry, but will never be able to remove me from this plain and necessary Conclusion, You affirm a manifest Falshood, and therefore cannot be infallible.

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IV.


As to the Pretence of any private Person to an infallible Direction of the Spirit, if he claim it in consequence of those general Promises of Scripture, that all Christians shall be taught of God, that the Spirit shall abide with them for ever, &c. we may fairly answer him, That in Virtue of those Promises, we have as good a Title to Infallibility as himself. If he claims it as a distinguished Favour indulged to him, an immediate and special Communication from God, he must prove it by the same Evidences that the Apostles did theirs. But supposing him even to work Miracles in Confirmation of his Claim, yet still, unless his Doctrines be agreeable to those of the Gospel, we are

I bound


SERM. bound to reject him. For the Scrip-  
 IV. ture has foretold the very Case, That  
 Men should come assuming the Name  
 and Mission of Christ, and work  
 Signs and Wonders in Support of the  
 Pretence, but at the same Time com-  
 mands us, *Go not after them.* Nay, if  
 an Angel from Heaven should teach  
 any other Doctrine, we are required  
 not to receive him. His Doctrines  
 then are the properest Test in this  
 Case: These we are to try by the  
 Standard of the Scriptures, according  
 to the Rules of Application before  
 suggested; and if, in the Result of  
 such Trial, his Doctrines appear con-  
 trary to the Scriptures, we cannot ad-  
 mit his Inspiration, without renoun-  
 cing the Inspiration of the Scriptures.  
 In this Inquiry, his Pretence to Inspi-  
 ration must beset aside as the Thing  
 in Question; neither can we rationally  
 admit his Expositions of Scripture, any  
 farther than the Reasons he offers for  
 them are conclusive; and as to his  
 Autho-

*proving our Religion.*

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Authority, that we cannot reasonably SERM.  
or piously admit, in Preference to IV.  
those whom Christ, in the Order   
of his Church, has appointed to  
guide us.

In Sum: That the Spirit will ever  
be present to the Church of Christ,  
and every Member of it, no good  
Christian will deny; this the Pro-  
mises of the Gospel evidently teach.  
But the Question is, What Measure  
and Degree of the Spirit's Assistance  
these Promises imply? An Infallibili-  
ty in the Exposition of Scripture, con-  
trary to any plain Truth, or to our  
own clear Convictions of the Sense  
of it, I have shewn it impossible for  
any rational Man to admit in any  
Man, or Number of Men, and conse-  
quently to admit any Sense of Scrip-  
ture as affirming or promising such In-  
fallibility; but an Authority, though  
short of this, yet of great Weight and  
Extent in the Direction of private  
Christians, the Institution of Christ,

SERM. the Nature of Society, and the Pro-  
 IV.  mises of the Spirit, will oblige us to  
 acknowledge in the Guides and Pa-  
 stors of his Church. The Holy Ghost  
 will ever accompany his own Ordi-  
 nances, and afford such a Measure of  
 his Assistance to every Member of his  
 Church who walks in them, as, with  
 their own Application, will enable  
 each to perform the Duties of his  
 Station. But he guides and governs  
 us as rational Creatures, by rational  
 Means; to a diligent Use of these  
 Means, his Blessing and Grace will  
 give Success; but if we leave these  
 Means, and will strike out into Paths  
 and Methods of our own devising, we  
 have no Promise of his Company.

Upon the Whole, it appears from  
 what I have suggested in this Dis-  
 course, that to all who acknowledge  
 the Christian Revelation, and the  
 Scriptures, as containing the Doctrines  
 of it, these Scriptures are the proper  
 Rule



Rule by which we must try whether SERM.  
any Doctrine is a Part of that Reve. IV.  
lation: That the Application of this   
Rule, even by private Christians, is  
not so impracticable as has been some-  
times represented, since some Parts of  
Scripture must be confessed so plain,  
that no one who attends to them can  
mis their Meaning. And as to Places  
of greater Obscurity, Christ has ap-  
pointed in his Church Pastors and  
Teachers, for the Guidance and Edi-  
fication of the Saints, to whom there-  
fore the Ordinance of Christ will o-  
blige our Recourse in all Difficulties;  
and where we must be determined  
by Authority, our Submission in Pre-  
ference to other Men; and conse-  
quently in these Cases their Judg-  
ment and Decisions are our proper  
Rule.

In this Scheme of Trial, the whole  
Process is easy, natural, agreeable to  
Reason, in every Step adapted to the  
general State and Condition of Man-

SERM. kind, consistent with the Order of  
 IV. Society, and the Liberty of rational  
 Beings. Wherever Men clearly see  
 their own Way, it leaves them to pursue it; where they must unavoidably take and rely upon the Direction of others, it points out to them their proper Guides, provided for them by a regular Oeconomy, of which divine Wisdom was the Author, and which his holy Spirit will accompany to the End of the World. If in following their Judgment and Direction, in those Cases where we want Direction, we happen to err, we shall have this to say in our Defence, that we did our best to know the Will of Christ, according to a Method of Instruction which he appointed, and shall be sure of his Approbation. But if we are led into Error by the Authority of any other Persons, whatever Call or Commission they may pretend, that Error will be criminal, the Consequence of a voluntary Departure from Christ's  
 Insti-

*proving our Religion.*

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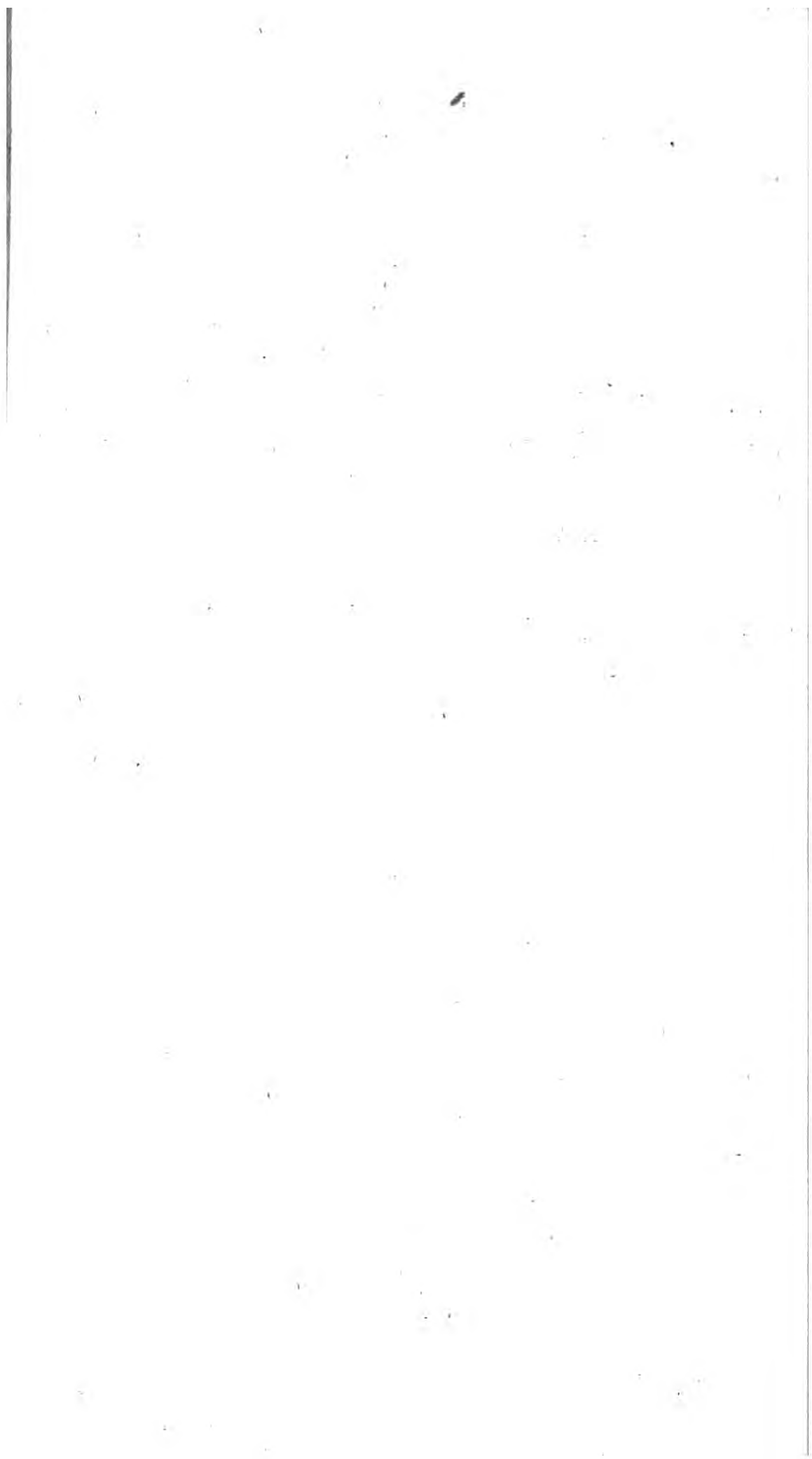
Institution, and will have nothing to  
plead its Excuse.

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IV.

The preceding Reflections have, I  
hope, sufficiently establish'd the pro-  
per Rule by which all Doctrines are  
to be tried. It remains only for us to  
consider the subsequent Duty, or the  
End of this Trial, that we hold fast  
that which in the Result is proved to  
be good.

Which I must defer to another  
Opportunity.





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# S E R M O N V.

The Duty of proving our Religion.

I T H E S S. V. 21.

*Prove all Things : hold fast that which  
is good.*

**T**H E Points I propos'd to <sup>SERM.</sup>  
consider, as arising to our <sup>V.</sup>  
Reflections from this Scrip-  
ture, were,

I. The Extent and Importance of  
the Duty here enjoin'd, of trying or  
proving all Doctrines, and the Care  
and



SERM. and Attention which the Discharge of  
 V. this Duty requires from us.

II. The Rule, according to which the Trial here prescribed, is to be made.

On these two Heads I have offer'd my Thoughts *pretty largely* in two former Discourses. And when we are convinc'd of the Duty of making this Trial, and are satisfied in the Rules and Methods by which we are to proceed in making it, it remains only farther to be enquir'd, When, and how far, we may rest in the Conclusions to which this Trial shall lead us? or when we may acquiesce in a Doctrine as sufficiently prov'd to be good? and with what Firmness then we are to hold it fast, and adhere to it? For this we are enjoin'd, as a Duty subsequent to this Trial, and the proper End to be intended in it. And this we now,

III. Address ourselves to consider.

Now

Now the Nature of Thing leads to  
conclude, that this Trial is a Duty  
only in order to a just and rational Sa-  
tisfaction ; and therefore, when that  
is obtained, the Trial must cease of  
course. To be always proving, and  
resting in nothing, ever learning and  
never coming to the Knowledge of  
the Truth, is the very State of Scep-  
ticism. Our Curiosity perhaps may  
find some Amusement in such a per-  
petual Succession of new Enquiries,  
but it can never be reconciled to the  
Purposes of Life, or the Ends of Re-  
ligion. The very Duty of proving,  
as it supposes us previously to rest in  
something, to admit some Principles  
of acknowledged Truth, from whence  
we set out, and which we use as Mea-  
sures in the Trial of other Propositi-  
ons ; so it also supposes us capable of  
the same Rest and Satisfaction in what  
we thus try : And where Practice and  
Action are suspended upon the En-  
quiry, it is especially necessary to set  
some

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V.



SERM. some determinate Bounds to the Search,  
 V. to fix some Measures of Proof upon  
 which we may acquiesce, and proceed  
 to act with a rational Satisfaction.  
 In Religion particularly, Faith and  
 practical Obedience are the Condi-  
 tions upon which all its Rewards are  
 offered to our Hopes: The great Im-  
 portance indeed of the Event is an  
 Argument to us to proceed with Care  
 and Caution, attentively to examine  
 the Doctrines we assent to, and the  
 Precepts we admit into our Rule of  
 Practice, and to be well assured that  
 the Faith and Actions to which they  
 direct us, are such, to which the Pro-  
 mises of that Religion we embrace  
 are made. But still this supposes the  
 Necessity of fixing somewhere, of de-  
 termining some Point of Assurance  
 where the Search must end; and we  
 must proceed to act in consequence of  
 it, otherwise we shall loiter away Life  
 in a distracting unprofitable Labour,  
 without any Comfort in the Progress  
 of

of our Journey, and without any rational Hope in the End of it.

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V.

Now the Determination of the Point where we must fix, put a Period to the Search, and rest in the Conclusion, must arise from the Rules of Trial before laid down, and such an Application of them as the Nature of the Subject in Debate requires, and the Capacities of the Person enable him to make.

Thus in that Question which first offers itself to our Consideration, whether what is proposed to us as a divine Revelation be really so or not : If we have no internal Objection from the Contents of it ; if it affirms no Doctrine inconsistent with those Attributes, which the natural Idea of God implies ; if it contradicts no prior Truth, and prescribes nothing repugnant to the moral Interests of Mankind, we may thus far acquiesce.--- This System may be from God : And if the external and positive Proofs which

SERM. which assert it to be from God, are in  
 V. their natural Force conclusive that it  
 is so, and these Proofs are derived down  
 to us with as much Evidence as a rea-  
 sonable Man in our Circumstances can  
 expect they should be, we have then  
 as much Proof as we ought in Equity  
 to insist on, the Inquiry is here fairly  
 at an End, we are to be satisfied in  
 the Reality of the Revelation, and  
 proceed to believe and act according  
 to its Direction.

So likewise, after we have admitted  
 the Revelation, and go on to examine  
 into the Contents and Import of it;  
 when, by the best Rules and Methods  
 of Inquiry, which the Nature of the  
 Subject and our Capacities enable us  
 to make Use of, we are come to a  
 Conclusion, we have sufficiently dis-  
 charged the Duty of Examination;  
 we must now address ourselves to  
 Practice, and not spend the Time of  
 Action in a fruitless and unreasonable  
 Search after farther Lights and Dis-  
 coveries.

If



If we apply this to the Case which SERM.  
properly concerns us as Christians, our V.  
Enquiry into the Meaning and Direc-  
tion of the Holy Scriptures, if the  
Sense of any Place arises to us from  
the common Use and obvious Con-  
struction of the Words, and is nei-  
ther inconsistent with other Scriptures,  
or with any manifest Truth, we have  
no Occasion to look farther, but may  
securely rest in this Sense, and act  
accordingly. If either of these Ob-  
jections appear against that Sense, or  
if the Place be on any other Account  
of difficult Interpretation, we then go  
on and try whether the Context, the  
Occasion it was applied to, a Compa-  
rison with other Scriptures, or any  
other Methods of rational Inference,  
will lead us into the Meaning of it;  
and if, in Consequence of this Search,  
we arrive at a clear consistent Sense,  
here also we may equitably leave the  
Enquiry, and be satisfied we under-  
stand that Scripture as well as God re-  
quires

SERM. quires we should do. But if the  
 V. Sense of a Place does not appear to  
 us from either of these Applications,  
 but arises from Inferences, whose Force  
 we are incapable of examining, de-  
 pends on Allegations, for whose Truth  
 we must rely on Authority; if we con-  
 sult the best and most proper Autho-  
 rity, we have done all that the Du-  
 ty in my Text obliges us to do, and  
 may without Scruple acquiesce, and  
 act upon the Sense we thus receive.  
 The Evidence indeed, upon which we  
 assent and act in this Case, is less than  
 in the former Instances, but it is the  
 best we are capable of; and if we  
 will still proceed, and not be satisfi-  
 ed, without such Kind of Proof and  
 Conviction, as the Nature of the En-  
 quiry, or our Circumstances, will not  
 admit of, we act against all Reason;  
 and our Diligence in searching to  
 know our Duty, will not atone for  
 our Omission of the Practice of it.  
 We certainly do well in examining  
 every

every Doctrine according to our Abilities, and the more Attention we employ in it the more commendable we are; but some Limits must be set to the Enquiry, some Period settled, beyond which the Truth and Goodness of the Doctrine must be no longer in Question, but it must be received as tried and admitted into our Rule; and that can be no other than such Measures of Proof and Evidence, as the Nature of the Subject, and our Capacities, leave it in our Power to acquire. And where the Case is such, that we can have no other Proof than Authority; there Authority is a sufficient Proof for us to rely and act on: and if there be any Authority which Reason and our Duty oblige us to prefer to others, there that Authority is the best Proof; and we are bound to adhere to it, in Opposition to any other: And since Christ has appointed in his Church certain Orders of Men, for the Recourse and Guidance

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of

SERM. of the Flock, the Regard we owe to  
 V. his Institution will in all Questions  
 (which must be decided by Authority) oblige us to prefer theirs, and rest on their Judgment in the Exposition of Scripture, as a Rule which in these Cases we are warranted to act by. In Sum ; whatever, in Consequence of the proper Rules and Methods of Enquiry, which Reason and Duty advise, and the Nature of the Case enables to apply, appears to be the Sense and Direction of Scripture, we are as much obliged by the latter Part of the Precept before us, to receive and hold fast, as we are by the former to prove and examine it according to those Rules.

But what this Duty of Perseverance particularly implies, it concerns us something farther to consider. For it may be objected, that how much soever it may be our Duty to act according to the present Conclusions of our Enquiry, in any of the Cases before

fore suggested, yet to be tied down, and unalterably fix'd to them, is inconsistent with the Liberty of reasonable Beings. We may perhaps have examined the Point in Question, as well as our present Opportunities will permit; but must we shut our Eyes against all farther Lights, and resolve against future Conviction? If this be our Duty, he who happens to be once mistaken must always abide in his Error, and is precluded from acknowledging the Truth. Here then lies the Difficulty suggested by this Objection, in reconciling the Duty of proving all Things, with the Perseverance at the same Time enjoined; both are confessed to be our Duty, and both are certainly consistent with each other: And this Consistency will, I presume, appear in the preceding Assertions of both Precepts, if what has been affirmed under each Head be observed and compared. In the Duty of Trial it was declared, that the

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SERM. less Evidence must always be submitted to the greater; and consequently by this Doctrine no Man is precluded by a former Assent upon less Evidence, from admitting a contrary Opinion upon a greater: But till such Evidence be offered, it is his Duty to abide in his present Convictions: And where we have the best Proof in any Case that the Nature of the Subject will admit of, it is no more Abridgement of our Liberty to acquiesce in it, than it is to rest satisfied, and give over all farther Search upon the Evidence of Demonstration, in a Subject capable of such Proof. We are obliged to give up a present Persuasion, when better Evidence is offered for another; but if we have no reasonable Doubt of our present Persuasion, we are not bound to raise any, and put ourselves upon the Search after it, but may honestly and safely sit down, and rest in our present Convictions.

But

But the Consistency of adhering to our Conclusions, with all the Examination we are obliged or concerned to make, will more fully appear, if we resume and apply what has been offered, to some Questions we are most concern'd to examine. In the Choice of our Religion, or what Community of Christians we should associate with, the Nature of the Subject requires us to come to some Resolution. In the Years of our Minority indeed we are hardly capable of such a Search, as may rationally determine a Question of this Importance, and therefore may be expected to resign ourselves wholly to the Authority and Example of those who govern our Education: But when we arrive at a Maturity of Reason, which enables us to judge and resolve for ourselves, this is certainly one of the first Questions we are concern'd to decide, and great Care and Attention it will require. For to live in a fluctuating  
K 3                      Suspence,

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Suspence, to purpose our Enquiry thro' the Pretensions of all Sects and Parties, and in the mean Time to communicate either with none, or with all, is neither consistent with the Peace of our own Mind, nor with the Principles of any Religion. It is therefore necessary for us to fix somewhere: And when we enter upon the Enquiry, the Religion in which we are educated will of Course demand our first Consideration; and if upon the best Examination in our Power we find no just Objection to the Terms of Communion it insists on; if the Professions and Practices it requires are not inconsistent with the primary Obedience we owe to Christ, and the Laws of the Gospel, here we may sit down with Satisfaction and Assurance, and are under no Obligation to examine any farther. But if another Religion is proposed to us, and we are solicited to enter ourselves into Communion with those who profess it; here

here indeed a comparative Trial of SERM.  
each, by the Standard of Scripture, V.  
explained by the proper Rules of In-  
terpretation, is necessary; and if in  
the Result of it we find the Religion  
we are invited to agreeable to Scrip-  
ture, and our present Profession con-  
trary to it, Reason will certainly o-  
blige us to shake off our first Attach-  
ment, and engage where we are better  
assured of the Approbation of Christ.  
But if upon this Comparison the Pre-  
tensions of both appear equal, *i. e.* if  
both are agreeable to Scripture, and  
neither repugnant to it, common Rea-  
son, and the Precept in my Text, will  
certainly oblige us to hold fast our  
present Profession, and give at least  
this Preference to the prior Occu-  
pant.

So likewise in the particular Exa-  
mination of the Doctrine of each,  
upon which the Resolution of our  
Choice in this Case must depend, if  
the Proofs offer'd by one are clear and  
strong,

SERM. strong and the most manifestly defective; or if the Doctrines of one are proved by the obvious Sense of Scripture, or by evident Deductions of Reason; and the Doctrines of the other only by the Authority of those who profess to teach them, there is no Doubt but in this Case the greater Evidence ought to determine us: But if the Reasonings of each are equally clear, or equally obscure, we can have no just Motive to depart from our present Persuasion upon such Evidence, and ought certainly to abide where we are. And if the Question and Evidences before us be such, as we must in Conclusion be determin'd by some Authority or other, there common Justice will demand a prior Regard and a greater Deference to the Judgment of our ordinary acknowledged Guides, than to any other Persons, even though their Commission and Authority itself be the Point in Dispute.

In



In all these Cases, and these in Ap-  
plication will include all, it is appa-  
rent that the Stability and Perseve-  
rance here required do not in the  
least preclude us from any farther  
Examination, which we are in Reason  
concern'd, or by this Precept obliged  
to make; it points out to us indeed  
proper resting Places, and persuades  
us not to squander away our Time  
in unnecessary Enquiries. But where  
the Search is of Importance to us for  
our Direction in any Point of Faith  
or Practice, it leaves us to pursue it  
as far as is requisite to such a just and  
reasonable Satisfaction, as an honest  
and conscientious Man may safely rest  
on. To carry the Duty of Trial farther  
than this, is to represent Religion as  
a Subject incapable of Proof, and all  
its Doctrines only as Problems, thrown  
out to amuse Mankind, and exercise  
their Parts in everlasting Disputations,  
but never intended to be a steady Di-  
rection of their Faith and Actions.

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A Re-

SERM. A Religion of such a Character as this  
 V. must appear very unworthy the Wisdom of God; calculated to perplex, rather than instruct; to divide, rather than to unite his Creatures; impossible to be made the Foundation of a Church, or adjusted to the Terms of a social Union.

I have gone thro' what I proposed to offer to your Reflections from this Scripture, and shall only farther intreat your Patience to attend me in a more particular Application of it to ourselves.

The great Variety of Sects and Doctrines, which under the Liberty of a general Indulgence appear among us, and the Zeal and Affiduity with which the Partisans of each apply themselves to proselyte others to their Sentiments and Communion, render our Attention to this Precept of the Apostle of more peculiar Concern to us. We are continually called upon to give a Reason of the Hope that is in us. Not only

only the Constitution of our Church, but the Creed, and even the Morality of the Gospel, are openly and daily opposed. Every Doctrine, both the Foundations and Superstructure of our Religion, are brought into Question; and Objections against them dispersed with so much Industry, that no Station of Life is out of the Way of them. These are Circumstances which perpetually oblige us, all People as well as Pastors, to engage in the Trial here prescribed; and therefore it is of the greatest Concern to us to attend carefully to the Rules by which it ought to be conducted, and to know upon what Measure of Proof we may acquiesce, dismiss the Enquiry, and adhere to the Conclusion.

It is our Happiness to be Members of a Church which cheerfully abides this Trial, which has indulged, heard, and answered every Objection form'd against her. She claims indeed a Right  
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SERM. to judge in Controversies of Faith,  
 V. the inseparable Right of every religious Society, to whose public Resolutions the Contentions of its Members as such must be submitted; but she pretends not to Infallibility in her Judgment, acknowledges the prior Obligation of all Christians to the Authority of Christ, and submits her own Decisions to be tried by the Declarations of his Will. For thus we are taught in her Articles, that all Churches and Councils may err; and therefore Things ordained by them, as necessary to Salvation, have neither Strength nor Authority, unless it may be declared that they are taken out of the holy Scriptures. To the Scriptures then she appeals in all Questions which are properly to be tried by them; and, in Application of this Rule, allows all the Liberty of private Judgment that Reason and Equity can claim, and the Nature of Society admit. To our own clear Perceptions  
 and

and Convictions she submits her EX-  
positions of Scripture ; nor does she  
teach that they are the ultimate Rule  
of our Belief or Practice, as Christi-  
ans. But where the Question is such,  
that either from the Nature of the  
Proofs it depends on, or the Circum-  
stances of the Enquirer, he must be  
determined by some Authority or o-  
ther, there she insists on a Preference  
to her Authority, in virtue of that  
Commission she derives from Christ, to  
guide and govern the Flock commit-  
ted to her Charge; an Authority which  
all her Subjects acknowledge in their  
Stipulations, and to which even the  
Right of Possession claims her first  
Regard. By these Rules, and under  
these most equitable Conditions of  
Enquiry, she submits her Doctrines  
to a free Examination ; nor does she  
forbid a fair and impartial Attention  
to the Objections of her Adversaries.

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But when we engage in this Trial, this must carefully be remembered, that in order to determine whether we may or ought to become or continue Members of her Society, it is not necessary for us to examine all the Doctrines she teaches, but those only to which our Assent is required as Terms of her Communion. The Doctrines, for instance, to which she demands the explicit Assent of those whom she admits into any Office of the Ministry, they only are concern'd to examine who propose to enter into such Office: To them indeed the Enquiry is of Importance; and if in the Result of it, one or more of those Doctrines appear contrary to the Declarations of the Gospel, they cannot with good Conscience subscribe, or profess Assent to them. But these are not Terms of Communion, but only Terms of being admitted to a certain Office in the Society; and therefore a private Christian has no  
Occasion

Occasion to examine these Doctrines, SERM.  
in order to resolve whether he may V.  
continue in her Communion or not,   
but those only to which his Assent in  
his Station is demanded : What is in-  
fisted on from another does not affect  
him : and if nothing be required from  
him in his Station, but what he may  
with a safe Conscience comply with,  
no Objection against what is required  
from another can be any good Rea-  
son against his communicating with  
her. The Church in this Case leaves  
him at Liberty, and he may dissent  
from her in such Doctrines, and yet  
be received or continue in her Com-  
munion : All that she requires from  
him is, not publickly to oppose them ;  
and this no private Christian can be  
under any Obligation to do, unless he  
can produce an immediate Call and  
special Commission from God to do  
it; and if he is not bound by his Du-  
ty to God to do it, he is bound, as a  
Member of the Society, not to do  
it ;

SERM. it; for he is bound by that Character to obey his Superiors in all Things, not contrary to his Duty to God. And if, together with this Remark, we observe to how few Doctrines the Assent of private Christians is required by the Rules of our Church, the Examination necessary for them to determine whether they should be of her Communion or not, will appear reduced into a narrow Compass. To the Examination indeed of all she teaches, she invites and exhorts every one of her Members; nor is she afraid of having her Doctrines compared with the most boasted Pretensions of her Adversaries; the more she is tried, and the better she is understood, the more she is sure of being approved, and the more firmly will her Members adhere to her: Nor does she desire more Regard to her Authority in the Debate, than common Reason and Justice assert to be her Due. But then

then she advises each in his Station to attend first and principally to the Examination of those Doctrines, to which his Assent is precisely required; and tho' she doubts not to give a reasonable Satisfaction to our Enquiry into others, yet still we are to remember that her Right to our Communion depends not on these, but on those only which are insisted on as Terms of it. And as to Matters of prudential Consideration, such as Laws of Order, Decency, &c. she is not in these confined by any prior Rule, is under no Obligation to prove them by Scripture, but has a Right to insist on Submission to her mere Authority, in Consequence of that fundamental Principle of all Society, That in all Things not predetermin'd by a superior Authority, the Resolutions of public Wisdom must conclude and over-rule the private Sentiments of every Member.

Upon the Whole, this Advantage the good Providence of God has de-

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SERM. the good Providence of God has de-  
 V. rived to our Church, from the mani-  
 fold Oppositions she has met with,  
 that all her Doctrines have been there-  
 by brought into the clearest Light,  
 and established upon unanswerable  
 Defences. The Means of examining  
 what she teaches are in every one's  
 Power, and as well adjusted as the  
 Nature of the Thing will admit, to  
 the various Abilities of Men. To  
 those who have Capacity to pursue the  
 Conclusions she asserts to the Prin-  
 ciples they are built on, the proper  
 Proofs of each Doctrine are laid open,  
 and they are desired only impartially  
 to weigh and attend to the Deducti-  
 ons : And we heartily wish that every  
 Member of our Church were capable  
 of this Examination. But since it  
 is unavoidable, that in Societies of  
 Men the greater Part of the Mem-  
 bers will neither have Leisure, nor  
 Abilities, regularly to examine such  
 Conclusions, as depend on the Alle-  
 gation



gation of remote Facts, or on long De-  
ductions of Reason ; and yet in every  
System of Christian Religion, many  
such Conclusions must be affirmed,  
and submitted to by the Members of  
a Church formed upon such a Sys-  
tem : It is plainly necessary for such  
Persons in the Trial of these Conclu-  
sions, to rely on Authority ; and he  
who in these Cases assents and acts  
upon the Authority of the proper  
Guides and Pastors of the Church,  
need not doubt the Approbation of  
his Judge, and may rest with this  
comfortable Assurance, That he has  
done his best to know and obey the  
Will of Christ ; and where he wanted  
Direction, has received it from those,  
who by his Ordinance and Institution  
are appointed to lead him.

*Now to the God of Truth, Order,  
and Peace, the Founder and Pro-  
tector of the Christian Church, to  
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be  
ascribed, &c.*



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## S E R M O N VI.

Of the different Offices in the  
Church.

I C O R. XII. 28.

*And God hath set some in the Church,  
first Apostles, secondly Prophets,  
thirdly Teachers, after that Mi-  
racles, then Gifts of Healing, Helps,  
Governments, Diversities of Tongues.*

**I**T is occasionally observed by St. SERM.  
*Peter*, that there were some VI.  
Things in his Brother *Paul's* VI.  
Epistles hard to be understood, which  
they who were unlearned and unstable,  
L 3                      wrested,

SERM. VI. wrested, as they did also other Scriptures, to their own Destruction. If there was Reason for this Complaint in the Apostolic Age, when the Doctrines asserted were commonly taught, the Customs and Practices referred to generally known, the Language and Way of Speaking of familiar Use, and the Apostles themselves were living, and might be applied to for an authentic Exposition of any Difficulty; much rather may we expect these dangerous Mistakes when so many Centuries are past, and all these Advantages are ceased. Many more Places must, at such a Distance, become hard to be understood, and therefore liable to be wrested by the Unlearned and Unstable; and the Sense perhaps of some not certainly to be determined by the greatest Abilities. We may indeed with Assurance conclude, that the understanding these difficult Places is not necessary, nor always profitable; and perhaps Attempts to

to explain them, are not free from Danger of some Inconveniencies. But when unlearned and unstable Men shall wrest such Places, as we find they were apt to do even in the Apostolic Times, and raise Doctrines from them, destructive to the Faith or Order of the Church ; it becomes then necessary, for those who are Ministers of the Word, and Stewards of the Mysteries of the Gospel, to apply some Remedy. And though the Sense they assign to such Place be only probable, yet if it be agreeable to the Analogy of Faith and Christian Doctrine, plainly taught in other Scriptures, it may, at least, be safely received, and ought certainly to be preferred to one which breaks in upon this great and fundamental Rule for the Exposition of Scripture. But whether we can ascertain the Sense of such obscure Place or not, we can generally be sure what is not the Sense of it ; and when an evil Doctrine is

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SERM. advanced in Consequence of it, it will  
 VI. always be useful to disprove the In-  
 ference.

The Scripture I have read to you, we may justly place among the *δυσνόητα* of St. *Paul*, the Things hard to be understood; since there is scarce any, in whose Meaning even learned Expositors are less agreed, at least as to some Parts of it. Some have with much, and, I think fruitless Labour, endeavoured to find it in the several ordinary Offices, in succeeding Ages established in the Church: So the Comment usually ascribed to St. *Ambrose*, but more truly to *Hilary* the Deacon. But others have, under an Error of much greater Danger, hence concluded, That no standing Orders or Offices at all were instituted, or ever intended in the Church; but that, in all Ages, all its Offices were to be supplied by the immediate Gifts and Inspiration of the Holy Ghost. That the Persons so gifted are by these  
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Marks to be acknowledged by the Rest of the Church, and regarded in the Subordination here described. This latter Error I shall principally keep in View; tho' I hope the Foundation of both will be taken away, if it may be proved,

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I. That these Words do not, and were not intended to describe the ordinary Settlement of the Church, even at that Time; but relate only to the particular State of the Church of *Corinth*, and others in the like Circumstances.

II. It does not appear that any Office at all is here described (except the Apostles) but merely supernatural Gifts, promiscuously bestow'd in that Age on Persons ordain'd to an Office, or not ordain'd; and by which the Want of proper Officers in that Church was for the present supplied.

III. Sup-

SERM. III. Supposing these Gifts to have  
 VI. *made* the Persons they were conferr'd  
 on, in any probable Sense, Officers in  
 that Church, and at that Time; yet  
 they were no Officers of Government,  
 and such Officers even in the Ministry  
 and Teaching, as were not design'd  
 for Continuance in the Church. And,

I. These Words do not, and were  
 not intended to describe the ordinary  
 Settlement of the Church, even at  
 that Time; but relate only to the par-  
 ticular State of the Church of *Co-*  
*rinth*, and others in the like Circum-  
 stances. For it is certain, that long  
 before this, the Church of *Jerusalem*  
 was establish'd upon a different Plan.  
 For some Time after the Descent of  
 the Holy Ghost, the whole Authority,  
 and all Offices of the Church, remain'd  
 with the Apostles: But it was not  
 long before, by a solemn Imposition  
 of Hands, they appointed the Order  
 of Deacons, who not only assisted in  
 the

the distributing the public Alms and Provisions of the Church, but were also Ministers of the Word, and accordingly preach'd and baptiz'd; as appears in the Examples of *Stephen* and *Philip*. Afterwards, tho' we have not so particular an Account of the Institution of Presbyters; yet, *Acts* xi. 30. we find them mentioned as settled Officers, concern'd in the Government of the Church. For as at first all Offerings made by the People were laid at the Feet of the Apostles, and by their Direction distributed by the Deacons; so here the Offerings brought to *Jerusalem* by the Hands of *Barnabas* and *Saul*, were delivered to the Elders, as Persons under whose Direction Distribution should be made. In the next Chapter, *ver.* 17. *Peter* requires the Notice of his miraculous Delivery to be communicated to *James*, as the supreme Officer, the fixed Apostle; or, as the earliest Writers unanimously call

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SERM. call him, the Bishop of that Church.

VI. And it is observable, that from that  
 Time forward the Elders or Presby-  
 ters are mentioned either with the  
 Apostles, who continued for some  
 Time in or near *Jerusalem*; or after  
 their Dispersion, with *James* only,  
 as an Order of Persons assistant in the  
 Government of the Church. Thus  
 the Appeal from *Antioch* was to the  
 Apostles and Elders at *Jerusalem*.  
 And afterwards, when the Apostles  
 were dispersed, *Paul*, returned to *Je-  
 rusalem* from the Work of his Mini-  
 stry, is said to go in unto *James*, the  
 Elders being present, to give an Ac-  
 count of the Things which God had  
 wrought by him. It will not, I think,  
 admit any reasonable Doubt, but that  
 this Frame of Polity was then esta-  
 blished in the Church of *Jerusalem*:  
 First, a fixed Apostle, or Bishop;  
 next to him, and as Assistants to him,  
 a College of Presbyters; and under  
 them the Order of Deacons; and that  
 by



by these three all Offices of that Church were administer'd. And since this Order and these Offices were established in that Church by the joint Authority of the Apostles, before their Separation, we may justly conclude this to be intended for the Pattern according to which all future Churches should be formed, as soon as their State would admit of it. But, as *Epiphanius* observes, the Apostles could not settle all Things at first; fit Persons could not presently be found to be fix'd in the Offices of the Ministry. Among *Gentile* Converts especially, whose former Religions had scarce any Thing in common with the Christian, it required some Time to qualify Men for this Trust, by a competent Knowledge of the Doctrines of the Gospel; and much more to prove and try their Stability in the Faith; and therefore the ordinary intended Polity was gradually established, in some Churches sooner, in others

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others later, and in various Measures, according as several Churches were more or less disposed to receive it. Thus we are told, *Acts* xiv. 3, 23, That tho' *Paul* and *Barnabas* abode a long Time at *Iconium*, preaching the Gospel, yet they left it without fixing any Ministry; till afterwards they re-visited that, and other Churches of their Conversion, and ordained them Elders. In some Churches we read of only Presbyters and Deacons; in others of only Bishops and Deacons; where, whether by the Words Presbyter and Bishop, we understand the same; or different Offices, it is evident that the entire Polity, according to the Pattern of *Jerusalem*, was not yet establish'd. But in the other Churches, no ordinary Officer at all was for some Time appointed, but they remain'd in the same Condition that *Iconium*, *Lystra* and *Derbe*, were in from their Conversion to the Time that *Paul* and *Barnabas* re-visited them,

them, and ordained them Elders. Now in all these Churches, thus imperfectly settled, a Primacy of Power and Oversight remained with the Apostles, and was particularly exercised by those Apostles, who had labour'd in their Conversion. Where any Order of Officers were fixed, a Part of this Power was devolved on them; but where none were fix'd, the whole Authority of Government and Direction was in Reserve with the Apostles. That this was the State of the Church at *Corinth*, when this Epistle was wrote, we have Reason to conclude: *1st*, Because there is not either in the Address, or thro' the whole Epistles, the least Mention of any Bishop, Elder, or Deacon. *2dly*, The whole Ecclesiastical Power of Government was plainly reserv'd in the Apostle's own Hand. In Virtue of this Authority, he directs and enjoins them what to do in his Absence; particularly that they should excommunicate


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SERM. nicate the incestuous Person. And

VI. this Command he directs, not to any Persons distinguish'd by Office among them, not to these Prophets or Teachers, or otherwise gifted Persons, mentioned in the Text, but to the whole Body of the Church; and accordingly it was (under the Authority of his Spirit, or spiritual Power) executed by the *Many*, the Suffrages of the whole Assembly. Neither does it appear, that in inflicting this Censure, any one acted with any Distinction of Authority over another. But it is observable, that where the Apostle had fixed any Persons with the ordinary Apostolical and Ecclesiastical Powers, as *Timothy* in *Ephesus*, and *Titus* in *Crete*, this Authority of Excommunication, of reprovng, rebuking with Authority, and finally rejecting, is committed to them.

It appears from hence, and will farther appear, that this was at that Time the State of the Church at *Corinth*,

*rintb*, not yet constituted in a regular SERM.  
Polity, the whole Power of its Go- VI.  
vernment remaining in the Hands of   
the Apostle, to be executed under his  
special Direction by the whole Body  
in common. In the mean Time, and  
till a stated Ministry could be appoint-  
ed, the Offices of public Worship and  
Instruction were in this and other  
Churches, in the like Circumstances,  
perform'd by Persons occasionally in-  
spired, and supernaturally gifted by  
the Holy Ghost : (which in that Age  
was poured out in stupendous Effu-  
sions, for a Testimony to Unbelievers,  
and for the Edification of the Church.)  
But for Want of a settled Order and  
Polity, the Performance of these Of-  
fices was attended with great Irregu-  
larities and Indecencies : Many of  
which are here observed, and com-  
plain'd of by the Apostle. For these  
Prophets and gifted Persons magnifi-  
ed their several Gifts, and contended  
with each other for Priority on Ac-  
M count



SERM. count of them. And in the public  
 VI. Assemblies, some were preaching in  
 one Tongue, some in another: Many  
 speaking at the same Time: One was  
 praying, while others were singing,  
 some of them one Hymn, and others  
 another, with great Confusion. Till  
 the ordinary Ecclesiastical Govern-  
 ment and Officers, the proper Remedy  
 for these Disorders, could be settled  
 among them, the Apostle prescribes  
 to them some Rules, accommodated  
 to their present State. He largely  
 and frequently reminds them of the  
 Authority of the Apostolic Office,  
 and the Submission and Obedience  
 they especially owed to him: not  
 only as equal to the chiefest Apostle,  
 in the general Powers of that Office,  
 but as one, who by a distinguished  
 Title, claimed their Regard as their  
 Father, who had begotten them in  
 Christ, and to whose Care and  
 Inspection they particularly belonged.  
 To him all these inspired Persons,  
 however

however gifted and graced, owed Sub-  
jection, as well as others: For God  
had set first in the Church Apostles  
by divine Institution, the chief, and  
at that Time the only Officers of Go-  
vernment placed over them. And  
as for those extraordinary Persons, by  
whom the public Worship was per-  
formed; God, who is a God of Order,  
and not of Confusion, appointed a  
Subordination among them: And  
therefore, after the Apostles, the Pro-  
phets should have the Precedency,  
after them the inspired Teachers, af-  
ter them Miracles, &c.

When we consider this Scripture,  
with this special Regard to the present  
Condition of the Church of *Corinth*,  
and others in the like Circumstances,  
an easy natural Sense arises to it, per-  
fectly agreeable to the whole Scope  
and Tenor of the Epistle: And it  
appears plainly to have been a tem-

SERM. VI. porary Provision for Order and Regularity among them, accommodated to those Circumstances : But if it be understood, as describing the ordinary Offices and standing Polity of the Church, it does not truly represent it, neither can it, with any Consistency, be applied to such form'd Churches, as that at *Jerusalem*. To confirm this farther, I observe,

II. That it does not appear that any Office at all is here described, (except the Apostles) but merely supernatural Gifts, by which the Want of proper Officers was for the present supplied.

If this Character may be presumed of any of the Persons here mention'd, the Prophets will be entitled to it, who are frequently mention'd with the Apostles, as Persons next to them of greatest Consideration in the Church. But that these Prophets were not Ecclesiastical Officers, in a proper Sense, appears, because

cause they were not ordained according to that Rule and Method, which was even then constantly observ'd, in the Appointment of Church Officers. The Deacons we find, *Acts* vi. 6. were solemnly ordain'd with Prayer, and the Imposition of the Apostles Hands. By the same Rite was *Timothy* ordained, and in like Manner are he and *Titus* commanded to ordain others, both Presbyters and Deacons. And if we except the Eleven, immediately called and appointed by our Lord himself, thus also was the Apostolate itself, the supreme Office in the Church conferr'd. Thus was the Designation of *Matthias* an Act in the Church. And tho' this Authority was committed to *Paul*, immediately and personally by Christ himself, yet he appears not to have taken upon him the Name and Exercise of it, till he was solemnly separated to it, by Fasting and Imposition of Hands at *Antioch*, *Acts* xiii. v. 3. In the first Verse

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he and *Barnabas* are mentioned only as Prophets and Teachers; but after this solemn Designation, we find them constantly called Apostles; and this was done by the express Command and Direction of the Holy Ghost. So great a Regard had the holy Spirit to the ordinary Rules he had established in the Church. But through the whole New Testament, we have no Example of the Ordination of Prophets, nor any Direction for it; whence we may reasonably conclude, that they were not Officers of the Church. But this will farther appear, if we observe that the Gift by which they were distinguished, was bestowed promiscuously on All, not only Men, but Women; as the Daughters of *Philip*, whom no one will contend to have been Church Officers. In the xi<sup>th</sup> Chapter of this Epistle, *v. 1.* the Apostle encourages all to desire spiritual Gifts, but rather (or especially) that they might prophecy. And *ver. 5. I would*



would that ye all spake with Tongues, SERM. VI.  
but rather that ye prophesied. Now VI.  
it cannot be imagined, that the Apo-  
stle either himself desired for them,  
or would encourage them to desire,  
and even earnestly to covet all to be  
Officers in the Society: For this is a  
Scheme in the Nature of the Thing  
impracticable, inconsistent with the  
Idea of a Society, and just the same  
Thing in Effect, as if there were no  
Officers at all.

Teachers indeed, the third Order  
here mentioned, were in settled  
Churches, appointed Officers; but here  
are plainly meant Persons enabled by  
immediate Inspiration to teach; and  
their Gift, as distinguished from that  
of the Prophets, among those before  
mention'd in this Chapter, the Word  
of Wisdom, the Word of Knowledge,  
the Interpretation of Tongues. On  
Women also, as well as Men, was this  
Gift then conferred. Such a Teach-  
er was *Priscilla*: And the Women,  
M 4 whom

SERM. whom St. *Paul* forbids for the future  
 VI. to speak in the Church, had before  
 this Reftraint, either as Prophets or  
 Teachers, publicly exercifed this  
 Gift.

The Gifts of Healing, of Miracles, of Tongues, have not the leaft Appearance of diftinguifhing the Perfons they were conferr'd on as Officers; becaufe they were promifcuoufly conferr'd on all. Thus on all who were prefent at the Conversion of *Cornelius*, the Holy Ghoft fell, and they fpake with Tongues. So likewise all thofe at *Ephesus*, on whom, after their Baptifm, St. *Paul* laid his Hands, immediately fpake with Tongues and prophesied. It cannot be imagined, that all thefe Perfons were by thefe Gifts prefently made Church Officers; for on fome, as on thofe with *Cornelius*, they were beftowed before Baptifm, before they were even Members of the Church. From thefe Confiderations we may conclude, that the  
 Cha-

Characters here described were not, in SERM.  
a proper Sense, Officers of the Church, VI.  
but only Persons by whose superna-  
tural and infused Gifts the Holy Ghost  
supply'd the present Want of proper  
Officers in that Church. But,

III. Supposing these Persons to have  
been at that Time, in any probable  
Sense, Officers of the Church, yet Of-  
ficers of Government they were not ;  
and such Officers they were, even in  
the Ministry and Teaching, as were  
not designed to have Continuance in  
the Church.

I before observed, that the whole  
Authority of Rule and Government  
in the Church, seems yet to have been  
retained by the Apostle in his own  
Hands ; and accordingly no Degree  
or Instance of this Authority appears  
to have been committed to, or exer-  
cised by these gifted Persons ; all that  
they are said to have done was,  
preaching, praying, giving of Thanks,  
&c.

SERM. *&c.* in the public Assemblies; none  
 VI. of which imply any Act of Govern-  
 ment. And it is remarkable, that thro' this whole Epistle the Apostle does not require the *Corinthians* to obey, submit, or be subject to these inspired Persons, Prophets, or others; all that is implied in my Text is, that one Gift was subordinate in Dignity to another, and therefore one should have Precedency in that Respect before another. The only Persons to whom he any where requires them to submit themselves as *Stephanas*, and others who helped and laboured with him; by whom he probably meant *Fortunatus* and *Achaius*, the Fellow-Messengers with *Stephanus* of this Epistle, who came to them with Commission from him, and with his Authority. But I observe farther, that not only in this Epistle, but through the whole New Testament, no Act, or Power of Government, is ascribed to these gifted Persons. Of Presbyters  
 this

this is expressly affirmed, they are said to be appointed Overseers of the Church by the Holy Ghost, in Execution of this Office: some of them are said to rule well. And in the Council at *Jerusalem*, it is plain they authoritatively concurred with the Apostles in an Act of Legislation: But we read nothing like this of any of these gifted Persons, Prophets, or others. There is no Doubt, but at the Council of *Jerusalem*, a great Number of these Persons were present: But the Decree is not sent forth in the Name of the Apostles and Prophets, (as it must have been, if these were in the Order of Government next to the Apostles) but the Authority it is declared by, is the Apostles and Elders: All these gifted Persons are comprehended under the general Name of Brethren, without any Character of Distinction.

It has been thought by some, that these Prophets at *Corinth* were Presbyters

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SERM. byters by Ordination, and are therefore placed next in Order to the Apostles: And the Appearance of Reason for this Conjecture is, that in the Absence of the Apostle, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was there administer'd; for he complains of many Irregularities in the Administration of it. Now this being an Act of Ministry, which by the Rules of the Church required at least a Presbyter, it seems to follow that some of that Order must be among them. But this Argument will not conclude: For, admitting these Prophets to have performed the Office proper to the Presbyter in that Administration, yet they might have sufficient Authority so to do, from an immediate Call of the Holy Ghost; according to the known *Jewish Maxim, Prophetæ potest omnia*, a Prophet might execute any Office, as often as by special Inspiration he was called to do it: And therefore, admitting the Supposition desired,

desired, it will not hence follow that SERM. they were Presbyters. That they VI. were not here placed in the second Rank, and next to the Apostles, as Presbyters, is plain; because others were Prophets, and by that Character entitled to this Rank, who' tis certain were not Presbyters. That the Prophets then at *Corinth* were not Presbyters, we may infer from what I before observ'd, that the Apostle encourages all to covet earnestly to be Prophets; which if we understand it only of a Gift, is very reasonable and consistent; for, as he says, all might prophecy one by one; but surely, they could not all be Presbyters by Office.

The Apostle indeed, among the Gifts here recited, mentions Governments; by which some have understood these ordinary Officers or Offices, to whom the Authority of Rule and Government was committed in the Church, *viz.* Pastors and Elders. But whatever *κυβερνήσεις* may here signify, (which

SERM. (which I confess myself not able to  
 VI. determine) I think it cannot admit  
 this Sense; because it is here placed  
 very low in Order, the lowest but  
 one. Now the Office of Rule and  
 Government is certainly the supreme  
 in every Society; and accordingly  
 belonged then in the Church to the  
 Apostles in Primacy, and in Subordi-  
 nation to them, to the Pastors and  
 Elders. And if these subordinate  
 Powers be here meant by *κυβερνήσεις*, *i. e.*  
 those who, under the Apostles, admi-  
 nister'd the Government of the Church,  
 I must observe, that this Office would,  
 in the Nature of it, place them next  
 in Order to the Apostles. For they  
 who immediately under the Apostles  
 executed this Office, must have Au-  
 thority over all in the Society, except  
 the Apostles. They must have Au-  
 thority to reprove, correct; and in  
 order to that, to oversee and judge all  
 in their several Stations; for these  
 Powers are necessarily imply'd in the  
 Office

Office of Government. Now can it SERM.  
 be presum'd, that Persons distinguish'd VI.  
 by the Gift of Healing, for Instance,   
 should, in the Order and Polity of  
 the Church, be superior to those who  
 were entrusted with these Powers of  
 Government? The Apostle here pre-  
 scribes several Rules or Laws for the  
 Exercise of the greatest of these Gifts,  
 even Prophecy itself. *Let the Pro-  
 phets* (says he, *1 Cor. xiv. 29, 31.*)  
*Speak two or three, and that one by one:*  
 And these Rules he enjoins as of strict  
 Obligation. *If any Man think him-  
 self to be a Prophet, or spiritual, let  
 him acknowledge the Things I write  
 unto you, to be the Commandments of  
 the Lord,* *ibid. 37.* Now, if we un-  
 derstand by Governments, Persons  
 here entrusted with the Office and  
 Powers of Government under the  
 Apostles, it belonged to them to see  
 these Laws observ'd among them, and  
 to correct and reprove those who of-  
 fended against them; and conse-  
 quently

SERM. frequently to exercise this Authority over  
 VI. these very Prophets, the proper Sub-  
 ~~~~~  
 jects of these Laws: And yet we see
 these Prophets here are placed by the
 Apostle in a Rank very high above
 them, as Persons by many Degrees
 their Superiors: So that, according to
 this Supposition, the Inferiors were
 to govern, and their proper Superiors
 to be governed by them. Whatever
 then is here meant by Governments,
 it is evident that Officers of Rule
 and Government, in a common Sense,
 cannot be intended, without fixing
 on the Apostle a manifest Absurdity.
 But,

Lastly, Whatever the Apostle here
 intended to describe, whether Gifts or
 Offices, it is plain they were only tem-
 porary Provisions, and not designed
 for the standing Order and Polity of
 the Church. For in the Chapter fol-
 lowing he tells us,---*Whether there
 be Prophecies, they shall fail; whe-
 ther there be Tongues, they shall cease;
 whether*

whether there be Knowledge, it shall vanish away. Now it is certain, that the Church as a Society will at all Times stand in Need of Persons to pre-
SERM. VI.

side over it, in the Offices of Government and as a Religious Society, of some to teach and minister, in its Worship and Ordinances. Since therefore these Gifts were all to cease, it is manifest, that these were not intended to be the regular and ordinary Provision of the Church in these Offices. And in a Sense agreeable to this, I understand the Words of the Apostle, immediately following those last recited,---- *For we know in Part, and we prophecy in Part: But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in Part shall be done away: (i. e.)* When the Canon of Scripture should be compleated, and the full Knowledge of the Gospel thereby communicated to the Church, and Persons duly qualified for the Instruction of others, and the Offices of

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the

SERM. the Ministry were ordained and appointed in every Church; the former imperfect Dispensation should cease, and be done away. And accordingly these Gifts did cease, as to any Power conveyed by them for meddling with the Offices of the Church, in a short Time; and tho' they remain'd longer as a Sign to them that believed not, yet when this End was sufficiently served, they wholly expired.

Upon the Whole, I hope it appears, that the Apostle did not here intend to describe the ordinary Polity of the Church, and the Officers establish'd in it, but only the extraordinary Provision made for it in its infant State. In that State these Gifts were necessary, not only as a Sign for the Conversion of Infidels, but to supply the Offices of Worship and Instruction in the Church. A Knowledge of the Doctrines of the Gospel, sufficient to qualify Men for these Offices, could not by ordinary Methods be acquired
under

under a long Time, and without much Application; especially before the Scriptures were written, and generally communicated to the Church. And therefore, unless the Holy Ghost had, by immediate Inspiration, supplied these Defects, the Church must at first have either wholly wanted these Offices, or have them performed in a Manner very imperfect, and even dangerous to the Faith of new Converts. The Apostles themselves were called from Place to Place, as either a Door was opened to new Conversions, or as the Care of the Churches required their Presence. And tho' in their Absence they sometimes send their Evangelists to them who were Apostles of the Apostles, Persons commissioned from them, and acting with their Authority; yet the Harvest was so great, and the Labourers, even with these Assistants, so few, that it was a considerable Time before any could be spared from the general Work, and fix'd

SERM. in the Care of particular Churches.

VI.

In the mean Time, where no Order of the Ministry was yet settled, as here at *Corinth*, the Offices of public Worship and Instruction were performed by Persons inspired and gifted by the Holy Ghost: But the Authority of Government in such Places the Apostles reserved to themselves, which they executed in Person when present, and in their Absence by Letters, or special Messengers, till fit Persons could be found in each Church, to whom this Authority should be committed, according to the Pattern of *Jerusalem*. And when such Officers were appointed, both the Authority of Government, and all Offices of the Ministry, were lodged with them, as appears from the Epistles of *Timothy* and *Titus*, and may be collected from other Scriptures. When such Appointment came to be made, it is reasonable to think, that, generally some of these inspired Persons, who

who had before supplied these Offices, were chosen and ordained to them. And to this probably allude those Sayings of some early Fathers, That the Apostles, when they settled Churches, chose such for Bishops and Deacons, as were signified and marked out by the Spirit, that is, by the Gifts of the Spirit. But when such standing Appointment was made, others, however distinguish'd by Gifts and Graces, might not take upon them any Office of the Ministry: As appears from repeated Directions of *Clement*, a Fellow-Labourer of our Apostle. And in an Epistle to this very Church of *Corinth*, he there requires all to be subject to the Presbyters, and keep within the Duties of their several Stations; and each of the Ministers themselves within the prescribed Bounds of their Ministry. And I cannot but observe, how manifestly the Rules inculcated to that Church, by this Apostolical Father, confirm

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SERM. my Exposition of this Scripture. St.
 VI. *Paul* here speaks of the Offices of
 Worship and Instruction, as supply'd
 by Persons immediately inspired and
 gifted by the Holy Ghost. But these
 Gifts he foretels should cease; whence
 I have inferr'd, that these were only
 a temporary Provision for the present
 State of the Church, and that some
 other Order of Ministration was to
 succeed; which I suppose to be such
 Officers as were appointed in the
 Church of *Jerusalem*, viz. Bishops,
 Presbyters, and Deacons; and that
 when these Officers were appointed,
 all Power of Rule, Order or Ministry,
 would belong to them exclusively of
 all others. Accordingly in this Epistle
 of *Clement*, wrote not many Years
 after this of *St. Paul*, we find Pres-
 byters and Deacons settled in this
 Church of *Corinth*; and to these he
 requires the Ecclesiastical Offices to
 be submitted, and that every one
 should keep within the prescribed
 Canon,

Canon, or Rule of his Ministry. There were doubtless at that Time many of those gifted Persons at *Corinth*; for those Gifts continued long after in the Church: And the Sedition against the Presbyters, so much complained of in this Epistle of *Clement*, was probably occasioned by the Emulation of some of these Persons, unwilling to recede from Offices they had formerly executed. But these, as well as others, are, by this holy Man, included in the Restraint, and commanded to leave the Offices of the Ministry to those who were appointed to them.

It does not indeed appear from this Epistle of *Clement*, that any Bishop was yet established in this Church: The contrary must rather be presumed, because none is mentioned. But it is plain enough from this Writer, that that Office was a Part of the original Institution, tho' not so early establish'd in some Churches, as in

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others. for speaking in general, he says, Let us worship our Lord Jesus Christ; let us reverence our *Præpositi*, let us honour our Elders: Where he evidently supposes these *Præpositi* to be an Order next under Christ, and superior to the Elders; which could be no other than Bishops. And the same may be inferred from other Passages in this Epistle. The Reason why Bishops were not yet settled in this and some other Churches, *Epiphanius* gives us in a Place before referred to; deduced, as he says, from the Series of Truth, and the ancient Histories of the Church. Presbyters and Deacons were more immediately necessary; for by them the Ecclesiastical Offices might be performed: But where there was not found any worthy to be a Bishop, the Place remained without one; but where some were found fit, there Bishops were ordained. And, in Agreement with what I have all along suggested,

he

he there observes, that the Apostles SERM.
wrote according to the present State VI.
of Things in each Church, and must
be understood accordingly.

I presume I need not offer any Thing farther in Support of my Exposition of this Scripture; I shall only just remind you of an Inference or two arising from it. And,

1st, It appears how impertinently this Scripture is alledg'd by some Enthusiasts, to prove that no settled Order of Ministry was, or ought to be, established in the Christian Church; but that all public Offices are left in common, to be at all Times supplied occasionally, by Persons immediately inspired and gifted by the Holy Ghost.

While any Church was under the Care and Superintendance of an inspired Apostle, to whom all were prepared to submit; and while, among other supernatural Gifts, the discerning of Spirits, or distinguishing a true
from

SERM. from a false, a real from a pretended
 VI. Inspiration, was one, it might pretty
 well subsist in this State; tho' even
 with these Advantages, we see what
 Disorder and Confusion the Apostle
 complains of, and how early the or-
 dinary Offices we contend for, were e-
 stablished in the Church, as the pro-
 per Remedy for them. But if, upon
 the Death or final Removal of the
 Apostles, none had succeeded into
 their Authority, to regulate and order
 these Pretensions, the Confusion must
 have been far greater. To come low-
 er: Had the Church been continued
 in this State after the Gift of Miracles,
 the proper Test of Inspiration ceased,
 and none could give Evidence of his
 having the Gift of discerning Spirits,
 but every one must be left, upon his
 own Affirmation of the Spirit, to set
 up for a Prophet, a Teacher, a Dis-
 cerner of Spirits, and under these Cha-
 racters to take upon him the pub-
 lic Offices, and exclude others from
 them;

them; what Distraction must have ensued! The Church, and even the Christian Religion, could scarce have lasted a Century under these Circumstances! Its Society must have crumbled into Atoms, and its Doctrines have been lost in Fable and Enthusiasm!

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2dly, We may hence find Motives to praise and magnify the Goodness of God to his Church, by whose wise Providence it was conducted thro' all the Difficulties of its infant State, and at last settled in an orderly Oeconomy, as an Army in Array; where every one, knowing his appointed Station, and working together in sweet Harmony, the whole Body might be edified in Love, and grow up to the Measure of the Stature of Fulness in Christ. Let us not hearken after any pretended Gifts and Inspirations, which we are expressly foretold should cease; but let us seek the holy Spirit in his appointed Ordinances, in which
he

SERM. he will always be found, and sanctify

VI. the Hearts of the Faithful with those
 Graces, which will ever remain of Use to the Church. Those Officers who are over us in the Lord, to whom we are commanded to submit ourselves, the Apostle tells us, are themselves a Gift of the Holy Ghost to the Church, bestowed for great and most important Purposes, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry; that we should no more be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the Truth in Love, may grow up into him in all Things, who is the Head, even Christ. And may that divine Spirit, whose Ordinance this is, render it effectual to the gracious Ends proposed in it, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.

The

in the Church.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.

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S E R-

in the Church.
Gifts of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the Love of God, and the
Gift of the Holy Ghost, be with
us all forever.
Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

Of Peace and Submission, Religious
and Civil.

I T H E S S. IV. II.

*That ye study to be quiet, and to do
yout own Business.*

IT hath been acknowledged, even SERM.
by the Enemies of the Christian VII.
Religion, that the holy Books
in which its Doctrines are delivered
contain many wise and excellent Rules
of Morality, formed upon the most
accurate and comprehensive Views of
the Happiness and Interests of human
Life,

SERM. Life, and manifestly calculated for
 VII. the Promotion of them. And it is
 an Argument of no small Advantage
 to the Gospel, that what the Infidel
 himself is forced by natural Reason
 to approve in its Directions, the Re-
 ligion of the Christian binds him to
 practise, under the strongest Ties of
 Conscience and Duty, as an Obedi-
 ence he owes to God, and the Con-
 dition of attaining eternal Salvation.
 This Inference at least we may be al-
 lowed to make, that an Institution
 prescribing, and by the most power-
 ful Motives obliging Men to Rules of
 Life, whose excellent Use and good
 Tendency are universally confess'd,
 has a Title to Protection and En-
 couragement, from all who are con-
 cern'd for private or social Happi-
 ness; and that all Endeavours to
 lessen the Authority, or weaken the
 Restraints of this Religion, ought to
 be resentted, as Attempts against the
 Public Peace, and subversive of the
 common

common Interests of Mankind. A-SERM.
mong the Precepts which recom-VII.
mend our Religion to this favour-
able Regard from the World, there
is none that better deserves our At-
tention, than this in my Text, That
we study to be quiet, and do our own
Business. A Precept of constant Use,
and daily Application; which extends
to every Part of our Conduct Spirit-
ual and Temporal, requires our Ob-
servance both as Men and Christians,
and is of equal Importance to our
Happiness present and future.

This, as other general Directions,
delivered in short, thro' comprehen-
sive Terms, must unavoidably leave
Room for Mistake in particular Ap-
plications. It shall therefore be my
present Endeavour,

I. To explain and assert this Pre-
cept, under its proper Sense and Re-
strictions. And then,

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II. I

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II. I shall recommend it to your Practice, by observing the Advantages arising from a Conduct so govern'd, and the many Evils that attend the Transgression of this Rule. And,

I. 'Tis certain, the Apostle did not here mean to recommend an idle, useles, inactive Life, as agreeable to the Spirit, and injoin'd by the Precepts of the Gospel. To be thus lazy and indolent is not to be *quiet*, but to be asleep, or dead to all the Purposes of Life, and can never be reconciled, either to Wisdom or Duty. Man is born for Labour and Action; and therefore the *Quiet* here recommended, is consistent with, and properly explain'd by what immediately follows, *doing our own Business*. 'Tis our Duty to be busy, neither can any Man be too active, when he is properly employ'd; but then our Activity must be confined within the Limits

mits of our own Concerns ; and in order to pursue them without Interruption, we must study to be quiet ; not perplex and entangle ourselves in Employments foreign to us ; neither disturbing others, nor provoking them to molest us.

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But we are not to understand this Precept, as confining our Care and Sollicitude to ourselves, exclusive of all Concern for the Interests and Welfare of our Neighbour ; for this would be expunging all the Offices of Charity out of the System of Duty. We are certainly bound to consult and to be more or less active in the Service of others, in Proportion to the nearer or more remote Degrees of Relation, in which they are allied to us : Within the Compass and Obligation of this Duty, the Business of other Men becomes our own : Neither will the Pretence of being quiet,

SERM. and minding our own Business, excuse
 VII. our Neglect of it. With Regard to
 ~~~~~ the Engagements of Justice, Relation,  
 and Humanity, we must take  
 another Command of the Apostle along  
 with this, and look not only on our  
 own Things, but look every Man  
 also on the Things of another.

The Difficulty then of applying the Precept in my Text to the Occasions of Practice, lies principally in reconciling the Restraint here laid upon us, to the Obligations of Justice and Charity; or, in other Words, in stating and ascertaining what is properly our own Business, and how far that comprehends our Concern and Interposition in the Affairs of our Neighbour. Now,

'Tis acknowledged in general, that every Man is bound to do all the Good, public or private, properly in his Power. As to Acts of public Beneficence, or such as our social Relation to the Community of which  
 we



we are Members requires from us, our SERM.  
Power, and consequently our Duty, is VII.  
to be judg'd of and measured, by the  
Rules and Laws of Society, which  
appoint the Duties of the several  
Ranks, Offices, and Characters of  
Men in it. And if our Station o-  
bliges us to oversee, reprove, correct,  
or order the Actions of other Men,  
we are not only allow'd, but bound  
to concern ourselves thus far in them :  
It is in the strictest Sense our Busi-  
ness to do so ; a Trust reposed in us,  
for the Discharge of which we are  
accountable to God and Man. And  
whether our Station be high or low,  
whether the Extent of Power com-  
mitted to us be little or great, while  
we act within the legal Compass of  
it, we are doing what we ought to  
do ; and how much soever this may  
require us to interest ourselves in  
the Conduct and Behaviour of other  
Men, in their Stations, whether Supe-  
riors or Inferiors, nothing in this Pre-

SERM. cept restrains us from doing it. In  
 VII. all these Cases the Public Constituti-  
 on is our proper Rule; and, provided we act with an honest Heart, and due Attention, we can then only transgress the Duty here injoin'd, when we go out of our assign'd Station, and usurp the Office and Province of others. Thus for Instance, in every Community it belongs to public Authority to provide for the Welfare of the Whole, by enacting and executing such Laws, as appear conducive to it: And 'tis the general Duty of all Inferiors, within the Reserve of their prior Engagements to God, to obey these Laws, and submit to those Officers, who, under the several Distributions of Power in the Society, are trusted with the Execution of them. If, therefore, any private Person shall assume to himself to be a Judge, or a Divider, pretend to direct or oppose his Superiors, acting within the proper Limits of their Office,

fice, is guilty of a criminal Impertinence, and meddling where he has nothing to do. But if, by the Rules of the Constitution, he is intrusted with any Measures of Power, intended to be a Check upon the Actions, and Guard against the Mistakes or Excesses of his Superiors, it becomes his Duty to exert this Power, whenever, according to the best of his Judgment, the public Good appears to require it: And how much soever this Duty may oblige him to censure or oppose his Superiors Behaviour, he is not only innocent, but laudable in doing it. But then these are his Boundaries, within which he is circumscribed, and whenever he goes beyond them, he falls under the Correction of this Precept in my Text: He runs where he is not sent, and offends against those Laws of God and Man, upon which the Peace, Order, and even the Subsistence of Society depends.

And this Resolution equally holds,

SERM.

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with Regard to Ecclesiastical and Civil Society ; a Distinction of Stations and Offices are as necessary in one, as in the other. And agreeably the Apostle, in Allusion to a natural Body, represents some Members of the Church as sustaining the Office of the Eye, others of the Hand, some of the Head, and others of the Feet : And as the Eye cannot say to the Hand, I have no Need of thee, nor the Head to the Feet, I have no Need of you ; so, if either of the Members should usurp the Office of the other, there must necessarily follow a Disorder and Schism in the Body. It is the Duty in all Societies of some to guide and direct, and it is equally the Duty of others to be guided and directed by them. And as those in superior Trusts are required to attend on their proper Office and Employment ; they who teach on Teaching, they who exhort on Exhortation, they who rule to do it with Diligence ;

ligence ; so is it likewise the Duty of SERM.  
their Inferiors to submit with Meek- VII.  
ness to their Authority, and with Hu-  
mility to receive, and with Chearful-  
ness to comply with their Directions:  
Not to invade or vilify their Office,  
but, as the Apostle commands, to do  
all Things without murmuring or dis-  
puting. If the Superiors prescribe any  
Thing forbidden by God, or incon-  
sistent with previous Obligations, the  
Inferiors are within their proper Sphere  
in judging of the Lawfulness or Un-  
lawfulness of what is enjoin'd, and  
are not only at Liberty, but bound to  
act according to their own Convic-  
tions. But in Matters of mere pru-  
dential Consideration, such as the  
Convenience or Inconvenience, the  
Expediency or Inexpediency of pub-  
lic Rules; these must, in the Nature  
of the Thing, be left to the Deter-  
minations of Authority, which must  
judge for, and conclude the Whole.  
It is no Part of the Business of the  
Inferiors



SERM. Inferiors to interpose in these Cases,  
 VII. but they are under the Direction of  
 the Apostle to be quiet and obey. Neither is it possible for any Rules to be establish'd, any Order to be preserved, or any social Scheme, civil or religious, to be devised or executed, without such a Limitation of private Liberty, and Resignation to Authority, as I have here asserted. In short, unless we admit the Distinction of Governors and Governed, and the latter be restrained from intruding on the Offices proper to the former.

But our Conduct is under the Rule and Application of this Precept, not only with Regard to the more public Relations of Life, and the Rank we hold in the Subordinations of Society; but it extends to every Part of our moral Conversation, and is a proper Measure of Duty in such Actions, as are not within the Cognifance and Penalties of any public Law, but are left to be governed by private Discretion.

To

To offer our Counfel or Affiftance SERM.  
where they are wanted or defired, to VII.  
reprove the Faults and Imperfections  
of our Neighbour, within the proper  
Bounds of fraternal Corruption, to  
reconcile the Differences and Contention-  
tions of Men, to appear in Counte-  
nance and Defence of oppreffed In-  
nocence, are Duties prefcribed to us  
by Juftice, Charity, and Religion;  
in thefe Cafes the Bufinefs of other  
Men becomes Part of our own, and  
requires our Attendance; and when  
thefe Occafions call upon us to inter-  
pofe, to ftand ftill and look on with  
Indifference, and confine our Concen-  
to the narrow Limits of our own per-  
fonal Interests, is neither Christian  
nor Humane. But we offend againft  
this Precept in my Text, whenever we  
concern ourfelves farther in the Con-  
duct and Affairs of other Men, than  
thefe Ends require. When we take  
upon us to censure the Difcretion, and  
expose the Failings and Imperfections  
of

SERM. of our Neighbour; when we busy  
 VII. ourselves with a vain Curiosity to  
 know the Secrets, and pry into the  
 Actions of others; and much more,  
 when we are not only thus busy Bo-  
 dies, but Tale-bearers, and make  
 these impertinent Remarks the Subject  
 of our common Mirth, and the En-  
 tertainment of our Conversations. In  
 all these Instances, even the least of-  
 fensive of them, we certainly trans-  
 gress this Command of the Apostle.  
 Vanity is the lowest Character of  
 Guilt, under which they can be con-  
 sider'd: But when Malice, Envy, or  
 Revenge, are the Motives of such a  
 Conduct, as too frequently they are;  
 or when it is attended with mischiev-  
 ous Consequences to the Reputation,  
 Peace, or Interests of our Neighbour,  
 the Offender is concerned to reflect  
 on his Crime, as heighten'd by these  
 Circumstances into a Sin of deep Ma-  
 lignity, and to make a particular  
 Atonement for it. I shall hope to  
 deter

deter you from the several Branches of this Sin, public or private, which this Scripture reproveth; and persuade your Compliance with the wise Advice here given, by representing,


SERM.  
VII.

II. The great Advantages of the Conduct it recommends, and the Mischiefs and Inconveniencies arising from a contrary Practice.

Whoever will attentively consider, how great a Variety of Duties attend every Station, and every Period of human Life, in how constant a Succession they flow upon us, every Day still adding to the Burden; how much it imports both public and private Happiness to discharge them, and how short and precarious the Opportunities of doing it many Times are, will see Reason to conclude, that every Man has enough to do at Home, and may, within the Limits of his own Duty, find a full Employment for his Time. Or, if we want Con-  
viction

SERM. *viction of this great Truth let us only*  
 VII. *observe the vast Extent and Com-*  
*pafs of that which is the chief Buſi-*  
*nefs and Concern of every Man; and,*  
*in Compariſon with all other, the*  
*one Thing neceſſary, the Care of his*  
*Soul, and the Proviſion for Eternity.*  
*How many Enemies and Temptati-*  
*ons is he obliged to guard againſt?*  
*What Vigilance and Affiduity is re-*  
*quired to cultivate and improve the*  
*Seeds of Grace, to ſubdue corrupt*  
*Habits or Inclinations, and to render*  
*unto God the Service that is due to*  
*him? Surely in this ſingle View we*  
*may diſcern Buſineſs ſufficient to en-*  
*gage every Hour of human Life. But*  
*if we take farther into the Account,*  
*the Attendance due to the ſecular*  
*Affairs, and the Proviſion neceſſary*  
*for ourſelves, and thoſe who depend*  
*on us, together with the relative*  
*Duties of Juſtice or Charity, either*  
*fixed to our Office and Station, or oc-*  
*caſionally ariſing from the Incidents*  
 of



of Life, and remember, that for all SERM.  
this Multiplicity of Duties we are VII.  
accountable to God, we can scarce   
forbear crying out with Astonishment,  
*Who is sufficient for these Things?*  
and shall be sensibly convinc'd, that  
our Business is much, and our Time  
short; and that our utmost Diligence  
and Application will be little enough  
to acquit us of it. Nay, that it  
concerns us even to study to be quiet,  
as the Apostle advises, to fence and  
guard against the Intrusion of Busi-  
ness foreign to our Station, that we  
may be at Leisure to attend what be-  
longs to it. For our own Affairs must  
suffer, and our own Duty be ne-  
glected in the same Proportion that  
we are called off, and incumber'd by  
other Men's. The great personal Ad-  
vantages, then, we may expect, from  
acting under the Restraint of the  
Precept before us, are, that our own  
Concerns both spiritual and temporal  
will be better minded; our Errors  
and

SERM. and Defects amended, the Occasions  
 VII. of Action observ'd and improved, and  
 our Spirits kept in a calm and regular Temper: To which we may add, that so inoffensive a Conduct will engage the Esteem and Benevolence of Men to us, and derive the Blessing of God on all that we put our Hands unto. On the contrary, a numberless Train of Inconveniencies attend us, when ever we break this excellent Rule. How often must we expose ourselves to Reproach and Derision, by undertaking what we cannot perform, and censuring what we do not understand? We know who has given it as the proper Character of the Fool, that he will be meddling; meddling where he has nothing to do; passing Judgment on Actions, whose true Springs and Motives, whose Aim and Intention, whose Obstructions and Difficulties, 'tis impossible for him to apprehend: And what does he gain to himself by his Impertinence, but  
 the


the Hatred of those whom he dis-  
quiets, the Resentments of those whom  
he injures, the Scorn and Abhorrence  
of all that know him ; besides what  
was before observ'd, the Damages  
that must arise to him from his Neg-  
lect and Inattention to what properly  
concerns him? These are present Con-  
sequences of this Sin to the Offender  
himself.


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But of much greater Importance is  
the Observance of this Precept, when  
we consider it with Regard to public  
Communities, and the social Happi-  
ness of Mankind.

All Experience tells us, That the  
fewer Things any Man attends to, the  
more accurately and perfectly will  
those be perform'd. The Knowledge  
requisite to any useful *Office* of Life,  
and a Facility of Practice in the Dis-  
charge of it, is not to be acquir'd on  
a sudden ; but must be the Effect of  
repeated Observations, and a long and  
fixed Attention to it. Human Ca-  
P capacities

SERM. capacities are not large enough to com-  
 VII.prehend, with Exactness, many diffe-  
 ~~~~~rent Branches of Science at once; and  
 he who divides his Application be-
 tween too great a Variety of Pursuits,
 is generally found to know nothing
 as he ought to know it. 'Tis in View
 of these Maxims, that all political
 Constitutions range and sort out their
 Members into several Classes and Sta-
 tions, to which they are previously
 design'd and prepared by long Instruc-
 tion and diligent Attendance, and
 then appointed each to their proper
 Office and Employment, in a mutual
 Subservience to one another. That
 each being thus confined to a certain
 Circle of Business, they may better
 understand, and with more Readiness
 and Accuracy dispatch that, to
 the great Advantage of the Whole,
 and every Member of the Commu-
 nity. And for these Reasons, they,
 whose Office requires them to over-
 see, and direct the Behaviour of others,
 are

are either chosen out of Persons, whose SERM.
Condition exempts them from Labour- VII.
ing with their own Hands for their 
Support : Or when the public Care of
a Station is great and constant, such
Measures of Affluence are annexed to
it, that those placed in it may be at
Leisure to attend the Duties of it,
without Avocation, by the more pri-
vate Concerns of Life. While this
Order and Disposition is preserv'd, e-
very one keeping to his Post, and at-
tending the Business proper to it,
diffused through the Society; the Du-
ties of every Relation are discharg'd
in the most useful and effectual Man-
ner; and Men, by a mutual Exchange
of Services, are endeared to one an-
other. But if this Oeconomy be bro-
ken through; if Men desert their pro-
per Business, refuse to abide in that
whereunto they are called, intermed-
dling in the Province and Office of o-
thers, all the wise Provisions of Go-
vernment

SERM. **VII.**  vernment are defeated, and the greatest Inconveniencies must arise from the Disorder. For he who thus intrudes into other Men's Business, must, as I observ'd, unavoidably leave his own undone: And as every Man, by discharging the Duties of his Station, contributes something to the common Happiness, so in the same Proportion that this Service is withdrawn, the Public must suffer Loss and Damage. It suffers by the Neglect of his own Business; it suffers by his interposing where he is not wanted, and by his undertaking what he has no Skill to judge of, nor Capacity to perform; and it suffers yet more, from the Disturbance and Interruption he gives other Men in the Course of their Duty, whose Counsels he distracts, diverts their Attention, and embarrasses the Execution of their Office. These and many other ill Effects this Conduct will derive on Society, tho' the Offence be committed only by Equals
against

against Equals; nay, tho' the Irregularity rise no higher than an over-busy Curiosity. For whence come the greater Part of those Enmities and Difaffections, which divide and disquiet Mankind, but from Calumny and Tale-bearing, officious Intermedling in the Affairs, or impertinent Reflections on the Conduct, of other Men? I believe it may in general be affirm'd, that there is scarce any Breach of Charity among Neighbours, but what upon Enquiry will be found to have either its Rise, or its Improvement and Aggravation, from this Sin.

But when this Offence is committed by Inferiors against their proper Superiors, the Evils consequent to it must be far greater, and more extensive; when the Subordinations of Society are infringed, when they whose Station requires Submission and Obedience to Authority assume the Seat of Judgment, take upon them to be

SERM. Leaders of the People, to arraign the
 VII. Counsels, and oppose the Admini-
 strations of public Power, the very
 Frame of Government will be un-
 hing'd, its Motions obstructed, and e-
 very End of it defeated. Magistrates
 indeed are subject to Mistakes in their
 Counsels, and Wickedness in their In-
 tentions, as well as other Men; and
 when this is the Case, it may be the
 Duty of our Station to hold their
 Hand, and check their Proceedings:
 But then we must be careful to act
 upon upright Principles ourselves, to
 exclude Envy, Ambition or Revenge,
 from having any Influence on our
 Conduct; and above all, to confine
 ourselves strictly to the Limits of our
 Station, the legal Boundaries of Power
 committed to us. For Opposition to
 Authority, even when just, neces-
 sary, and under the best Regulations
 that can be devised, will be attended
 with some Disorder, and is chosen only
 as a less Evil, for the Prevention of
 a great-

a greater: And when it proceeds from SERM.
corrupt Motives, or exceeds its proper VII.
Restraints, it may easily prove a
greater Mischief than it proposes to
remedy. But for private Persons, who
have no legal Call to such Office, to
usurp the Powers of it, is Mutiny and
Sedition, a Liberty inconsistent with
Government and Order, and which
manifestly tends to Anarchy and Con-
fusion.

And as I before observ'd, that the
Application of this excellent Rule in
my Text holds equally in ecclesiasti-
cal and civil Society, so I must here
observe, that a Departure from it is
equally pernicious to both. In the
Church, as in every other Society,
there must be a Subordination of Of-
fices and Powers; and so far as these
oblige any one to concern himself in
the Behaviour of others, so far it is
his Business to interpose. There are
also Reserves of Liberty, the inherent


SERM. Right of every Christian, and conse-
 VII. quently within these Bounds every
 one may judge of the Prescriptions
 of his Superiors. But if these Limits
 are exceeded; if the Feet will take
 upon them to direct the Head, if the
 Hands will see for the Eye, if they
 who occupy the Room of the Unlearn-
 ed will be Teachers, if Subjects will
 be Rulers, and prescribe where they
 should obey, all Order must be con-
 founded, all Union render'd impracti-
 cable, and the very Being of a Church
 subverted.

Upon the Whole, I beg Leave to
 remind you, that the Precept before
 us is not only deliver'd as an Advice
 we are concern'd to observe in Point
 of Prudence, and with Regard to the
 manifold Evils, public and private,
 attending the Breach of it; but we
 must look upon it as a Command of
 God, obliging our Obedience under
 the Penalties of his Laws. If for
 every

every idle Word an Account will be demanded in the Day of Judgment; if even the unprofitable Servant shall not then be acquitted, how shall he escape, who has not only been idle where he ought to have been employed, but busy where he ought to have been quiet? who has not only neglected his own Duty, but disturbed and hindered other Men in the Performance of theirs? who has not only been unprofitable, but an Enemy to Peace and Order, to Justice and Charity, the Vexation and Burden of human Society?

Let us then study to be quiet, to be faithful and diligent in our proper Vocations, neither declining our own Duty, nor ambitious to enlarge the Extent of it. The immediate Effect of such a Conduct will be Calmness and Content in our own Breast, and Favour and Benevolence from the Rest of Mankind: The Blessing of God,
who

SERM.
VII.
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SERM. who is the Author of Peace, and the  
VII.  Lover of Concord, will attend us  
here; and the Rewards of a meek  
and quiet Spirit, which in his Sight  
are of great Price, will be our Portion  
hereafter.

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## S E R M O N VIII.

The Folly of making a Mock at  
Sin.

P R O V. XIV. 9.

*Fools make a Mock at Sin.*

**T**IS, methinks, a little mortifying to the Profane and Irreligious, who set up for more refined Parts, more accurate thinking, and a deeper Penetration than other Men, to find so great and so wise a Prince as *Solomon*, who had consider'd human Life with so much Attention, constantly ranking them under

SERM.  
VIII.

SERM. under an opposite Character, and  
 VIII. treating them as Fools. This Impu-  
 tation he not only asserts, but proves  
 from a particular Examination of their  
 Principles and Conduct; and in my  
 Text infers from this Instance of  
 their Folly, their making a Mock at  
 Sin.

By which it is not meant, that they  
 affect to expose the Vices of their  
 own Life and Practice, as absurd and  
 ridiculous. No, their Raillery is di-  
 rected against the Laws of Virtue and  
 Religion, which forbid them. The  
 Actions prohibited by these Laws  
 they are ready enough to applaud and  
 defend; but what they endeavour to  
 make a Mock at is this Sin, the Con-  
 sideration of these Actions under that  
 frightful Idea, and being deterr'd from  
 the Commission of them as forbidden  
 by God.

One would wonder indeed, what  
 Motive should induce the libertine  
 Part of the World to be so sollicitous

as they are, either to argue or laugh SERM.  
the Rest of Mankind out of the Re- VIII.  
straints of Virtue and Religion. The  
Interest even of their Vices themselves  
seems rather to persuade another Con-  
duct. For 'tis certainly a great Ad-  
vantage to them, in their Pursuits of  
the Honours, the Wealth, or Plea-  
sures of Life, to have other Men li-  
mited by fixed and stated Rules ; to  
know exactly within what Bounds  
they are confined ; how far they can  
go, and where they must stop ; and  
to be able to ascertain the Point, be-  
yond which they are secure from their  
Competition : While they themselves  
are free from all Rules, and at Liber-  
ty to make Use of any Expedients that  
appear conducive to their Designs.  
But here lies the Secret : The Liber-  
tine can have no rational Conviction,  
and consequently no rational Acqui-  
escence, in the Principles he acts on.  
A Consciousness of Guilt, and its na-  
tural attendant Shame, hang about  
him



SERM. VIII. him do what he can. To guard against these troublesome Sentiments, which haunt and interrupt his Pleasures, he finds it necessary to gain the Applause and Approbation of Men to his Conduct. 'Tis the peculiar Privilege of Virtue and Innocence to be able to stand alone. He who is secure in the Approbation of God can despise the Scorn and Contradiction of the whole World: But Wickedness is naturally timorous. The Libertine finds himself unsupported from within, and is therefore solicitous to confirm his Diffidence, and remove his Shame, by the Countenance and Esteem of Men. Now while the Fear of God, and the Reverence of his Laws, retain their due Force in the World, these Men are sure of being mark'd out with general Abhorrence and Detestation. Before they can expect any favourable Regard or Credit with Mankind, they must dispossess them of these rigid Principles, and soften their Aversions

sions from Sin. And by what Methods must this be effected? Serious Reasoning the Cause of Vice will not bear: But if they can give a ludicrous Turn to the Argument, and by a Mixture of Wit with their Prophaneness raise a Laugh on their Side, they succeed as far as they desire: For they know very well, that what Men can be prevail'd on to laugh at, they are not apt in any great Degree either to hate or fear. Their Dread of Sin, and Aversion from the Sinner, will be gradually lessen'd by these Impressions; and if, under any Character, we can be reconcil'd to the Friendship, and be pleas'd with the Conversation of the Criminal, we shall not be very much offended with his Crimes. To correct this profane Levity in those who are guilty of it, and to guard others from its Impression, I shall endeavour to confirm the Assertion of *Solomon*, that 'tis extreme Folly thus to make a Mock at Sin.

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VIII.

But

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VIII.

But first it may be proper to premise, that these Mockers at Sin may be distinguish'd under two Characters; either they are such as ridicule all Fear of offending God, and in Consequence all Religion, as Weakness and Superstition; and these can be no other than profest Atheists; or such as care not to go quite so great a Length as this. Some Crimes they will acknowledge to expose us to the Anger of God, and to be justly odious to Men; but others, such as they indulge in their own Practice, or would encourage in others, they represent as light and trivial Escapes; Matters of Jest rather than of Conscience, and not deserving a serious Consideration. But the Folly of both these Attempts against Religion must appear, if we consider,

I. What Sin is.

II. What Consequences must attend making a Mock or Jest of it.

Now

Now Sin in the Notion which Religion gives of it, is the Transgression of a reasonable, holy and righteous Law, prescribed to our Conduct by the Author of our Being, on whose Pleasure all that we have, and all that we hope for, depends. The Reproach of our Reason, which it contradicts; the Abhorrence of our God, whose Power and Authority it defies, and whose Guilt, no less a Sacrifice than the Blood of the Son of God himself could expiate. Consider it in its Effects, and we find it the Parent and Cause of all the Misery we either feel or fear. 'Twas Sin that degraded our Nature, from the Perfection in which it was created: That debased us from a Glory little inferior to the Angels, into that weak, passionate and ignorant Creature we now are: That brought Death into the World, and open'd all the Paths of Sorrow that lead to it. All these are the Fruits

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and

SERM. and Wages of Sin: But it has still  
 VIII. more terrible Effects than these. It  
 pursues us into another World, and  
 will there be attended with everlasting  
 Penalties, Horror and Torments,  
 which shall never have an End. And  
 can this dreadful Evil be a proper  
 Subject for Sport and Drollery? Can  
 we permit ourselves to laugh at what  
 enrages the Anger of our God against  
 us, what nail'd our Friend and Patron  
 to the Cross, what daily crucifies the  
 Son of God afresh, and puts him to  
 an open Shame? And what, unless  
 atoned for by the Tears of Repent-  
 ance, will ruin our whole Nature,  
 and cast both Body and Soul into  
 Hell?

To him who calls himself a Chris-  
 tian, Sin, under these Characters, must  
 appear the most hateful and terrible  
 of all Evils. If he believes that Gos-  
 pel which he professes, he knows that  
 the Wrath of God shall be reveal'd  
 from Heaven, against all Unrighte-  
 ousness



ousness of Men: That no Sin shall SERM.  
escape the Notice, or Repentment of VII.  
his Judge, but be aveng'd in eternal   
Infiictions. When he reflects on these  
serious Truths, he will find little In-  
clination to treat any Sin as a light  
and ludicrous Thing, and make a Jest  
at what may possibly be his own or  
another's Damnation. The Atheisti-  
cal Scoffers at Sin indeed, make a  
Mock at these Consequences of it too:  
Ridicule them as *Mormos* invented to  
frighten Mankind; the Artifices of the  
Crafty, or the Dreams of Superstition.  
But alas! they will one Day find that  
there is a God, just and terrible in  
his Judgments, when all their Jollity  
shall be changed into Trembling, and  
their Laughter into weeping and  
gnashing of Teeth.

In the mean Time, let us condescend  
so far to the Libertine, as to argue  
with him upon his own Principles.  
Let us consider Sin only under its pre-  
sent Consequences, and see whether

SERM. he be so wise as he thinks himself, in  
VIII. making a Mock at it.

Now, what is it that embroils human Society, disturbs the Peace, Order, and Happiness of the World, but Sin? Whence come Wars and Fightings among us; Discord and Contention, Fraud and Oppression, and all the sad Effects of Malice, Envy, Avarice, or Revenge, but from the ungovern'd Lusts and Passions of Men? The far greater Part of the Complaints of the Miserable, when traced to their proper Source, will be found to arise either from their own, or other Mens transgressing the Laws of God. To laugh at Sin, therefore, is to laugh at Misery, to laugh where a wise Man ought to mourn. It argues indeed somewhat worse than Folly, a Baseness and Inhumanity of Temper, and an Enmity to Mankind, for a Man to delight and sport himself with public Mischiefs. Should we see a Man playing with Serpents, and jest-  
ing

ing with Scorpions, could we be di-  
verted with the Sight? Would not  
the natural Passions arising in us upon  
such a Sight, be Pity for the Igno-  
rance, and Concern for the Danger of  
the Man? Or if we apprehended any  
Malice in the Action, a Design to per-  
suade others to venture on these pe-  
rilous Liberties, should we not abo-  
minate the Wickedness of the Inten-  
tion, and with Zeal and Indignation  
oppose the Success of it? And can  
we with Patience behold a prophane  
Wretch, endeavouring to abolish the  
Dread of Sin, and persuade Men to  
divert themselves with present Mi-  
sery, and future Damnation? Folly in  
its common Notion is too mild and  
gentle an Imputation for such a Con-  
duct: We must aggravate the Idea,  
and add to it some odious and detest-  
able Images, before it will express it.  
That, even in its highest and worst  
Sense, it will properly be applied to

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this

SERM. this Practice, will farther appear to
 VIII. us, if we
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II. Consider the Consequences of making a Mock at Sin.

Now the general Consequence of this Practice must be the prevailing of Sin and Unrighteousness in the World. The Passions of Mankind lead them by a strong Propensity to what is forbidden. Our Appetites are always calling upon us to reach out our Hand, and taste something out of the *inviting* Scene of Pleasure that Passes by us; and the Devil is ever suggesting to us, we may do it safely, we shall not surely die: and all the Fences and Guards of Religion are found little enough to withhold our Compliance. All the Restraint we are, or can be under, is from them. Were it not for the Fear of offending God, exposing ourselves to his displeasure, and incurring the Penalties of his Laws, every kind of Wickedness  
 would

would soon prevail, and, like a Tor-  
rent which has broke its Bounds, over-  
spread the Face of the Earth. And  
consequently, whatever weakens these  
Restraints, must, in the same Propor-  
tion, occasion the Increase and Over-  
flowing of all Ungodliness. Now  
what can more effectually contribute  
to this Evil than making a Mock at  
Sin, laughing at that formidable No-  
tion, under which it ought to be con-  
sider'd, and representing it only as a  
petty Indiscretion, a light and ludi-  
crous thing? The Idea of the Action  
is perfectly changed by this Disguise:  
The proper Penalties of it are hid out  
of Sight, and only a trifling Inconve-  
nience from the Raillery of Men sub-  
stituted in the Place of them. A Pe-  
nalty (if it may be called one) which  
will give the Sinner but little Appre-  
hension; for few are disposed to think  
they want Wit, and if they can but  
turn the Jest upon such a Reprover as  
this, they are sufficiently guarded a-  
gainst

SERM.

VIII.



SERM. gainst any Uneasiness they can fear  
 VIII. from him. The Fear of God, and  
 the Dread of his Resentments, are (as  
 I observ'd) the only effectual Restraints  
 from Sin. But to keep up the Sense  
 and Impression of this Principle, it is  
 necessary that Men should every where  
 meet with some apparent Effects of  
 it. When they see in all about them  
 a reverent Apprehension of the Divine  
 Presence and Authority: When they  
 hear them on all Occasions express an  
 awful Regard to his Laws, and, in-  
 stead of Laughter or Applause, enter-  
 tain the Transgression of them with  
 serious Reproof and Abhorrence, it  
 gives a quick and lively Influence to  
 the Fear of God: It will reclaim the  
 modest, and check even the most pro-  
 fligate Sinner. The very Shame of  
 appearing less conscientious, less re-  
 strain'd from Wickedness than other  
 Men, will at least correct the open  
 Insolence of Impiety, and keep the  
 public Example within some Bounds  
 of

of Decency and Sobriety. But when SERM.  
the Transgressions of God's Laws are VIII.  
every where made light of; when it  
obtains as Fashion, to treat Sin only  
as a Matter of Jest and Pleasantry;  
neither Shame nor Conscience will be  
able to preserve their proper Force.  
The Libertine will no longer affect to  
conceal his Crimes; and even the Vir-  
tuous will be tempted to remit of  
their Zeal, abate their Opposition,  
and, by an undue Compliance with  
the Stream, avoid the Reproach of  
Affectation and Singularity.

'Tis to be hoped, indeed, that the  
natural Reluctances of Reason and  
Conscience will generally guard Men  
against the Scoffers of the first Kind,  
the open Atheists, who ridicule all Fear  
of God, all Restraints of Virtue and  
Religion, and in Effect all Distincti-  
ons of Good and Evil. Mankind must  
be corrupt even beyond Example, be-  
fore they can with Pleasure or Pati-  
ence endure such Insults on common  
Sense

SERM. Sense and Virtue. But there are  
 VIII. Mockers of another Character, whose  
 Success is more to be feared. Men  
 who will permit you to keep a Re-  
 serve of Religion, will pretend to a-  
 gree with you in detesting some Crimes,  
 but persuade you to think others on-  
 ly ludicrous Amusements, which 'tis  
 Weakness and Superstition to abstain  
 from yourselves, and a morose uncon-  
 versable Severity to censure in your  
 Neighbours. Now this is a Tempta-  
 tion to which we are exceedingly o-  
 pen We are fond of any Overture  
 of compounding Matters with God,  
 and will give him any Equivalent for  
 a favorite Sin: And therefore, when  
 we are persuaded to believe the Sins,  
 to which the Solicitations of Friends,  
 popular Fashion, or our own Appe-  
 tites particularly lead us, to be Tri-  
 fles of no Moment, and that other Ob-  
 servances, from which we have no A-  
 version, will secure to us the Expecta-  
 tions of Duty, the Delusion is not ea-  
 sily

fly resisted. But how fatal must the Consequences of these Notions be to public Virtue, wherever they are entertain'd? For, while every one will be for bringing his own Vices within the Indulgence as Trifles, not meriting a serious Regard, whatever Restraint each private Person may lay upon himself, the public Example will be under none at all. Every Vice will have its Patrons, be represented equally trifling, equally reputable, till Men will be neither ashamed, nor afraid to commit any; and all Restraint of Conscience, all Sobriety of Carriage, and even the Distinction of Vice and Virtue, shall be *laugh'd* out of the World. These are the natural Consequences of making a Mock at any Sin.

And can it consist with Reason and Wisdom to advance such a Scheme as this? to let loose all the wild Passions of corrupt Nature, to range and sport themselves thro' the Earth? What  
De-

SERM.

VIII.


SERM. Deluge or Pestilence can make so  
 VIII. much Havock and Distraction in the  
 World, or be so pernicious to the  
 Peace and interests of human Society?  
 In *Solomon's* Image of this Folly, 'tis  
 like a Man who scatters Arrows, Fire-  
 brands, and Death, and says, Am I  
 not in Sport? And what does the Fool  
 gain to himself, by the Success of his  
 Attempt, but a Share in the common  
 Calamities he occasions? Perhaps with  
 Fools like himself he may obtain the  
 Applause and Reputation of an impu-  
 dent Wit; but from all serious and  
 good Men, from all who have any Re-  
 gard for the Honour of God, for the  
 Salvation of Mens Souls, or for the  
 Virtue and Welfare of their Country,  
 Indignation and Abhorrence: And  
 from God, the righteous Avenger of  
 all Contempt of his Laws, the severest  
 Inflictions of his Wrath, a Place in  
 the nethermost Hell, with the great  
 Seducer and Corrupter of Mankind,  
 whose Kingdom and Interests he has  
 served.



ferred. The Time will come, when SERM.  
he shall know and feel, that all the VIII.  
Laws of God are the solemn Injun-  
ctions of Almighty Power: That the  
Penalties annexed to them are the im-  
mutable Determinations of infinite  
Justice. When Sicknefs or Age shall  
fet the Terrors of the Lord before  
him, with what Regret and Astonish-  
ment will he reflect on those Sins,  
which are now the Subject of his  
Mirth, and Drollery? With what A-  
gonies of Remorse will he then re-  
member how he has gloried in his  
Shame; and beseech that Majesty  
whom he has provoked, that the Sor-  
row of the Penitent may atone for  
the Laughter of the Fool?

From these Reflections I hope it  
may appear to us, how much we are  
obliged in Duty, and concern'd in In-  
terest, to correct and oppose this vain,  
irreligious Humour of mocking at Sin.  
If we seriously attend to the Conside-  
rations

SERM. rations I have suggested, the Nature  
 VIII. and Consequences of Sin, the Authority that forbids it, the Penalties threaten'd to it, the Misery it derives on Mankind in this World, and the Damnation that awaits it in another, 'tis impossible we should think lightly of it, either in ourselves or others. We may with as much Reason and Sobriety make a Jest of a Pestilence, and laugh at our own or our Country's Ruin. If the Sins we treat with this Levity are committed by other Men, we make ourselves Partakers with them: But if they are our own, we enflame the Resentment, and double the Guilt of them. For he who is ashamed of his Sin confesses still the Justice and Obligation of the Law he transgresses; some Seeds of Grace are yet alive in him, which by due Culture and Application may be improved to his Recovery: His Example at least is less infective, and if he perishes

rishes in his Iniquity he falls alone, SERM.  
and does not involve others in his VIII.  
Ruin. But he who laughs and sports   
at his Sin, not only offends, but de-  
fies God: He declares against the Au-  
thority, and disowns the Obligation  
of his Laws. Such a Conduct dares  
Light and Discovery: The Sinner tri-  
umphs and glories in his Crimes, and  
forms a Party against Religion: And  
therefore will be answerable not only  
for his own Commissions, but for the  
Thousands that fall besides him, and  
the ten Thousands whom he encou-  
rages in the same impious Presump-  
tions.

In order to check this growing Evil,  
and restrain an Offence so provoking  
to God, and so pernicious in its Ef-  
fects, on the Virtue and Happiness of  
Mankind, let us every one, with a  
serious and fix'd Attention, reflect on  
that holy and dreadful Presence, be-  
fore whom we stand: That the Eyes  
of our Judge are always over us, at-  
tend

SERM. tend our going out, and our coming  
 VIII. in, behold, observe, and record every  
 ~~~~~ Action of our Lives. Let us remem-  
 ber, that for every idle Word we must
 give an Account to his Justice : That
 even the most innocent Parts of our
 Mirth will escape well, if they are
 reckon'd among our pardonable Infir-
 mities. But where Things serious and
 sacred, where God and Religion, where
 the Transgression of his Laws, and
 the Penalties he has annex'd to them,
 are the Subjects of an impious Mirth,
 be we assured these Things are noted
 in his Book with the deepest Charac-
 ters of Guilt, and will be resent-
 ed with Fury poured out. What God
 hates, he requires us to hate also; and
 to express our Allegiance to his King-
 dom, and our Affection to his Ser-
 vice, by an open and public Detes-
 tation of what offends him. If we
 can be guilty ourselves of the Le-
 vity I have been reprov'g, or if we
 sit passively, and hear others affront
 his

his Majesty, and laugh at his Displea-
sure, must he not look upon us as SERM.
VIII.
Traitors to his Interests, and in Con-
federacy with his Enemies? Let us
then appear with Zeal in the Cause
of God, and declining Virtue, and
not suffer our Religion, which no Ar-
guments can shake, to be jested out
of the World by the Raillery of Fools.
Let neither the Wit, nor Figure of
the Criminal, prevail with us, by Ap-
plause to encourage, or by Silence to
approve, his profane Liberties: But
let us treat every Sin with the Resent-
ment it deserves, and every Offender
with Reproof and Correction. If
those among us who truly fear God,
and are concern'd for his Honour,
would unite in such a Conduct, the
Effect of it would soon appear. Vir-
tue would resume Courage and Con-
fidence, and Vice be driven to Co-
vert and Retirement. Credit and Ap-
plause would attend Religion, and
Shame would be the Promotion of
R Fools.

SERM. Fools. But whether the Attempt succeeds in these Effects, or not, let us
VIII. remember that God requires it at our Hands; will acknowledge and reward our honest Zeal, and make us a large Amends for any Inconvenience we can suffer from it. But if either through Shame or Cowardice we decline this Duty, of us shall the Son of Man be ashamed, before his Father and the holy Angels.



S E R M O N IX.

Virtue and Piety our best Security.

I P E T. III. 13, 14.

*Who is he that will harm you, if ye
be Followers of that which is good?
But and if you suffer for Righteousness
Sake, happy are ye.*

THIS Epistle the Apostle of SERM.
the Circumcision addresseth IX.
to the *Jews* of the Disper-
sion, after he and *Paul* had agreed
upon their distinct Provinces, in the
Work of the Gospel. He begins
with exhorting them to a general
R 2 Purity

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Purity of Life, and Holiness in all Manner of Conversation, from a Variety of Christian Motives; from the Expectation of that ^a Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved for them in Heaven; from the ^b Holiness of that God who had called them, ^c the Regeneration they professed, and the Dignity of that Relation into which they were adopted, being as ^d lively Stones built up in a spiritual House, an holy Priesthood, to offer up spiritual Sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. To these Motives he proceeds to add this Consideration, that by such a Conduct they would engage the Esteem of those who were without, the *Gentiles* among whom they lived: That whereas they were ready to speak against them as evil Doers, by beholding their good Works, they might be induced to glorify God. He then

(a) Chap. i. v. 4. (b) *ibid.* v. 15. (c) *ibid.* v. 22, 23.
 (d) Chap. ii. v. 5, 9.

descends

descends to some Duties of a more especial Tendency to produce these good Effects, such as Obedience of Subjects to their civil Governors, and of Servants to their Masters, and that not only to the Good and Gentle, but also to the Froward. He then presses as recommended by the same Arguments, the relative Duties between Husband and Wife; and finally, a general Unanimity among the Brethren, an affectionate Love and Tenderness towards each other, and Pity and Courteousness towards all Men. And to the Motives before suggested, he farther adds, that a Compliance with the Commands of the Gospel, in these Instances of Duty, was the most effectual Way to secure their outward Quiet and Happiness. For thus the Psalmist had assured them,

He that will love Life, and see good Days, Let him refrain his Tongue from Evil, and his Lips that they speak no Guile: Let him eschew Evil, and do

SERM. *Good, let him seek Peace and ensue*

IX. *it: For the Eyes of the Lord are over the Righteous, and his Ears are open to their Prayers.* And besides the Assurance which the Promise of God gave them, that these Effects should attend such a Behaviour as he recommended, they might conclude it from the natural Tendency of the Duties themselves; for who is he that shall harm you, if ye be Followers of that which is good? But and if it should happen otherwise; if, notwithstanding all their Care and Innocence, the Malice and Wickedness of Men should return Evil for Good, and persecute them for doing their Duty; they might then take to themselves this great Satisfaction, that they suffer'd for Righteousness Sake, and were entitled by the Promises of the Gospel to a distinguish'd Measure of Reward. The Conclusions which manifestly arise to us from this Scripture, are,


I. That

I. That a steady Practice of the SERM. Duties prescribed by the Gospel is IX. the wisest and most effectual Provision against those Afflictions, which are derived on us from the Malice and Passions of Men. Nevertheless,

II. That this Provision will not always be effectual to secure us from these Afflictions; that the Innocent, notwithstanding this Defence, will sometimes suffer, yea suffer for being innocent. But then,

III. He who has made this Provision will find Support, and even Happiness under the worst that can befall him, from this Reflection, that he suffers for Righteousness Sake.

And, I. We are here taught, That a steady Practice of the Duties prescribed by the Gospel is our wisest and most effectual Provision against all those Afflictions, which are derived on us from the Malice and Passions of other Men. - And how large a

SERM. IX.  Portion of that Scene of Misery which occurs to us in human Life, is to be assign'd to this Class, we need no other Proof than our own daily Observati-
 on and Experience. Let us examine the several Tribes of Mourners, whom we meet in the World ; let us attend to the Cries of the Oppressed, to the destitute Exile, or the solitary Cap-
 tive in the Dungeon : In Sum, let us enquire into the Source of all those various Instances of public or private Calamities, which afflict Mankind, and we shall soon be convinced, that the far greater Number of them are owing to the Tyranny, or Malice, the Envy, Treachery, or Revenge of un-
 righteous Men. Now from these Evils, no Skill or Cunning of the World can give us a Security, equal to that prescribed to us by our holy Religi-
 on. For, in the First Place, if we serve and please God in the Duties of our Stations, he himself (as the Apostle here observes from the Psalm-
 ist)

ist) has promised to be our Protec-
tor. That Almighty Power in whose
Hands are all Events of Life, who
directs the Wills, and over-rules the
Passions of Men, has assured us, that
his Eyes are over the Righteous,
that no Evil shall come nigh his Dwel-
ling, neither shall the Wicked ap-
proach to hurt him, and that he will
make even his Enemies to be at Peace
with him. But the Apostle in my
Text particularly directs us to ob-
serve, that the Duties enjoin'd by the
Gospel are in their Nature a Guard
and Security to us from these Evils.

So long as the Distinctions of Good
and Evil are acknowledg'd in the
World, the Actions commanded by
our holy Religion must be approved
under the former Character. Now
this Distinction was not made, and
these opposite Characters affixt to the
Actions of Men, from a mere spe-
culative and abstract Consideration of
their Natures, but with a manifest
Rela-


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SERM. Relation to their Effects, and the In-
IX. fluence they had on the Happiness of
Mankind. Those Actions were by
general Consent denominated good,
which conduce to private and social
Felicity; and those evil, which dis-
turbed the Peace of the World, or were
injurious to the public or private In-
terests of Men. But among all the
Schemes of Morality, which have been
recommended to the World, none e-
ver appeared so exactly calculated for
the Happiness of Men, as that re-
veal'd and enjoin'd in the Gospel.
Natural Reason approves the Justness
and Excellency of every Precept in
it, and wherever it had before differ'd
from these Directions, is forc'd to
acknowledge its own Error. We may
therefore conclude, that a Conduct
agreeable to these excellent Rules of
Life, must lay a general Obligation
on the Gratitude of Mankind, and
procure Esteem and Benevolence to
the Man whom it adorns. The most
savage

savage and wicked Disposition cannot SERM.
but discern something lovely and en- IX.
dearing in the Meek and Merciful,
the Affable and Courteous; in the
Man who goes about doing Good, and
who extends his Charity even to his
Enemies. The Villain himself feels
a secret Impression of Awe, when he
approaches so venerable a Character:
He cannot injure him without some
Remorse, and his Hand strikes with
Reluctancy.

But the Protection of this Charac-
ter will especially appear to us, if we
consider, that the most barbarous
Temper oftener exerts itself under the
Appearance of Revenge than of vo-
luntary and unprovoked Mischief, and
will always endeavour to plead in its
Defence the Resentment of some real
or seeming Injury. Now if our Con-
duct be govern'd by the inoffensive
Rules of the Gospel, we have the
Security of provoking none. The
meek, the humble, the patient Dis-
ciple

SERM. ciple of Christ, not only defrauds, in-
 IX. jures, or oppresses no Man, but has
 every Passion under Government and
 Discipline, and consequently raises no
 Enemy to himself by Contempt, none
 by Censure, none by Envy. His Pur-
 suits of this Life are calm and inof-
 fensive. He does not willingly cross
 the Projects, or break into the Schemes
 of the Worldly and Ambitious: And
 if he happens to be engaged in a
 Competition, (as sometimes he una-
 voidably may be) he confines himself
 to the Bounds of Justice and Sobriety;
 his Disputes are managed without
 Fierceness and Bitterness, without
 Slander and Detraction; And tho' he
 cannot permit himself to acknowledge
 Right to be Wrong, Justice to be In-
 justice, yet rather than be the Occa-
 sion of any extensive Evil, or of hin-
 dering any general Good, he is pre-
 pared to give up his own Interests,
 and recede even from the most equi-
 table Pretensions. He will avoid, in
 the

the whole Course of Actions, not SERM.
only what is really Evil, but also so IX.
far as it is possible all Appearance of 
it. This is the Temper, and this
will be the Conduct of all who sin-
cerely obey the Gospel, and are truly
influenced by the Spirit of it. A
Conduct, which so far as any Rules
of Life can effect it, must disarm
Malice itself, must reconcile the
Friendship and Affections of Men to
us, and not only give the Wicked no
Provocation to harm us, but in a great
Measure disable him from doing it.
A general Esteem is itself a real Pro-
tection. The Injuries offer'd to a
good Man will be resent'd with an
universal Detestation, and every Man's
Hand will be armed against him who
inflicts them.

The Protection of this Character
will appear still farther, if we recol-
lect that the most considerable Inju-
ries we can receive, must be inflicted
under

SERM. under some Colour of Justice with the
 IX. Pretence of executing public Laws,
 or at least within the Covert of them. For though we should suppose all Esteem for Virtue, all Regards of Conscience, to be put off by Men, yet even Malice itself will be under some Restraint from the civil Laws of every Community, and not care to expose itself to the Penalties of them. Now the Ends of Society require, that the Laws of every Community should in general intend the Defence and Encouragement of those who do well, and the Terror and Punishment of evil Doers. Laws, as the Apostle observes, are not made for the Righteous and Good, but for the Lawless and Unruly, for the Unjust and the Oppressor, for the Murderers of Fathers, and the Murderers of Mothers, for the Liar and the Perjured; and if there be any other Thing that is contrary to sound Doctrine. But against the Just and the Merciful,

ful, the Temperate and the Peace-SERM.
able ; against such there is no Law. IX.

And consequently they who are Followers of that which is good, have not only the general Protection of Innocence, but act under the profess'd Favour and Defence of all Laws : Neither can they be brought under Censure from them, unless their Conduct be represented under some Character of Evil : An Attempt of some Difficulty, even to the subtlest Malice, and which will not very often succeed, where the Action is perfectly conformable to the Rules of the Gospel. Something or other will generally be found wanting, such Prudence and Circumspection at least, such Guard against Appearances as our Religion advises, where an innocent Person or Action is in the ordinary Course of Justice render'd obnoxious to the Law.

Let us suppose the Case which was chiefly in the Apostle's View, that
the

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the civil Government should disfavour us, as it did the first Christians; these must be acknowledg'd to be Circumstances, in which our Religion can give us the least Protection: Yet, if we be Followers of that which is good, if we act up to the holy Rules we profess, if we obey our Superiors as far as our Religion directs, if we mind our own Business, confine ourselves to the Duties of our Station, and be pure and peaceable, as we are commanded to be, such a Conduct must be attended with the utmost Security that such Circumstances can possibly admit: We shall in a great Measure cut off all Occasion, even from those who seek Occasion, that they may have whereof to accuse us. And the most tyrannical Government must not only be without any just Offence from such a Behaviour, but it must break thro' all those Rules, on which the Happiness of Society depends, and even act against its own
true

true Interests before it can harm us. SERM.
From what has been suggested on this IX.
Head, I presume it may appear, that
a Conduct of Life agreeable to the
Precepts of our Religion, not only
recommends us to the special Protec-
tion of God, but naturally engages
the Friendship and Inclination of Man-
kind to us, puts us under the De-
fence of a general Esteem, offers no
Provocation to Malice itself, and very
much restrains even its Power to hurt
us, and consequently is our best Se-
curity against the Effects of it.

But a perfect Exemption from In-
juries, the present Condition of hu-
man Life will not permit us to hope
for; and therefore the Apostle must
not be here understood, as affirming
universally, and without Exception,
that if we are Followers of that which
is good, it will be impossible for any
one to harm us. It was sufficient to
his Purpose, of recommending Inno-
cence and Virtue as our wisest Choice,
S if

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if the Rule generally holds: if Innocence is better guarded, and less exposed, and affords upon the Whole, a greater Security, than the most refined Expedients of secular Cunning can give us without it. Unless the Assertion were thus limited, it could not be reconciled to those many Predictions of Christ and his Apostles, by which they prepared their Converts for Distress and Persecution from a prejudiced World, and would be refuted in the Example of their own most holy Life, and bitter Sufferings. In Prevention of all Mistake therefore, it is

II. Here supposed by the Apostle, that the Provision he recommends will not always prove effectual, but that the Righteous may sometimes suffer, yea suffer for Righteousness Sake. And this we shall easily account for, if we consider,

1st, That

1st, That there always were, and SERM.
ever will be some Men so exceedingly IX.
wicked, so abandon'd to their Lusts
and Passions, as to break thro' all the
Bonds of Gratitude, and even Nature
itself, in Gratification of them; such
as Murderers of Fathers, and Mur-
derers of Mothers; and from these
the most venerable Innocence cannot
always be a Protection.

2^{dly}, That our good Actions will
not always appear in their proper Cha-
racter, notwithstanding our greatest
Care. A very good Man may want
some Degrees of Prudence, and a very
good Action some Circumstances which
may be necessary to place them in
a due Light; and therefore it may
not appear strange to us if they are
sometimes mistaken, and opposed e-
ven by Men, who are in general Lovers
of those who are good, and Friends
to Virtue. All moral Virtue, we
know, consists in a Medium, and is
on either Side parted as it were but

SERM. by a Line from its opposite Vices :
 IX. And when the Action approaches on
 either Side of the Line of Partition,
 'tis easy even for a good Man to mis-
 take it, and much easier for Malice
 to represent it as an Excess, and ex-
 pose it to the Reproach and Penalties
 of a Transgression. We must re-
 flect,

3dly, That no human Virtue is per-
 fect, without a Mixture of some real
 Failings and Imperfections. Surprize,
 Weakness, or Passion, will sometimes
 betray the best of us into Actions not
 defensible; and these we must always
 expect to be aggravated by the Ene-
 mies of Virtue, and represented to
 our greatest Disadvantage. They are
 fond of lessening the Disparity of their
 own Character, and bringing the Vir-
 tuous down to a Level with them-
 selves; and therefore they never fail
 of objecting such Defects in a good
 Man as a Proof of his Hypocrisy,
 that his Vices are really as great as
 their

their own, and only the more dangerous for being covered under a Pretence of Virtue. When we attend to these Reflections, we cannot be surprized if good Men and good Actions are sometimes mistaken, often misrepresented, and suffer what is only due to evil Actions, and evil Doers.

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And this we may apply particularly to what, as I observed, was chiefly in the Apostle's View in the Scripture before us; the Resentments of the public Magistrate, whose Power extending farther than all other Men's, the Inflictions of it must be the greatest of temporal Evils, and the mistaken Application of it the greatest of temporal Injuries.

Now when we consider, that our Actions cannot come to the Notice of Persons in that high Station, but as they are brought to them by Report of others, and that generally through several successive Conveyances; and that if any one of these be partial or

SERM. unjuſt, our Behaviour cannot appear
 IX. to them in its proper Character. If
 we obſerve at the ſame Time, by how
 many ſtrong Paſſions of Intereſt, Am-
 bition, or Revenge, they who court
 the Favour of a Prince, are tempted
 to diſcredit others, to repreſent them
 as Evil Doers, unfit for his Truſt, diſ-
 affected to his Perſon and Govern-
 ment, and Enemies to the civil Peace;
 how eaſy it is for Malice to find or
 make Colours for ſuch Suggeltions,
 how irrefiſtably are they infused by
 continual Applications, and how dif-
 ficultly removed by thoſe who are ac-
 cuſed? When, I ſay, we take theſe
 and many other Circumſtances, which
 will eaſily occur to us, into our
 Thoughts, we cannot wonder if even
 good Princes are ſometimes impoſed
 on, and provoked to treat as Evil
 Doers Perſons of the greateſt Merit
 and Innocence. It was by theſe evil
 Arts and Inſinuations, that not only a
Nero, and a *Domitian*, but even a *Tra-*
jan,

jan, and *Antoninus*, merciful and virtuous Princes, were prevailed on to persecute a Religion, the most harmless and inoffensive, and the most friendly to Government, that ever appeared in the World.

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IX.

Nay, sometimes it must be expected to happen, that Virtue itself may be the direct and immediate Occasion of our Suffering. We have before observ'd, that wicked Men have even by Principle and Constitution a secret Antipathy to good Men, by which they are prepared to do every Thing that may lessen their Esteem, and render them vile and infamous in the Eyes of the World: And as Punishment is in common Opinion a Presumption of Guilt, in the same Proportion that wicked Men are possess'd of Power, good Men must expect to suffer. Their Virtue itself renders them offensive, to Men hardened in a contrary Disposition; their Lives are a continual Reproach to Vice, and their

SERM. IX. Actions must often in a Course of Duty cross upon the Schemes, and obstruct the Designs of unrighteous Power. It is a common Remark of the *Roman* Historians, that under some of their bad Emperors it was a dangerous Thing to be virtuous, and that Men were forced to dissemble their Merit, and distinguish themselves by some fashionable Vices, to avoid the Jealousy and Resentments of those in Power: But this our holy Religion will never permit us to do. If we thus please Men, we cannot also be the Servants of Christ. We are not at Liberty to decline the Obedience we owe to any one Command of God, in Compliment to the Passions of Men. And if the Duties of our Station require us to stand in the Gap, and oppose ourselves to the Overflowing of Ungodliness, to succour the Injured, and appear in Defence of the Oppressed, we are bound to act up to the Occasion, tho' in

in every such Case 'tis evident that SERM.
our Religion and Virtue will be so far IX.
from a Protection to us, that it must
provoke the utmost Resentment from
the Powers of the World, and derive
the whole Storm of their Wrath upon
our Heads.

Blessed be God, the fundamental
Laws of our Constitution, and the
Justice of our Government, secure us
as far as we are capable of being se-
cured in this World, from all Appre-
hensions of this Kind, and encourage
us to hope that Innocence and Virtue,
a firm Adherence to the Faith and Du-
ties of our Religion, cannot suffer a-
mong us under public Resentment, but
through such Mistakes or Misrepresen-
tations, as no human Polity can pro-
vide against. But the Case before
supposed is manifestly possible. The
Sword of the Magistrate has been e-
ven intentionally drawn against Virtue
and Religion, and therefore may be
again: And should we set this Case
wholly

SERM. wholly aside ; yet when we consider
 IX. how often public Justice, and the most
 upright Administration will be imposed on by invidious Suggestions, how impossible it is to guard against false Accusations supported by Perjury, and that so long as Malice or Ambition, Envy or Revenge, are found among Mankind, Instances will not be wanting of these unrighteous Practices ; we may be sure to find, at all Times, Ground enough for the Supposition in my Text, that the Innocent may sometimes suffer ; nay, suffer even for Righteousness Sake.

Upon the Whole then it appears,
 That the preceding Assertion of the Apostle is to be taken, with its proper Restriction, as generally not universally true. Generally, and in the ordinary Course of Things, they, who are Followers of that which is good, will be protected from Harm ; and therefore, notwithstanding these Exceptions, Virtue and Innocence are
 our

our wisest Choice, and render us far
more secure both from private and
public Injuries, than they can be who
trust in the unrighteous Arts of world-
ly Cunning, and strengthen themselves
in their Ungodliness. And this was
surely enough to recommend such a
Conduct to our Choice and Preference:
More Certainty than is here imply'd,
the Maxims of human Life, and the
wisest Directions for present Happi-
ness, will not admit of. But the A-
postle carries the Argument still far-
ther: And supposing the worst that
can befall us in Exception to his ge-
neral Rule, yet still he persuades us
to be Followers of that which is good:
For if we have made this Provision,
if we have with us a Conscience void
of Offence, we shall find Support,
and even Matter of Joy, from this
Reflection, that we suffer for Righte-
ousness Sake, and be induced to think
the Affliction itself an Honour and
Happiness to us. Which is the third
general

SERM.

IX.

SERM. general Conclusion from my Text,
IX. which I proposed to insist on: A
Doctrin of great Importance, and
which deserves to be farther enlarged
on, than the present Opportunity will
permit.

S E R M O N X.

Virtue and Piety our best Security.

I P E T. III. 13, 14.

*Who is he that will harm you, if ye
be Followers of that which is good?
But and if you suffer for Righteousness
Sake, happy are ye.*

THE Import of this Scripture SERM.
I propos'd to consider in X.
these three Conclusions, ⏟
which seem'd fully to comprehend
the Intention of the holy Writer.

I. That

SERM.


X.

I. That a steady Practice of the Duties prescribed by the Gospel is the wisest and most effectual Provision against those Evils; which we are exposed to from the Malice and Passions of Men. Nevertheless,

II. That this Provision will not always be effectual to secure us from these Evils, that the Innocent, notwithstanding this Defence, may sometimes suffer, yea, suffer for being innocent. But then

III. He who has made this Provision will find Support, and even Happiness under the worst that can befall him, from this Reflection, That he suffers for Righteousness Sake.

In treating the former of these Heads, I endeavour'd to shew, That the Good and Virtuous have a special Interest in the Protection of God, That the Conduct of Life imply'd in this Character is itself a Security to us, That the Duties enjoin'd by our
Reli-

Religion are in their Nature, such as SERM.
not only offer no Provocation to Ma- X.
lice itself, but very much restrain its 
Power to harm us----Such as recom-
mend us to general Favour and Esteem,
and oblige the Gratitude of Mankind
to shew Kindness and Benevolence to-
wards us----Such as put us under the
profess'd Protection of all Laws, and
which is the Interest of the Magi-
strate to defend and encourage. But
then,

II. I observ'd, That this general
Conclusion admits several Exceptions.
That we must sometimes expect our
Good to be evil spoken of, misunder-
stood even by good Men, and invi-
diously represented by wicked Men ;
and under these Appearances of Evil
be attended with public or private
Resentments, and derive on us such
Treatment as is due only to Evil Do-
ers. Nay, that sometimes our Virtue
itself may be the Occasion of our
Suffer-

SERM. Sufferings, and a firm Perseverance in
 X. Duty, the immediate Provocation of
 } wicked Men to harm us.

And therefore, to obviate these Objections, and render the Persuasion of the Apostle to follow that which is good, complete and effectual, it is necessary for us to attend to what he suggests in the

III. Place, That if we have made the Provision he recommends, if we have been Followers of that which is good, tho' our Innocence may sometimes fail of protecting us from Sufferings, it will give us a full Equivalent in supporting us under them: Nay, we may find Reasons not only to bear the Affliction with Patience, but even to esteem ourselves happy, whenever we suffer for Righteousness Sake.

The Application of this noble Motive of our Religion is what I reserved for your present Meditations.

And

And because the Foundation of this SERM.
Support under Sufferings is the Inno- X.
cence of the Sufferer, and Men are
apt to take to themselves the Comfort
of suffering for Righteousness Sake,
when they have no Title to this Plea,
and either through Partiality or Hy-
pocrisy pretend Conscience and Obe-
dience to God, when they really suf-
fer as Evil Doers; it will be proper
for us,

1st, To enquire, when we may be
satisfied that we suffer for Righte-
ousness Sake.

I shall then shew,

2^{dly}, The Support and Comfort
which will arise to us from this Re-
flection, whenever we can truly apply
it to our Sufferings.

As to Injuries of a private Nature,
which flow from the Malice of par-
ticular Men, if we have given just
Provocations of Resentment, or such as
in a common Estimate of the Passions
of Mankind may be expected to ir-

T

ritate

SERM. ritate their Revenge, tho' the Avenger
 X. may sin in his Resentment, yet the
 Evils produced by it must be receiv'd
 by us as the Effects of our own Mis-
 conduct, and cannot be charged to
 the Account of Righteousness, unless
 the Action be such as we are bound
 in strict Duty to God or our Neigh-
 bour to perform.

But Injuries of this Kind, and the
 Occasions of them, being less capable
 of Rule, and less considerable in their
 Effects, than those which are derived
 from public Power; and these latter
 being principally, if not only, in the
 Apostle's View, in this Scripture I
 shall chiefly attend to these.

The only Cases in which we can
 suffer for Righteousness Sake, under
 the Inflictions of public Power, are
 either when just Laws are unrighte-
 ously applied in the Execution, or
 when the Law itself is unjust, and re-
 quires us to do what a superior Law
 forbids.

As

As to the first Case, corrupt and wicked as the World is, Virtue and Justice continue still to be venerable Names, to which the most dissolute will not openly renounce their Title; and accordingly, the most unrighteous Power was never professedly exerted in the Oppression of Virtue and Innocence as such, but under the Colour and Suggestion of some Crime, acknowledg'd in general to deserve the Infliction. Now if a Man be really guilty of the Crime objected, however virtuous or praise-worthy he may be in other Parts of his Character, he cannot pretend that his Punishment is unjust, or that he suffers for Righteousness Sake. Nay, if he has not taken due Care to guard against the Appearances of Evil, if his Conduct has the outward Marks or Symptoms of Guilt, the Ministers of public Justice cannot be charged with Iniquity for resenting it, in a Manner agreeable to the Laws of that Community,

SERM.
X.


SERM. munity in which they preside. Hu-
 X. man Justice can look no farther than
 the overt Action, and the apparent
 Characters of it; and therefore, what-
 ever one suffers under such legal Pre-
 sumptions of Evil, he must take as a
 Consequence, if not of his Guilt, yet
 of his great Indiscretion.

In the second Case, when the Mat-
 ter of the Law is such, as falls pro-
 perly under the Direction of a human
 Legislature, (*i. e.*) either such Acti-
 ons as are of prior Obligation, by the
 Dictates of a superior Law; or such
 as are left indifferent, neither com-
 manded nor forbidden by any Law of
 God, positive or natural; whatever
 we suffer for Disobedience to such
 Laws cannot be on Account of Con-
 science towards God, or for Righte-
 ousness Sake. For where the Action
 injoin'd is a Duty of prior Obliga-
 tion by the Law of God, Man only
 requires under civil Penalties what
 God requires under natural or spiri-
 tual,

tual, and consequently we cannot disobey the one, but we must at the same Time disobey the other. And where the Matter of the human Law is such Actions as are neither commanded nor forbidden by God, it is evident, that by obeying such Law of Man, we cannot disobey any Law of God; (for the Law of God in this Case is supposed perfectly silent:) for *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression.* Objections against the Law as inexpedient, or not conducive to the End it proposes, can be no Reason in Conscience for declining Obedience to it: Because the Nature of Society requires, that in prudential Considerations, public Authority should judge for the Whole, and conclude the Sentiments of every private Member. The Subject therefore cannot act contrary to any Duty, in submitting to such Resolutions; and consequently, whatever he suffers in Refusal of such Submission, he suffers

SERM.

X.



SERM. not for Righteousness Sake, but as an
 X. Evil Doer, an Opposer of Authority,
 acting within the just Limits of its
 Power.

If a Man mistakes the Nature of the Action injoin'd, and under a Misperfuasion of Conscience refuses Obedience to the Law of his Superiors, as contrary to the Law of God, as commanding something which he forbids, or forbidding something which he commands; in this Case it is plain,

1st, That the internal Circumstances of the Error, which may possibly excuse it before God, are undiscernable by Men: They cannot certainly distinguish between a real and pretended Persuasion of Conscience; and if this Plea were to be always admitted in Exemption from Punishment, no Laws would be of any Force or Use. Where indeed it can be equitably presumed that the Error is purely involuntary, and the Man notwithstanding it innocent before God, and the Action

tion or Example have no manifest evil Tendency, there may be Reasons for human Justice to abate of the Severity of the Law, and deal tenderly with the Offender. But this must be left wholly to the Judgment of those in Authority; and if in the Result of their Consideration they determine to inflict the Penalties of the Law, their Sentence must be acquiesced in, and esteemed even by the Offender himself to be legally just. And

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X.
}

2dly, With Regard to the Judgment of God upon the *Action*, (on a Presumption of which alone either the Satisfaction of the Actor's Conscience, or the Indulgence of Authority to him can rationally be founded) before his Approbation of the Man, or his Excuse of the Action can be presumed, the Error must appear such as may consist with an honest, upright and humble Heart, free from Pride or Obstinacy, and not bias'd by any

SERM. corrupt Motive ; such as a good Man,
 X. *and a good Subject*, with due Attention might fall into. But alas ! if we look over the pretended Martyrologies of late Ages, how many Instances occur to us, to which Charity itself cannot extend these Characters ! How numerous are the Examples canonized for Saints and Confessors, who have suffer'd for such Crimes, as the first Dictates of natural Reason, the plain Rules of the Gospel, and the fundamental Principles of human Society condemn ! Such Actions, as the Ignorance of their Nature must itself be a Sin not to be excused. Nay some of them have gone so far, as to acknowledge the Actions they have committed to be simply and in themselves evil, but have pretended the pious Ends they sought by them sanctified the Villainy, and changed its Nature. Our own History furnishes us with Instances of more than one Kind of Enemies, who have defended
 Perjury,

Perjury, Parricide, Affassinations, and Rebellion, to be lawful, in order to introduce their own Schemes of Religion and Government, and subvert that establish'd, while the Profession has been a Zeal to assert the Cause, and promote the Glory of God; and to those who have suffered in these wicked Attempts has been ascribed the Honour of Martyrdom. But I trust we have not so learned Christ, and will never be persuaded that the least Evil can be justified, by a Pretence of promoting the greatest Good by it. The Religion of the Holy Jesus abhors to be assisted by such Principies as these; nor will he ever acknowledge those as Confessors for him, who suffer under the Demerit of such Crimes.

But farther; tho' the Principle and End by which we are influenced be good, and the Actions by which we endeavour to promote it be to some Persons, and in some Circumstances,
not

SERM.

X.



SERM. not only lawful, but a Duty; yet if
 X. to us, in our Stations and Circum-
 ~~~~~ stances, they are improper and un-  
 lawful, whatever we suffer in conse-  
 quence of such Actions cannot be  
 placed to the Account of Righteous-  
 ness.

Thus for Instance: The Infliction of corporal Punishment, and, in some Cases, even of Death itself, may be the Duty of a Magistrate: But if a private Person takes upon him to do this, his Punishment will be just; neither can he pretend that he suffers for Righteousness Sake. And so again, it may be the Duty of Persons in some Stations, and who are intrusted with the Defence of public Liberties, to oppose with Zeal the Errors or Oppressions of public Administrations: But in a private Person, the same Actions would be Mutiny and Sedition: He acts out of his Post and Calling, and whatever Inconveniences he derives on himself by such a  
 Con-

Conduct, are but the just Consequences of it: He suffers as an Evil Doer, as assuming such Liberties as are inconsistent with any Order or good Government among Mankind. It is our Duty to oppose all Unrighteousness within the Compass of our Station; but it is not our Duty to go out of our Station on any Pretence, and intrude into an Office which does not belong to us.

SERM.

X.

I may add farther, that whatever may be the Occasion of our Sufferings, yet unless we suffer like Christians, with that Meekness which our Religion prescribes; if we betray a Spirit of Impatience and Revenge under our Sufferings, we may not assume the Character, or promise ourselves the Reward of those who suffer for Righteousness Sake.

The Limits under which the Apostle asserts this Conclusion of my Text, in the preceding Chapter, will, if duly attended to, direct us in the  
Appli-

SERM. Application of it. *This (says he) is*  
 X. *thank-worthy, if a Man for Consci-*  
*ence towards God endures Grief, suf-*  
*fering wrongfully: For what Glory is*  
*it, if when ye be buffeted for your*  
*Faults, ye shall take it patiently? But*  
*if when ye do well, and suffer for it,*  
*ye take it patiently, this is acceptable*  
*to God.* From which Scripture it is  
 evident, 1<sup>st</sup>, That unless we suffer  
 really for Conscience Sake; 2<sup>dly</sup>, Tho'  
 we suffer for Conscience Sake, yet un-  
 less we suffer wrongfully; unless the  
 Actions, which under that Persuasion  
 we are led to, are in their Nature such  
 as no Punishment is due to: And,  
 3<sup>dly</sup>, Unless we take patiently, even  
 what we thus wrongfully suffer, nei-  
 ther the Character described by the  
 Apostle, nor the Encouragement here  
 given to it, will belong to us.

These Exceptions being admitted,  
 it will be easy to collect when we may  
 be truly said to suffer for Righteous-  
 ness Sake. And here it may be proper  
 to

to premise that an absolute sinless In-  
nocence, in all Parts of our Life, is  
not necessary to assure our Title to the  
Encouragement of my Text: Because  
if this were the Condition of it, it  
could never be apply'd to any Man  
living, or to any Case that can arise:  
It must therefore be sufficient to our  
Consolation, if we can apply the Cha-  
racter to the particular Occasion of our  
Sufferings.

1<sup>st</sup>, Then, we may take to ourselves  
this Comfort, when the Action for  
which we suffer is such as we are ma-  
nifestly obliged to, whether it be the  
general Duty of all Men, or of all  
Christians, or the particular Duty of  
our Office and Station in Church or  
State. For every Part of our Duty,  
civil as well as what may strictly be  
called religious, is injoin'd under the  
Sanctions and Encouragements of the  
Gospel; and therefore he who suffers  
for an Act of civil Justice, proper to  
his Station, will be entitled to the  
Happi-

SERM.

X.

SERM. Happiness here promised, as well as  
 X. he who suffers for professing the Christian Faith. And tho' the Christian Religion as such neither prescribes nor admits any other Defence against the Oppositions of civil Power, than Prayers and Tears, Reason and Persuasion, and the Influences of a holy inoffensive Behaviour: yet when the Laws of that Religion are incorporated into, and made a Part of the Laws of the Land, the Subject has the same Right of being protected by those Laws, as by any other Laws of that Community. The Profession of that Religion becomes a Branch, and surely a most valuable Branch of his legal Property. And though his Religion will not justify him in doing any Thing in Defence of this or any other Claim, beyond the legal Powers of his Station; yet whatever within that Compass it is lawful, or his Duty to do, in Assertion of any other legal Right, from public or private Attempts



Attempts against it, it will be equally lawful, or his Duty to do, in Assertion of this Right: And consequently, whatever he may suffer from the Resentments of those whom he may be obliged to oppose, will be as truly suffering for Righteousness Sake, in one Case, as in the other.

SERM.

X.



*2dly*, When we suffer under a mistaken Persuasion of Duty, if the Nature of the Action be such as a good Man might easily misapprehend it, and we have dispassionately and attentively consider'd it, and the Motives that lead us to it; tho' this Plea cannot without the greatest Inconveniences be admitted as a sufficient Excuse before a human Tribunal, because it cannot be discern'd by Man when this Plea is real or pretended; yet God, who sees the Integrity of the Heart, and the Innocence of the Will, will doubtless admit it. And, tho' he disapproves the particular Action for which he suffers, will accept the Man

as

SERM. as suffering for Conscience Sake, and  
 X. for his Obedience to that great Law  
 of acting according to the best Light  
 he had, or, in those Circumstances,  
 could have.

In Sum ; however difficult it may sometimes be, to judge for other Men in these Cases, it cannot be often difficult for an honest Man to determine for himself. Others we may perhaps impose on with Pretences of Conscience, and Protestations of Innocence, but our own Hearts are not easily deceiv'd: We cannot but know whether we are really guilty of the Facts charged upon us or not. And as to the Nature of the Action, the Rules and Measures of our Duty (in the most considerable Parts of it) are plain and legible to the meanest Capacities ; and in Cases really doubtful, it is neither hard to resolve where we should apply ourselves for Information, nor how far we should be govern'd by it : And as to the Motives

tives of our Conduct, they must be in every one's View, who observes what passes in our own Mind. If then we sincerely examine our actions by these Rules, which 'tis manifestly in every one's Power to do, we cannot often mistake a Sin for a Duty, and consequently cannot often be at a Loss to know, whether what we at any time suffer from the public or private resentments of Men, be for Righteousness Sake, or not. Whatever by a due and attentive Application of the proper Rules of Action, appears to be a Duty of the Station we are placed in, we are bound to perform, whatever Penalties from our Superiors, or whatever Inconveniencies from the Passions of our Equals, or Inferiors, it may expose us to. And whatever we suffer from either for so doing, if we endure it with that Meekness and Resignation our Religion prescribes, we have the Encouragement of the Apostle to think an

U


Honour

SERM.

X.

SERM. Honour and Happiness to us ; which  
 X. is the

2d, Point I undertook to prove. This was indeed a Doctrine difficultly received at the first Proposition of it by our Lord, a hard Saying, which the Aversions of our voluptuous Nature to present Pain could not easily be reconciled to ; but yet we find the same taught as a Conclusion of natural Reason. There is nothing more frequently asserted, among the Maxims even of Heathen Morality, than the Glory of Suffering for Virtue. These are the Circumstances in which they delight to represent their Hero, as the greatest advantages to his Character, and in which he shined with the most distinguished Lustre. 'Tis true indeed, that if the many fine Things they have said on this Topick are call'd to a strict Examination, the Principles whence they argued appear hardly strong enough to bear the Weight laid upon them. The Building

ing was beautiful in the Structure, but SERM.  
weak in the Foundation. The re- X.  
warding Virtue with itself, and the   
Paradox they advanced upon that  
Scheme, that a Virtuous Man could  
not be miserable even in Torments,  
were too visionary and romantic Doc-  
trines, to expect much Influence on  
the Practice of Mankind. The Con-  
clusion was useful, and conducive to  
the Happiness of Men, if they could  
be prevail'd on to receive an Encou-  
ragement to great and good Actions,  
and a Support under all the Dif-  
tresses that could attend them: But  
still there was a Defect in the Prin-  
ciples it was built on, and till this  
was removed, all the Oratory of the  
Preacher amounted only to this, That  
'twas an Opinion of good Tendency,  
and that 'twas worth the while of  
Mankind to be deceived into it.  
Some few indeed among them ven-  
tur'd farther, and encouraged Men to  
hope a future Recompence from the



SERM. Justice of God, for all they suffer'd  
X. in the Cause of Virtue. They were  
here upon right Ground, if they could  
have maintained it; but their Arguments upon this Prospect were but conjectural. Natural Reason was here at the End of its Line: It stood upon the Shore, and look'd with Sollicitude into the Ocean of Eternity. The Eye reach'd but a little Way, and was then lost in Clouds and Darkness: Something it was probable might be beyond its present View, but what it was, or whether any Thing at all, Reason could not with Assurance determine. And as it usually happens to Persons who look with long Attention on a Prospect, where nothing is distinctly perceived, that some will fancy they see, and others for the Credit of being Discoverers will pretend to see various Appearances: So it was in this Case; the Fictions of Poets, and the Conjectures or Vanity of Philosophers, undertook to form various  
rious

rious Scenes of this *terra incognita*, SERM.  
which were receiv'd according to the X.  
Esteem of the Reporters, or the Cre-  
dulity of the Hearers; the one served  
to amuse the Superstition of the Vul-  
gar, and the other the Disputations of  
the Curious, but in the Result afford-  
ed no rational Satisfaction: The Cer-  
tainty of the Conclusion depended on  
the Will of God, and could not other-  
wise be known but by Revelation.  
The Presumption indeed of a future  
State was very great, and general a-  
mong Mankind; but it prevail'd not  
as a firm Conclusion of Reason, from  
which few attempted, and none were  
able to deduce it with clear Evidence,  
but either as a Remain of original Tra-  
dition, or as a Persuasion agreeable to  
the Interest and Wishes of Men. But  
what I would observe hence to my  
present Purpose is, that if these dark  
Views, and confus'd Sentiments of a  
future State, were able to infuse into  
Mankind such a Consciousness of the

SERM. Dignity of their Nature, and the Dishonour of a base Action, as appear'd among some of the Heathens: If they could give Firmness and Courage to the Innocent, and Patience, and even Chearfulness to suffering Virtue; in how much greater Proportion must these Effects be derived from the Prospects of the Gospel? The Veil is now drawn, the Clouds and Darkness which intercepted our View dispell'd, and the Eye strengthen'd by Faith is enabled to look into the awful Scene, is assured of the Reality of the Vision, by a divine Revelation indisputably attested, and beholds in it such Rewards and Penalties attending human Actions, as render all their present Consequences trifling and inconsiderable.

The Christian has always before him that Sentence of his Lord,---*This do and thou shalt live*: The Rule of his Duty, and his Encouragement to perform it. And tho' he is in general assured,

assured, that Godliness has the Promises of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; and is ordinarily and in its Nature our best Security from present Evils, yet he is prepared to except many Exceptions to this Rule. He remembers that 'tis a Condition of his Profession, to take up his Cross and follow his Master, ---*That whoever will live godly in this World must suffer Persecution*---That Iniquity will sometimes abound, and that his Religion itself, and the Duties it prescribes, will sometimes expose him to the Malice and Repentments of unrighteous Men. But whenever this happens, he is prepared for the Shock: He has a firm Support in the Promises of God, and the distinguish'd Portion of Glory which awaits his Sufferings. He recollects with unspeakable Pleasure those Words of his Redeemer:---*Blessed are you when Men hate you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of Evil of*

SERM. *you for my Sake and the Gospel: re-*

X. *joice and be exceeding glad in that*

*Day, for great is your Reward in Hea-*

*ven.---*He looks up to those great

Examples of his Religion, who have

gone before him to the same Paths of

Sorrow: To the Captain of his Sal-

vation, the Author and Finisher of his

Faith, who was made perfect thro'

Sufferings, far greater, and more un-

deserv'd than his: To Apostle, Pro-

phets, and that noble Army of Mar-

tyrs, who had Trials of cruel Mock-

ings and Scourgings, of Bonds and

Imprisonments, of Racks and Crosses,

not accepting Deliverance, that they

might obtain a better Resurrection.

Supported by these animating Views

of his Faith, and encouraged by so

many glorious Examples of the Pow-

er of it, he can Triumph in the midst

of Torments, and rejoice that he is

call'd to the Honour of suffering *for*

*Righteousness Sake.*

Upon



Upon the Whole then it appears SERM.  
to us, from the Apostle's Reasoning in X.  
this Scripture, that the Promises of  
God, in the Nature and Tendency  
of the Duties enjoin'd by our Religi-  
on, assure us, that a Conduct of Life  
agreeable to it, is our best Security  
from those manifold Evils we are ex-  
posed to, in an unrighteous and passi-  
onate World: That it will generally  
affuage the Malice, and restrain the  
Power of those who would hurt us.  
And on the contrary it is manifest,  
that Vice and Irreligion are far more  
obnoxious to these Evils, offer greater  
Provocations to the Resentments of  
Men, and are less defended from the  
Effects of them. But then it is also  
here supposed, that in the Course of  
human Affairs we must expect fre-  
quent Exceptions to these Rules:  
That it will sometimes happen to the  
Righteous, according to the Work  
of the Wicked; that good and godly  
Men may sometimes suffer, yea suffer  
for

SERM. for Righteousness Sake. But what  
 X. shall we conclude from hence, that  
 there is no Profit in being Followers  
 of that which is good, and making  
 our Way perfect? No surely: There  
 is still Encouragement enough to persevere in Duty, since the Reflection  
 on our own Innocence, and the Promises of the Gospel, are able to support us under the worst we can suffer in Consequence of it. The God whom we faithfully serve, we know to be our Friend, a Friend who will not leave us nor forsake us; who will either remove our Burden, or increase our Strength to bear it; or, which is a Prospect of still more Encouragement, will reward the light Affliction that can endure but for a Moment, with a more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. A good Man under these Reflections is fortify'd against every Event of Life, his Heart is establish'd, and will not shrink, neither will he fear what Man can do unto him. But

But with the Ungodly it is not so: SERM.  
As their Vices render them more ex- X.  
posed to these Evils; so whenever  
they befall them, they are without  
Hope or Comfort under them; the  
Reproaches of God and Man, and  
their own Conscience combine to-  
gether to add Weight and Terror to the  
Affliction, and leave them for their  
last Recourse to Blasphemy and De-  
spair. But tho' we should not be  
thus abandon'd to Sin, as this Cha-  
racter seems to suppose: Tho' we  
may be able to reflect with Pleasure  
on some Parts of our Conduct, yet  
if in the particular Instance of our  
Affliction we suffer as Evil Doers, we  
cannot but confess that we suffer de-  
servedly, a Conviction which at once  
takes from us all the Consolation of  
this Scripture, the Applause of Con-  
science, and the Prospect of Reward  
from God. And tho' we may hope  
comfortably, that God upon our Hu-  
miliation will pardon our Sin, and  
thro'

SERM. thro' the Merits of Christ accept our  
 X. temporal Sufferings in Atonement for  
 it, yet the Joy that arises to us from  
 this Hope is mix'd and alloy'd with  
 the Tears of the Penitent, and is not  
 like that Joy unspeakable and full  
 of Glory, which shines forth in the  
 Triumphs of the Martyr.

Let us then be convinced by this  
 Scripture, and what has occur'd to  
 us in reflecting on it, of what Im-  
 portance it is to our present as well as  
 future Happiness, to keep Innocency,  
 and take heed unto the Thing that is  
 right. This will be our best Guard  
 in our Passage thro' this Vale of Mi-  
 sery, will give us Courage and Cheer-  
 fulness thro' the several Stages of our  
 Journey, and support us under the  
 various Evils that attend us in it.  
 And tho' a steady Adherence to Duty  
 may sometimes itself be an Occasion  
 of our Suffering; yet in the Multi-  
 tude of these Sorrows, the Comforts  
 that

*our best Security.*

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that arise to us from the Promises of God, will be able to refresh our Souls, will conduct us with Patience, and even Pleasure thro' our Trials, and infallibly bring us Peace at the last.

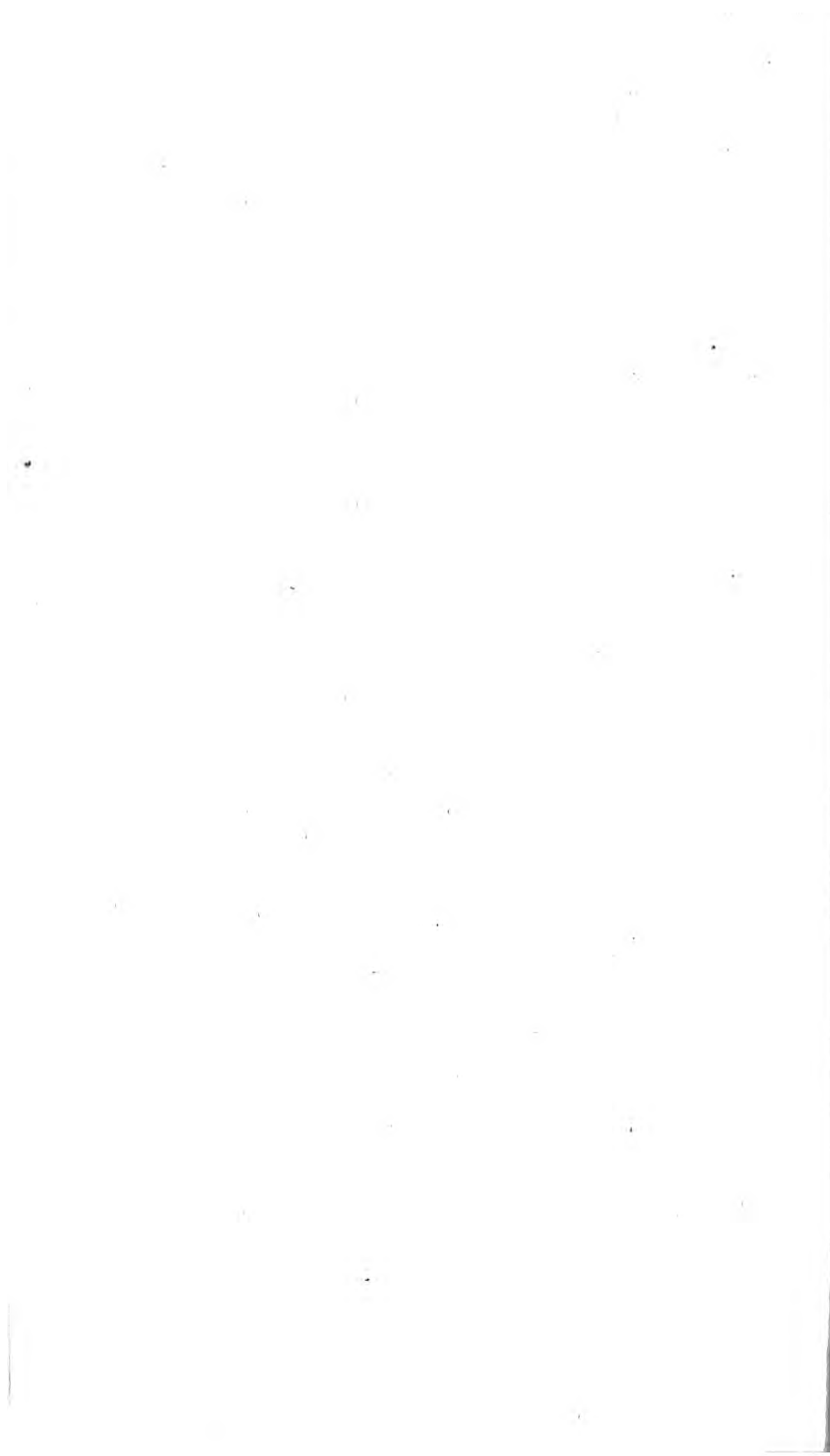
SERM.

X.



S E R-





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## S E R M O N XI.

The Difficulty of St. Paul's Choice.

PHILLIP I. 22, 23, 24.

*What I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a Strait betwixt two, having a Desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: Nevertheless, to abide in the Flesh is more needful for you.*

**A**S an Over-fondness for Life SERM.  
 is a mean effeminate Pas- XI.  
 sion, that exposes us to the  
 basest and most ignoble Impressions,  
 and renders us insignificant to every  
 honourable Purpose of Life; so a  
 Con-

SERM. Contempt of Death has always  
 XI. (even in the Accounts of Nature)  
 ~~~~~ been esteem'd among the Perfecti-  
 ons of a human Understanding, and
 the principal Ingredient in a great
 Character. From the Views of Hea-
 then Morality, 'tis indeed difficult to
 assign a rational Foundation for this
 Temper: It might argue a natural
 Bravery and Hardiness of Mind, and
 procure Respect to the Man possess'd of
 it, as a Person equal to great Attempts,
 and whose Service and Fidelity might
 be farther rely'd on than other Men's;
 but 'twill be hard to account upon
 any rational Principles, why he who
 had no sure Prospect of another Life,
 should be over-prodigious of this.

Sometimes, even under better In-
 formations, we see Men profuse of
 Life, from Impatience under the Cor-
 rections, or despair of the Mercy of
 God; but this betrays a weak and des-
 picable Spirit, sunk below the Hopes
 of a Christian, and the Dignity of a
 rational Being. But

But when we behold a Man rais'd SERM.
above the World by a just Sense of XI.
his Immortality; when his Indiffe-
rence to the Terrors and Satisfactions
of this Life is the Result of a sober
Choice, and a deliberate Regard to
the Arguments and Prospects of Re-
ligion, the most unconcern'd Specta-
tor cannot but applaud and reverence
the Example, as an Honour to
human Nature, and a glorious In-
stance of the Power of the Gospel.
The Apostle, in the Scripture I have
read, has left us a noble Pattern of a
Soul thus indifferent to Life, and re-
sign'd to God. The Reasons upon
which he debates each Side of the
great Question before him, exprefs so
lively a Faith and Confidence in God,
and so generous a Charity to Man-
kind; and his Resolution is form'd
upon Motives so becoming the Hope
and Genius of a Christian, that a
distinct View of his Reasons and
Conduct cannot but affect us with

SERM. something of the same Spirit: And
 XI. while it raises in us the Veneration
 due to so eminent a Preacher of the
 Gospel, disposes us to do Honour to
 our Religion, in an Imitation of his
 Temper and Virtues. That our pre-
 sent Meditations may contribute to
 this Effect; it will be of Use to us to
 consider particularly,

I. The Reasons that inclined him
 to desire to depart out of this Life.

II. The Motives that persuaded
 him to the contrary Choice, to abide
 longer in the Flesh.

III. The Submission he expresses
 to the Wisdom and Appointment of
 God. And,

I. Let us consider the Reasons that
 inclined him to desire to depart out of
 this Life, which he has given in these
 Words:---*Having a Desire to depart
 and be with Christ, which is far bet-
 ter.*---The Motives that lay before
 the

the Apostle to this Choice, must appear to us in the Meaning and Import of this Expression, which we are therefore concern'd distinctly to consider.

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Now to be with Christ, in the Language of Scripture, signifies that State of Happiness, into which the Disciples of the Gospel are receiv'd after this Life. This is the great Promise which our Lord propos'd to the Faith and Expectation of his Servants, that where he was, there should they be also. What the Nature and Degree of that Happiness is, which is imply'd in this Expression, the Scripture has no where distinctly inform'd us. *St. Paul* himself, with all the Abundance of his Revelations, was perhaps unable fully to comprehend the Nature of that Happiness; nor had it enter'd into his Heart, who was caught up into the third Heaven, to conceive the Things that God had prepared for them that love him.

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'Tis indeed impossible for us, in our present State, to have exact Notions of those Beatitudes reserved for us in another. For all our present Ideas are form'd, either from the Impressions of Objects on our bodily Senses, or by reflecting on the Acts of our own Mind. Now the Notices we receive by the former of these Ways can't be presum'd to lead us into any just Apprehension of those Perceptions, which the Soul must receive through quite different Channels when 'tis stripp'd and divested of all these bodily Senses: And though the latter Source of our Knowledge may carry our View somewhat farther into the Nature and Acts of a pure Spirit, yet when we have pursued the Discoveries of Reflection to their utmost Extent, we find them bounded within a narrow Compass: And (which is most considerable to our present Purpose) the Pleasures that attend them, such as will raise no very great Idea of our
future

future Happiness. And since all Words SERM.
or Language intelligible to us must XI.
either be the immediate Marks and 
Characters, which are by common
Use apply'd to signify such Ideas, as
by one of these Ways we have re-
ceiv'd; or if they describe any Thing
unknown to us before, it must be by
their Affinity and Resemblance to such
Ideas as we are acquainted with; it
follows, that even a divine Revela-
tion itself, which must speak to us in
Words by familiar Use made intelli-
gible to us, cannot convey to us an
exact and adequate Notion of the Joys
we are capable of in another State.
And accordingly, when the Scripture
expresses the Happiness of another
Life by Crowns of Triumph, by Trea-
sures, by Light, and other Objects
which are used to affect us agree-
ably in this Life, the Analogy must
be confess'd to be very little between
them, the Resemblance faint, and the
Images by which they are described
X 3 widely

SERM. widely disproportion'd from the Ori-
 XI. ginals.

Nothing indeed but an immediate Perception can give us a just Idea of them: And since that is impossible to our present Faculties, our Faith must be contented to see them thro' a Glass darkly, and raise Comfort to itself from the Assurance that they are greater than Words can describe, or our present Capacities apprehend. 'Tis enough for the Hopes and Purposes of Religion, that to be with Christ is to be Partakers of his Glory, the Glory of the only begotten of the Father.

But tho' the exact Nature or Measure of our future Happiness cannot be apprehended by us; yet to render the Apostle's Reasoning in my Text intelligible, we must of Necessity admit this Conclusion concerning it, that there is a two-fold State or Degree of Happiness after this Life.

The first, That which good Men immediately enter on, as soon as the
 Soul

Soul is separated from the Body. The other, that which is reserv'd unto the general Judgment, and Resurrection of Mankind at the last Day.

SERM.
XI.
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For tho' the Scripture usually refers our Expectations to the general Day of Retribution, because then the Sentence of God's Justice will receive its full Execution; yet 'tis not imaginable, that the Time which passes between Death and the general Judgment is a blank and void Space in the Scheme of Providence, but that the Soul, in that intermediate Condition, wakes and lives in a State of Sensibility, and tastes a less perfect and incomplete Measure of those final Allotments, that await the Determination of the great Day. 'Tis evident, *St. Paul*, in the Words before us, reason'd upon this View, and expected to be admitted into a State of Happiness, antecedent to what he was to enjoy at the last Judgment, and distinct from it; because it was to commence immedi-



SERM. ately after his Dissolution, and upon  
 XI. his Departure out of this World. His  
 Words manifestly suppose, that the  
 sooner he should depart, the sooner  
 he should be with Christ. Now,  
 whatever is imply'd in that Expressi-  
 on, 'tis plain he could not mean that  
 Crown of Righteousness, which he  
 elsewhere tells us the Lord should  
 give him in the last Day; because the  
 Period of that great Event was fixed  
 and determined, and would not be  
 hastened one Moment by his Dissolu-  
 tion: He might abide in the Flesh,  
 and yet receive the Promises of that  
 Day, altogether as soon as if depart-  
 ed out of it: And consequently the  
 Expectations of that Day could be  
 no Reason for him to wish his imme-  
 diate Departure. The Motives there-  
 fore of this Desire must be taken  
 from a Prospect antecedent to that  
 great Solemnity, a State which was  
 immediately to commence upon his  
 Dissolution. Now, though the bare  
 Consi-

Consideration of being deliver'd from SERM.  
 a Life of so much Distress and Affliction XI.  
 as attended St. *Paul*, might, without  
 any farther View, be Inducement  
 enough to him to request his Departure  
 out of it; yet the Expression of  
*being with Christ*, must import more  
 than this, and imply some Advantage,  
 by which the Servants of Christ  
 should be distinguished from other  
 Men; and no Difference can be imagin'd  
 between them, without supposing an  
 actual Perception of Happiness. For if  
 to be with Christ signify'd no more  
 than to lie in an unactive Rest and  
 Insensibility, the greatest Sinner  
 would have as much Advantage in his  
 Death, and be as much with Christ,  
 as the Apostle; since upon this Supposition,  
 both would be equally at Rest,  
 equally insensible. The Import of  
 this Expression is exactly the same  
 with that of those remarkable Words  
 of our Saviour to the penitent Thief,  
*To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

SERM. *radise.* By which our Lord could  
 XI. not mean, that his Pain and Punish-  
 ~~~~~ ment were now drawing to an End ;  
 for this the Malefactor knew before :
 Nor that after his Death he should
 sleep in a State of Insensibility ; for if
 this be the Condition of all departed
 Souls, and our Lord had intended no
 more than this, he had promised him
 nothing but what would naturally
 come to pass without his Promise ;
 and had made no Difference between
 him and his Fellow Sufferer. If this
 were all the Favour design'd him, he
 who died reviling and blaspheming
 would have had an equal Share in the
 Promise, and been as much with our
 Lord that Day in Paradise as the Pe-
 nitent. 'Tis evident, therefore, that
 an actual Sense and Perception of Hap-
 piness must be intended him in that
 Expression ; and that to be with Christ
 must signify a nearer and more inti-
 mate Communion with our Lord, than
 we are capable of in this Life. There
 is

is no Doubt but, while the Apostle SERM.
was yet alive, he was even then with XI.
Christ, and Christ with him; the Fe-
licity therefore he hoped for is, in
being with Christ at his Death, and
which he declares to be far better,
must imply more than this; a much
nearer Access to his Person, and a great-
er Communication of his Favour.

We conclude, therefore, that there
is a State of Happiness antecedent to
the final Sentence, which good Men
enter into immediately after Death;
and that the Motive that induced the
Apostle to be willing to depart out
of this Life, was the Assurance that
he should be actually and immediately
happy in a better.

And when we reflect upon the Rea-
sons that persuaded this Choice, it
cannot appear strange that so eminent
a Servant of our Lord, as the Apo-
stle, inflam'd with so generous an
Affection for his Master, from whose
Love he declares neither Life nor
Death

DE_{RM.} Death should separate him, should
 XI. desire to be with Christ, and receive
 the Reward of his Labours and Services: We may expect to find ourselves more at a Loss in the

II. Place, to account for the Motives that could reconcile him to a longer Stay in the Body. One, who not only had a certain Prospect of Happiness in another Life, but had also uncommon Reasons to be weary of this. His whole Life, from the Time he enter'd upon the Ministry of the Gospel, was but one continued Series of Afflictions, distinguish'd only by the Variety of his Perils and Sufferings for it. The *Jews* and Heathens join'd in his Persecution; wherever he came, Stripes and Imprisonment were his Reception from the Magistrate, and Scorn and Outrage from the People. It may perhaps be imagin'd, that the Love and Obedience of his Converts,
 and

and the universal Esteem and Reverence of the Christian World, were a Comfort able to support him under all these Distresses: But alas! the Perils he was in from false Brethren, the ill Returns of his Ministry, even from those who were converted by it, he very justly reckon'd among the most sensible Part of his Afflictions. But thus persecuted, thus discouraged, his Charity for the Souls of Men, and his Zeal for the Honour and Service of his Master, prevail'd with him to defer his own Felicity, and submit to a longer Continuance, even in this uneligible State. He was moved with Compassion to the Errors of a deluded World, and affected with the Concern of a Father for the Happiness of his Converts. Some he foresaw would want his Instruction, some his Reproof and Authority, and many the Support of his Arguments and Example, under the Terrors of Persecution. He foresaw that, after his Departure,

SERM.

XI.

SERM. parture, grievous Wolves would enter
 XI. in among them, who would pervert
 the Faith, corrupt the Manners, and
 endanger the Souls of his Disciples.
 And a Pastor so affectionately devoted
 to the Good of his Flock, as *St. Paul*,
 could not but feel in himself the tendereſt
 Motions of Pity towards them, and wiſh
 them the Relief and Aſſiſtance of his Preſence,
 under the Hazards and Exigencies he ſaw
 would attend them. He who could condeſcend
 to wiſh himſelf an Anathema, even for thoſe
 who crucified his Maſter, and perſecuted his
 Servants, could not but willingly poſtpon
 his Happineſs for a few Years, and ſubmit
 to the greateſt Inconveniencies of this Life,
 for their Sakes, who were Partakers of the
 ſame Hope, who honour'd him as their Father
 in the Goſpel, and were the Seal and Glory
 of his Apoſtleſhip.

THEſE were the Motives the Apoſtle had
 in View, in this Debate with himſelf.

himself. Motives so generous and truly christian, that his Choice had been abundantly justify'd, on which ever Side he had resolv'd the Question before him. Had he determin'd to request his immediate Departure, he had left us a noble Instance of a Soul fill'd with a joyful Affiance in God, and triumphing in the Hopes and Prospects of our Religion: Or had he importunately pray'd for a longer Continuance in the Flesh; a Charity so tender of the Happiness of his Disciples, and so regardless of his own, could not but demand our Esteem and Veneration. But the Resolution he takes, after having consider'd the Inducements to either Choice, carries the Example to a yet higher Degree of Christian Perfection. He presumes not to make his own Choice, but submits at last himself, and all his Desires and Interests, to the Wisdom and Disposal of God. He knew (as he tells us, Ver. 25.) that God had
deter-

SERM.
XI.

SERM. determin'd he should abide and con-
 XI. tinue with them, for their Furtherance
 and Joy of Faith; and therefore with
 an intire Resignation he acquiesces in
 the divine Appointment, and appears
 equally desirous to promote the Glory
 of God in this World, or to partake
 of it in another. He loved the Ser-
 vice as he loved the Master, and pre-
 fer'd not even the Joys of his Presence
 to the obeying his Commands.

In this Conduct of the Apostle, we
 have (as I observ'd) the glorious Image
 of a Soul thorowly influenced by
 the Principles of Christianity; a Soul
 so perfectly rais'd above all the little
 Passions and Frailties of our Nature,
 warm'd with so generous a Charity,
 so devoted to God, and so regardless
 of the World, that the Example can
 be exceeded by none but the great
 Master, whose Steps he followed.

Give me Leave then to make some
 Application of what has occur'd to
 us in reflecting upon this Scripture.

It

It appear'd from the necessary Im-
port of the Apostle's Reasoning, that
he expected to enter immediately up-
on a State of Joy and Happiness, as
soon as he departed out of this Life :
And since there was nothing peculiar
in his Case, to distinguish it from the
Condition of other Saints departed,
we may securely affirm, that this is
a Doctrine of the Gospel, an Ex-
pectation universally propos'd to the
Faith of every good Christian. The
eminent Services and Sufferings of the
Apostle must indeed be allow'd to
intitle his Hopes to a distinguish'd
Station in the Favour of his Master :
But every sincere Christian will also
be with Christ, and, in Proportion to
what he has done in this Life, receive
his proper Share of Honour and Re-
ward. The Body is reposed and
sleeps in Corruption, unaffected with
Pain or Pleasure, till that great Day,
when the Power of Christ shall recol-
lect its Dust, and raise it to a Simili-
tude

SERM.
XI.

Y

SERM. tude of his own most glorious Body;
 XI. but, in the mean Time, our nobler
 and better Half shall wake and live
 with our Lord in Paradise, and be
 admitted to a Participation of his
 Glory.

2dly, I would observe that this Doctrine is not a mere unprofitable Speculation, but is, to a good Man, a powerful Support against the Fear of Death, and a great Encouragement in Duty. For unless this Doctrine of an intermediate State of Happiness be allowed, all our Prospects of Retribution must be deferr'd to the final Judgment, and the whole Man, both Body and Soul, be supposed to sleep in a State of Insensibility till that great Day. Now, among all the false Terrors in which Death is represented to our Imagination, this is not the least disconsolate Image of it; That 'tis a State of Silence and Darkness, where there is no Thought or Remembrance; where we shall become as
 tho'

tho' we had never been born ; where
all our active Faculties shall be chain'd
up and stupify'd, and we be reduc'd
to no better a Condition than a Clod
of Earth.


SERM.

XI.

Human Nature itself cannot but shrink a little at the dark Prospect, and a good Man must reflect with more than ordinary Discomfort, that he is entering into a State, where all his Labours and Obedience will profit him nothing ; but there is one Event to the Righteous and the Wicked. We are told, indeed, that there is a Day appointed in the eternal Councils of God, in which all Irregularities shall be set right ; when we shall abundantly reap for all we have sown, and receive a full Recompence of our Services : But the Distance perhaps is great between our Death and the general Resurrection, and the Interval upon this Supposition is supply'd with so uncomfortable a Prospect, as must abate much of the Vigour and Chear-

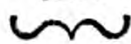
SERM. fulness of Men, in the Performance
 XI. of their Duty.

We cannot but observe, that the great Advantage, by which temporal Happiness prevails more generally on the Choice and Affections of Men than the Rewards offered to our Hopes by the Gospel, is the Nearness of the Prospect in which it is view'd; and that all the Arguments we can use are found little enough to take off this Disadvantage in the Comparison, and give the Fears and Expectations of Futurity an equal Weight in the present Regard of Men; and consequently the farther we remove the Day of Retribution from us, the stronger in Proportion will be the Influence of worldly Satisfaction, the more considerable will they appear in their Estimate, and the more difficult it will be to represent the Prospects of Religion in such a Magnitude and Value, as will make them an Overbalance to prevent Temptations. But
 if

if the Righteous has this Hope in his SERM.
Death, that his Labours shall imme- XI.
diately follow him, that as soon as he 
is delivered from the Burden of the
Flesh he shall be received into a State
of Joy and Felicity; such a clear and
uninterrupted Prospect of Reward
will infuse Life and Spirit into his O-
bedience. The Distance between this
World and the next will be render'd
so inconsiderable, that a Reversion de-
ferr'd only for so short a Period will
appear as valuable as a present Pos-
session: Supported by this View, he
will neither be weary nor fond of
Life, nor afraid of Death. All he
can suffer, and all he can enjoy here,
will appear but as momentary Trifles;
and tho' by a solemn Call of God
his Soul should this Night be requir-
ed from him, he can lie calmly down
in Peace, with full Assurance that he
shall wake in a State of Happiness,
and before the Morning be with our
Lord in Paradise.

SERM.

XI.



And, on the contrary, this Doctrine must be full of Terror to the Wicked, and a strong Preservative from the Commission of Sin, when he knows the Punishment attends at the Door. Our Corruption is too apt to put the evil Day far from us, and encourage us to presume on the shortest Impunity: And if even Men, who believe that the Execution of that Wrath pronounced against Sin will be suspended no longer than till the Hour of Death, will yet venture to offend, in Confidence of so short and precarious a Respite; how much more daring and insolent would they grow, if the Day of Vengeance was removed so much farther from them? What Ease and Security would they raise to themselves, from the Prospect of lying down in a long insensible Sleep, and being hid for Ages in Darkness and Oblivion?


3dly, We may learn from the Example of the Apostle, that as so near
and

and certain a Prospect of Reward SERM.
should support the Christian under all XI.
the Difficulties that can attend his O-
bedience ; so the only Motives that
should induce him to desire a longer
Continuance in this Life, are, that he
may have longer Opportunities of pro-
moting the Glory of God, and the
Happines of his Brethren.

'Tis difficult to find many Reasons
that can recommend this World to
the Fondness of a good Man, tho'
placed in the most favourable Circum-
stances of it. All the guilty Plea-
sures, by which it engages the Pursuit
of so great a Part of Mankind, are
his Abhorrence and Aversion : And
even that Share of its Entertainments,
which Religion allows him, appears
but weak and insipid Amusement, to
a Mind whose Hopes and Affections
are so much better placed. Nay, e-
ven that most valuable Felicity, the
Peace of an innocent Conscience, is
not without much Alloy, from the

SERM. many Failings and Imperfections to
 XI. which he is conscious, and the many
 Occasions of Fear and Trembling that
 attend him in the Work of his Sal-
 vation. But the Motives of Indiffe-
 rence to this Life are yet more and
 greater to a Man placed in the Cir-
 cumstances of *St. Paul*. When his
 Religion itself shall expose him to the
 Displeasure and Persecution of Men ;
 when his Duty shall require him to
 contend with Principalities and Pow-
 ers, and spiritual Wickedness in high
 Places ; to oppose himself to Irreligi-
 on or Heresy, supported by the Ap-
 plause and Authority of this World :

The Courage of an Apostle may
 be allowed to abate somewhat under
 these Circumstances ; to grow weary
 of so unequal a Conflict ; to wish
 that he was at Rest with Christ, and
 that the Days of so uneasy a War-
 fare were at an End. These Confide-
 rations which prevail'd with *St. Paul*,
 and these only, can, under such Dif-
 courage-


couragements, render Life desirable SERM.
to a good Man.---That Examples of XI.
Zeal for the Honour of God, and 
Courage in the Defence of his Truth,
are at such a Time more especially ne-
cessary to confirm the Faith, and sup-
port the Resolution of his Brethren:
That the Purity and Prosperity of the
Church may depend upon his Services:
That withdrawing himself from his
Share in the public Danger is be-
traying a Trust, and deserting a Sta-
tion in which God has placed him:
That our Happiness cannot be long
deferr'd; and that, if we employ'd the
mean Time in the Promotion of God's
Glory, the Improvement of our Re-
ward will make us a large Amends
for the Delay of it.

Lastly, We are here taught, with
what Temper and Equality of Mind
we should submit our Life and Death
to the Disposal of Providence.

A Christian should be no farther
concern'd about the Accidents of this
World,

SERM. World, or even his shorter or longer
 XI. Continuance in it, than as the Honour
 of God and his own or his Brethren's
 eternal Interest are affected by them.
 And since God alone is a proper Judge
 of what will promote or disserve these
 Ends, whatever in our short View of
 Things may appear to us the most
 conducive to them, we must submit
 our own Reasons to his Wisdom, and
 resolve to make that our Choice
 which is his Appointment.

All that can become us is, to ap-
 ply ourselves, Day by Day, to act up
 to the Duties of our several Stations,
 without inquiring how soon we shall
 be dismiss'd, or how long continued in
 them. That at whatever Hour we
 are called, we may be found em-
 ployed in the Work of our Master,
 defending his Gospel, and adorning
 it by the Graces of a holy Conver-
 sation; strengthening the Weak, con-
 firming the Doubtful, and reclaim-
 ing the Sinner: And then it will be
 indif-

indifferent to us, whether we depart SERM.
or abide in the Flesh ; since whether XI.
we live, we shall live unto the Lord, 
or whether we die, we shall die unto
the Lord.

* S E R M O N XII.

The Advantages of Humility.

M A T T. XI. 29.

*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly
of Heart; and ye shall find Rest to
your Souls.*

PRIDE was the Passion which ^{SERM.}
made that fatal Breach upon ^{XII.}
our Innocence, at which Sin
and Misery enter'd, and gave our
Enemy the Triumph of ruining our
Nature. When therefore the Son of
God became manifest in the Flesh,
to undo this Work of the Devil, he

* Preach'd before his Majesty, at the Royal Chapel at
St. James's, April 20th, 1729, being the last Sermon the
Author preached.

began

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began our Regeneration, by endeavouring to restore the Soul to its original Temper and Humility. Agreeably to his first public Address to his Followers, we find an Exhortation to this Virtue, as a Disposition necessary to prepare them to be his Disciples: *Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.* Before Men could be induced to embrace the Overtures he brought of Pardon and Reconciliation, they must be humbled to a Sense of their present Guilt and Misery, of their Weakness and Insufficiency to Happiness. In vain would Remedies be proposed to him, who thought himself whole. Especially vain was it to expect the Proud and Haughty should acknowledge the Character, and submit to the Direction of the lowly Jesus: A Teacher, undistinguish'd by any outward Advantages of Birth, Education, or Authority, which might engage the Reverence and Attention
of

of Mankind. And, therefore, we find SERM.
not many Wise, not many Mighty, XII.
became his Converts. Few of the Phari-
sees or Rulers believed; they con-
temned a Preacher in the Form of a
Servant, and scorn'd to receive In-
struction from the Carpenter's Son.
His Doctrine was plain and simple,
unadorn'd with any of those curious
Speculations and profound Subtilties,
by which the Schools of Philosophers
and Rabbies engaged the Veneration
of their Followers; and was there-
fore to the *Jews* a Stumbling-block,
and by the *Greeks* accounted Foolish-
ness. To prepare Men for such a
Teacher and such a Doctrine, it was
necessary to dispossess them of a Tem-
per so impatient of Instruction as
Pride and Sufficiency; and by a pre-
vious Humility reconcile their Aver-
sions to the Gospel.

The two Terms of Meekness and
Lowliness, in my Text, are distinguish-
ed by Moralists, as the one signifies a
Calm-

SERM. Calmness of Temper, in Opposition to
 XII. Anger; the other, that Modesty and
 Submission which is opposite to Pride.
 But Pride and Anger are Vices of a
 close Affinity. Only by Pride com-
 eth Contention, (says *Solomon*) and in
 another Place, *Proud and haughty
 Scorners is his Name, that dealeth in
 Wrath.* 'Tis our Pride gives a Point
 to Injuries and Affronts. 'Tis an O-
 pinion of our Merit and Right to the
 Observance of the World that gives
 every slight Occasion the Power of
 raising that Ferment in the Soul. Tho'
 the Notions therefore of Pride and
 Anger are distinct; yet, since Hu-
 mility is a Remedy effectual to the
 Cure of both, I shall confine my pre-
 sent Reflections to that Virtue; and
 observe,

I. Whence we are here directed to
 learn it.

II. I shall endeavour to recommend
 it from the Encouragement here gi-
 ven,

ven, that it will bring Rest to our Souls.

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I. We are to learn Humility from Christ, because it is a Grace so peculiarly Christian, that no other moral Institution will furnish us with it.

All the ancient Schemes of Morality we find in general chargeable with this great Defect, that they are advanced rather as Arguments for Men of Learning to dispute on, and the Ignorant to admire, than as Rules and Directions of Life, to be reduced to Practice: But if we look for the particular Virtue of Humility, it seems wholly forgot in their Systems. Pride and Vanity appear the principal Motives to all Enquiries: An Affectation to distinguish themselves from the Illiterate, rather than to instruct an ignorant, or reform a vicious World: And, when they form'd their Hero, their great and perfect Man, Humility is left out of the Character, 'tis dispa-
Z raged

SERM. raged in their Lectures, as an Argu-
 XII. ment of a mean and cowardly Spirit,
 and treated with Scorn and Igno-
 miny.

And though some few among them have declaim'd with great Appearance of Zeal on the Contempt of Glory, yet when we examine these mortify'd Pretensions, we find these Men to have despised the Applause with greater Vanity than others pursued it: That Esteem was the Mark they aim'd at, tho' they took a more cover'd and unobserv'd Path to reach it.

And as to the *Jews*, the Privilege of their Separation, their peculiar Intercourse with Heaven, their Descent from the Patriarchs, and the Promise of a Messiah in their Seed, gave them even a national Contempt of the *Gentile* World: They were taught to look upon the Rest of Mankind as common and unclean, and treat them as an inferior Order of Creatures. It was Christianity first taught the true Doc-
 trine

trine of Humility, check'd that Fierceness and Strife for Priority, which embroil'd the World, and reduc'd the Pretensions of Mankind within the Bounds of Justice and Sobriety : And therefore it is from Christ we must learn Humility.

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But especially are we to learn it from him, because he not only prescrib'd this Virtue, but was himself meek and lowly, the great Pattern and Example of it. He knew what Authority the Example of the Teacher added to his Doctrine, and was therefore himself a sinless and exact Pattern of all that Holiness and Purity he enjoin'd on his Disciples. But Humility is a Virtue which shines with a peculiar Eminence in his Example, and is exhibited to us in every Part of his Life and Character. What an amazing Scene of Condescension opens itself to us, in our very first Reflection on him as a God incarnate ! With what Astonishment do we consider him

SERM. emptying himself of Majesty, chang-
 XII. ing his Glory into the Similitude of
 ~~~~~ his own Creatures, and putting on the  
 Burden of Flesh and Blood! for thus  
 was the Only-begotten brought into  
 the World. He laid aside his Maje-  
 sty and Omnipotence, he bowed the  
 Heavens and came down, and to de-  
 liver Man he abhorred not the Virgin's  
 Womb. Angels themselves stood a-  
 amazed at the wonderful Mystery,  
 when they saw their great Lord and  
 Captain, him whom they had been  
 used to worship and obey, condescend  
 to appear in a Nature so much infe-  
 rior to their own.

Mortality, in its most desirable Cir-  
 cumstances, has all its Enjoyments  
 so mixed with Pain and Disquiet, that  
 ineffable had been our Lord's Humi-  
 lity in submitting to this State, tho'  
 attended with all the Advantages that  
 Ease, Affluence, and Authority could  
 derive on it. But the blessed Jesus  
 came not in a Character to share the  
 Plea-

Pleasures or Glories of Life with us, SERM.  
to be a Prince or a Ruler on Earth : XII.  
No, the Meanness of his Birth, the  
Toils and Indigence of his Life, and  
the Shame and Ignominy of his Death,  
are all convincing Arguments that his  
Kingdom was not of this World.  
Had he affected external Pomp and  
Figure, he might have ingrossed all  
the Riches of the World, and in the  
Splendor of his Court, as well as  
the Dignity of his Person, have been  
greater than *Solomon* in all his Glory,  
and exceeded even the carnal Expecta-  
tion of the *Jews*. Heaven and Earth  
were his Creatures, and at his Com-  
mand, and Legions of Angels attend-  
ed ready to minister unto him. But  
he voluntarily declined these Advan-  
tages, took upon him the Form of a  
Servant, and, as the Prophet had  
foretold in that mournful Descripti-  
on of him, he had no Form or Come-  
linefs, nor any Beauty, that we should  
desire him. The ordinary Works of



SERM. a mechanic Trade employ'd his private Years ; and when he enter'd upon his public Office, he only changed his Labour, and added to his Poverty, and submitted to a Condition, below even the common Provisions of Life : *Foxes had Holes, and the Birds of the Air Nests, but the Son of God had not where to lay his Head.* The only public Honour he suffer'd to be given him was temper'd with Humility ; and the Prediction of the Prophet was not more exactly fulfill'd in the Hofannah's of his Disciples, than in the Meekness wherewith he received them, lowly, and sitting upon an Ass. If we attend him in his Conversations, we find him generally encompass'd with the Multitude, and preaching the Gospel to the Poor. His particular Friends and Family were chosen out of the meanest of the People : And among them he appears rather as a Servant than a Master. *He came not, as he says, to be minister'd*

*ster'd unto, but to minister, and to give his Life a Ransom for many.* SERM. XII.

He gave his Life, and with amazing Resignation humbled himself to the Death of the Cross, the Death of a Slave and a Malefactor. *He was led as a Lamb to the Slaughter, dragg'd to Calvary without Opposition or Complaint, and as a Sheep before her Shearers is dumb, so he opened not his Mouth.* He might have commanded Legions to his Rescue, or by one single Act of Omnipotence have destroyed his Enemies; but he in his Humiliation suppress'd his Almighty Power, neither resent'd nor revenged the Injuries he receiv'd, but patiently was number'd with the Transgressors.

Thus meek and lowly was our divine Master; and whoever will be his Disciple, is requir'd to follow his Steps, to walk as he walk'd, *to let that Mind be in him which was also in Christ Jesus.* And 'tis observable,

SERM. that there is no Act of his Life, to  
 XII. which he so particularly call'd the At-  
 { tention of his Disciples, as to that  
 surprizing Example of his Humility  
 in washing their Feet: And the Infe-  
 rence he directs them to make from  
 it is, that if he, their Lord and Ma-  
 ster, had descended to so mean an Act  
 of Servitude to them, much more  
 ought they to be ready in the like  
 Offices to one another. This indeed  
 was an Action which appears no Way  
 conducive to the End of his Mission,  
 but as it recommended and prescribed  
 Humility. No Argument could be  
 drawn hence for the Conviction of  
 Mankind: It could therefore have no  
 other View than their Instruction, and  
 to inforce the Practice of this Virtue.  
 That we may be prevail'd on to be  
 thus meek and lowly as he was, let  
 us,

II. Attend to the Encouragement  
 given us, --- *We shall find Rest to our  
 Souls.* By

By the Rest here promised, may be understood, either that eternal Rest which remains to the People of God, the final Reward of our Obedience; or that Tranquility of Mind, which is the Spring and Foundation of our present Felicity. With respect to the former, 'tis Humility which forms and improves those Graces of Religion, and prepares us for that blessed Society, whence Malice, Faction, and Envy, every proud and disquieting Thought, will be excluded; which inspires us with the Resignation of Creatures, the Allegiance of Subjects, and the Contrition of Sinners. And as Pride expell'd the apostate Angels from the Presence of God, and the Station they held in his Favour; so Humility must qualify us to succeed to the Glories from which they fell. But I think the Connection of the Words determines the Rest here promised, to some immediate Effect of this Virtue, by which the present Burden

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den of Duty is rendered light and easy. For the Characters of a Yoke and Burden, under which our Lord here represents his Religion, can with no Consistency be extended to another Life. And since the Burden to be relieved is something present, the Rest or Relief here promised must be something present too: And even in this View we may find Encouragements enough to recommend the Practice of Humility.

The Peace of a satisfy'd Mind is so necessary an Ingredient of human Felicity, that without it all our Acquisitions are tasteless and insipid. This is the End which Avarice proposes in Wealth, Ambition in Honour, and Pride in Glory and Distinction: All these eager and painful Pursuits are directed to some Attainments, which they hope will set them at Rest. But the Disquiet, the Fears, the Disappointments, which continually attend us in the Passage, may convince us,  
that



that we are not in the Paths which SERM.  
lead to Happiness. Or however the XII.  
Hopes of the Prospect may support  
our Expectation, the Attainment seldom fails to convince us of our Error. When the Briskness of Desire is over, and we come calmly to value our Purchase, we soon discover the Delusion, and grow indifferent to what we before pursued with the greatest Fondness and Application. We have perhaps gain'd a Post we aim'd at; but when we come to look round us from the Ascent we have made, we discern some farther Want to engage our Desires, and give us the Labour of a fresh Pursuit. When we have reach'd even the highest Pitch that Ambition can aspire to, the same Uneasiness haunts us still: And when the Mind can amuse itself with no farther Expectation, it is apt to turn back again, to imagine it has overlook'd some Happiness in its Passage, which a more attentive Search may recover.

SERM. recover. From this Principle, we  
 XII. may account for those Examples of  
 Princes, who have retired from the  
 Glories of a Throne, to try again the  
 Pleasures of a private Life. 'Twas  
 this led *Tiberius* into that infamous  
 Retreat, when he deserted an Empire  
 for a private Indulgence to his Lufts.  
 For we are not to charge that De-  
 bauch so much on the peculiar Sensu-  
 ality of that Emperor, as the experi-  
 enced Emptiness of his present Acqui-  
 sitions, and that restless Agitation,  
 which is inseparable from a Mind dis-  
 appointed in its Pursuits of Happi-  
 ness; and which forced a much wiser  
 Prince than him, when he had run  
 thro' all the Schemes of Satisfaction  
 that Passion could suggest, and Em-  
 pire furnish, at last to confess, full of  
 the Conviction, *that all was Vanity  
 and Vexation of Spirit.* No, if we  
 expect to find Happiness, we must  
 seek for it at Home, and lay the Foun-  
 dation of it in our own Humility.  
 By

By his Grace we are prepared to acquiesce in every Dispensation of Providence, and confine our Wants and Desires to our present Circumstances. And he who can put an End to his Wishes, with the same Labour puts an End to his Uneasiness too: For Uneasiness is the natural Motive of Desire, and, reciprocally, he whose Desires are satisfied has all the Happiness that is attainable in this Life.

The far greater Part of the Miseries we complain of, we create to ourselves. Passion and Impatience hurry us on from one Disquiet to another; the Spur is ever in our Side, and will not suffer us to rest. 'Tis hence the Duties of Religion become grievous to us, the Pursuits of Life full of Anxiety and Torment, and our Disappointments intolerable. But on a Soul truly humble and resign'd to God, the most difficult Burden fits light and easy. He can find an equal Pleasure in submitting to his Providence,

SERM.  
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SERM. dence, and obeying his Commands.

XII. He feels within himself a never-failing Spring of Peace and Joy ; a Peace which the Honours of the World cannot give, nor its Afflictions destroy.

And when we observe how large a Portion of the Miseries, which attend our present Abode, arise from the Resentment of real or seeming Injuries, Humility recommends itself to us not only as a Support, but a Protection. The Humble provokes no Enemy by Contempt, none by Censure, none by Envy ; his Competitions themselves are calm and inoffensive, not imbitter'd with that Rage and Fierceness, with which the Eager and Ambitious pursue the Honours and Interests of the World, and vex, defame, and persecute one another in their Contentions for them.

The Modest indeed, and Humble, may, without Inconsistency, be engaged in any virtuous Pursuit ; but he  
will

will keep within the Bounds of Justice and Sobriety, neither impatient in the Prospect, nor fretted in the Event. Nay, *Solomon* has observed, to the Advantage of his Pretensions, that *before Honour is Humility*. The Virtue is certainly equally practicable in every Character of Life, and equally an Ornament to all. But whatever the Success of the Humble may be, he only is capable of any real Satisfaction in what he acquires, because he only is amused with no farther Projects, suffers no fresh Desires to interrupt the Enjoyments of his present Station; and what is still more, can even resign it with Patience, can depart from a Title, and retreat to a former Situation, calm and indifferent as he left it. Thus blest and happy is the humble and lowly Spirit, free from the Solitude and Impatience of Expectation, and the Torture of Disappointment: Possess of a Felicity, independent on  
the

SERM.  
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SERM. the Favour of the Great, or the pre-  
 XII. carious Applause of the World: Easy  
 in Prosperity, and supported in Affliction; satisfy'd with the present, and without Apprehension for the future. And if the Example of our Lord and Master cannot engage our Imitation, nor his Command our Obedience, our own Interest should recommend to us a Virtue, which alone can make the toilsome Journey of Life and Death not terrible.

Suffer me to stop a little here, and observe how much Humility softens the Terrors of this formidable Enemy, and reconciles us to our Dissolution. 'Tis indeed a Reflection full of Anguish to the Haughty and Aspiring, that a few Years will destroy all that Figure, he with so much Toil has rais'd, and level his most shining Glories with the Dust. 'Tis on this Topick the Prophet insults the Pride of the *Babylonian*,---*Hell* (says he) *from beneath is moved to meet thee: It stirreth*

*stirreth up the Dead for thee: All* SERM.  
*they shall speak, and say unto thee,* XII.  
*Art thou he who saidst, I will ascend*  
*into the Heaven, I will exalt my*  
*Throne above the Stars of God; who*  
*madest the Earth to tremble, and*  
*didst shake Kingdoms? Art thou also*  
*become weak as we? Thy Pomp is*  
*brought down to the Grave, and the*  
*Noise of thy Viols; the Worm is*  
*spread under thee, and the Worms*  
*cover thee. ----* And if we apply the  
 same Reflection to the less pompous  
 Instances of human Vanity, it cannot  
 but strike a Damp on the Pride and  
 Arrogance of Men, to consider that  
 all those great Pretensions, by which  
 they solicit the Esteem and Attenti-  
 on of the World, must determine in  
 so short a Period; that we, who are  
 this Day so intent on our several  
 Pursuits of Honour and Distinction,  
 must shortly lie blended with common  
 Earth, the unregarded Inhabitants of  
 Vaults and Charnels; that neither  
 A a the

SERM. the Knowledge nor Learning of the  
 XII. Wise, the Power or Quality of the  
 ~~~~~ Great, the Treasures of the Rich, nor  
 the Courage of the Brave, can give
 any Privilege from the common Ne-
 cessity.

In vain do we comfort ourselves
 against the Terror of these Reflec-
 tions with the empty Prospect of a
 surviving Name, and with Marbles
 and Epitaphs fence against Oblivion!
 These, alas! are subject to the same
 Fate; or, if they escape, are Monu-
 ments rather of our Folly than our
 Glory; or however are an Advan-
 tage we must then be insensible of,
 when removed into a State, either too
 miserable to receive Abatement, or
 too happy to be improved by so flen-
 der an Addition! It is true, the Hum-
 ble is no more exempt from the com-
 mon Destiny than the Proud and A-
 spiring; but he has long been con-
 vinced, that the true Dignity of our
 Nature is not to be retriev'd in this
 Life,

Life, and therefore regards the At-
tainments and Distinctions of it with
the Indifference of a Guest that tar-
ries but a Day; he leaves it to Pro-
vidence to appoint the Talents he
should manage, the Post he should
act in, and is solicitous only to ap-
prove himself to him in the Duties
of it; whether his Trust be great or
small, he knows his Fidelity in the
Discharge of it will assure to him a pro-
portionable Reward, and that the least
in the Kingdom of Heaven will be
adorn'd with a Glory greater than all
the Honours of this World can give;
he can therefore calmly resign all the
Acquisitions he has made here, Death
can no longer be terrible to him,
since it can rob him of nothing but
what he is prepared to part with,
and even begs to exchange for that
Kingdom, which his Humility here
encourages him to hope for here-
after.

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This then is the only effectual Remedy against this formidable Evil, which cuts off all our Schemes, and defeats our Councils, to confine our Ambition to the Prospects of Immortality. We have there a noble Field of Glory, to which we are not only permitted, but commanded to aspire; a Glory which our most enlarged Conceptions cannot reach, and in Comparison with which the most shining Scenes of present Honour are but Phantoms and Shadows, the transient Illusions of a pleasing Dream.

Permit me then to resume our Lord's Exhortation, to follow him in the Practice of Virtue, by so many Arguments recommended to us. If we call ourselves his Disciples, let the Humility of the Master correct the Pride and Ambition of his Servants. Let it mortify all our little Affectations, and reprove our Fondness for the Poms and Vanities
of

of the World, to consider that the SERM.
Son of God, when he took upon XII.
him our Nature, chose to appear in
the Form of a Servant. And if this
divine Person thought it no Dimi-
nution to his Majesty to leave us
an Example of such amazing Hu-
mility, let not the greatest among
Men think it any Reproach to their
Dignity to learn of him to be meek
and lowly. In whatever Station of
Power and Authority God shall re-
quire our Service, let us still reflect
that we are Disciples of the humble
Jesus; and when we are cloathed
with Majesty and Honour, when
Purple and Retinue shall engage to
us the Respect and Observance of
Men, let us then especially remem-
ber to put on also the Ornament
of a meek and humble Spirit, that
Christ may acknowledge us to be his
Servants.

But

SERM.

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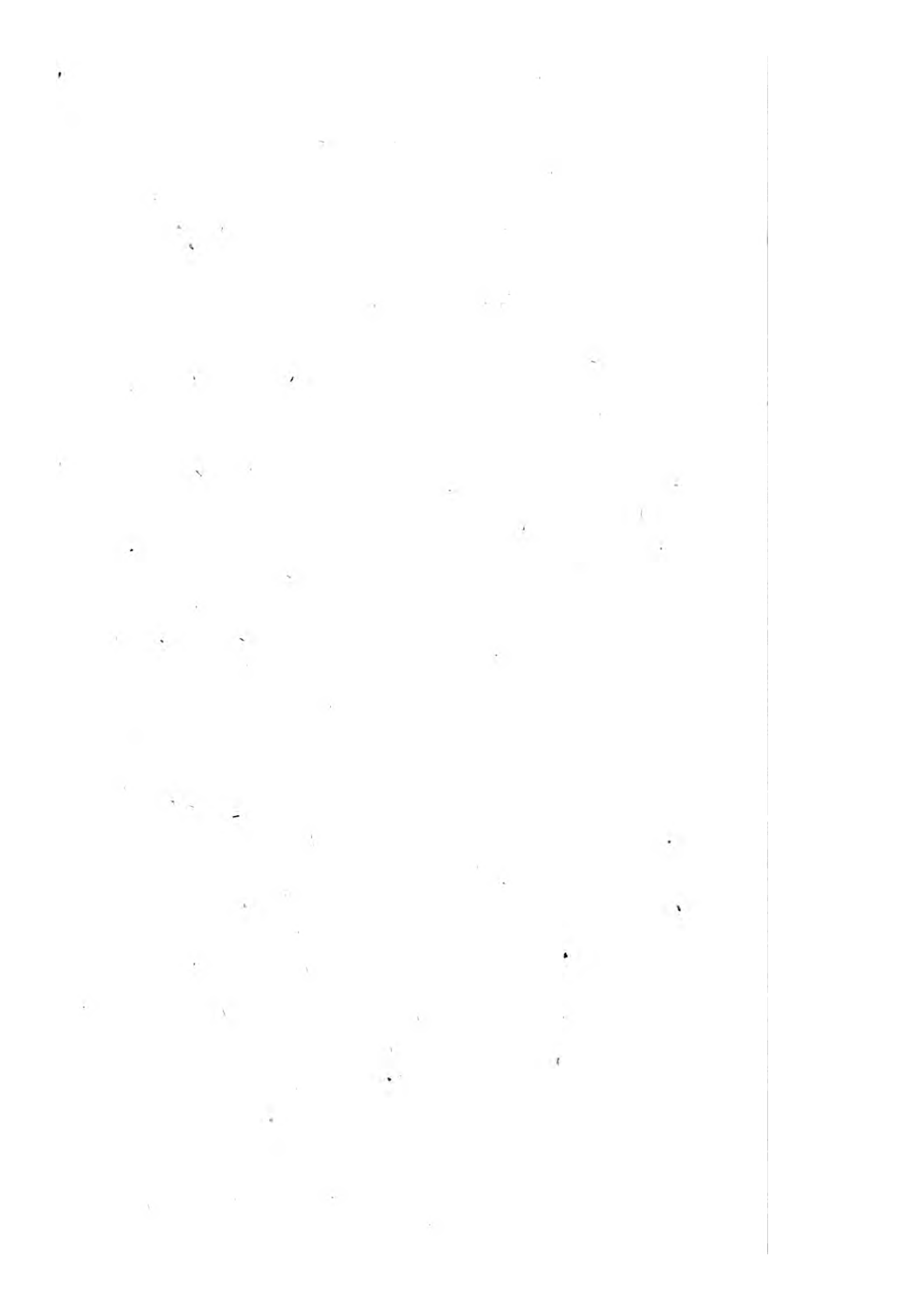
But if these Considerations are without Impression, let us reflect how much our own Happiness depends on this Disposition of Soul; that Humility keeps all the disquieting Passions of our Nature under Government and Discipline, arms us against all that can happen from without, and preserves Peace and Serenity within; is the Security of the Great, and the Support of the Poor; improves every Satisfaction of Life, and reconciles our Patience to the Distresses of it.

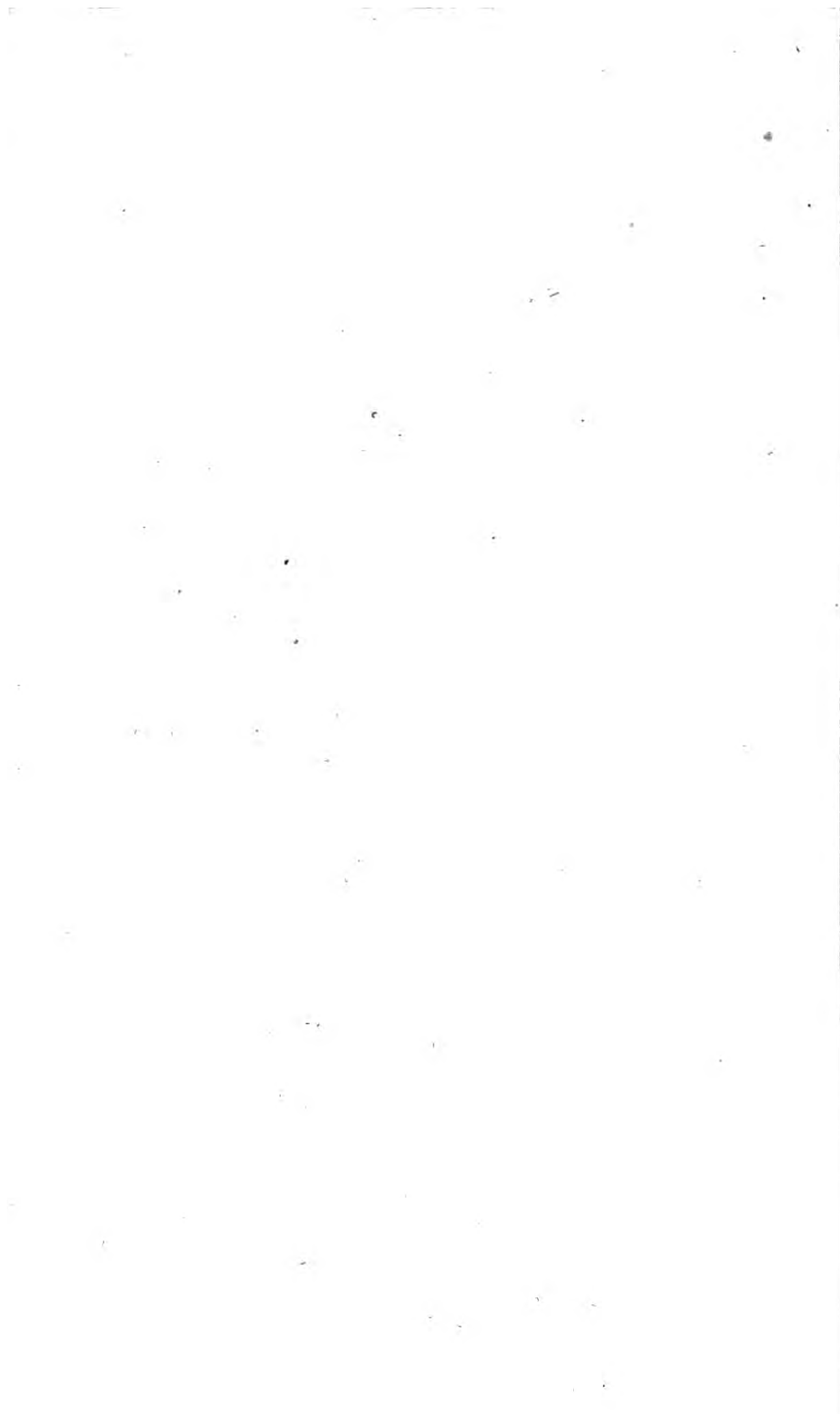
A Soul thus resigned is carried smoothly down the Stream of Providence; no Temptations of the Passage disquiet him with Desire, and no Dangers alarm his Fears; he relies with a firm Confidence on the Skill and Affection of his Governor, who he knows will conduct him safely through the troublesome Waves of this World, and finally bring him

him to the Land of everlasting SERM.
Life, to that Kingdom he has XII.
promised to holy and humble Men
of Heart; a Crown which never
will fade, and a Glory which will
not decay.

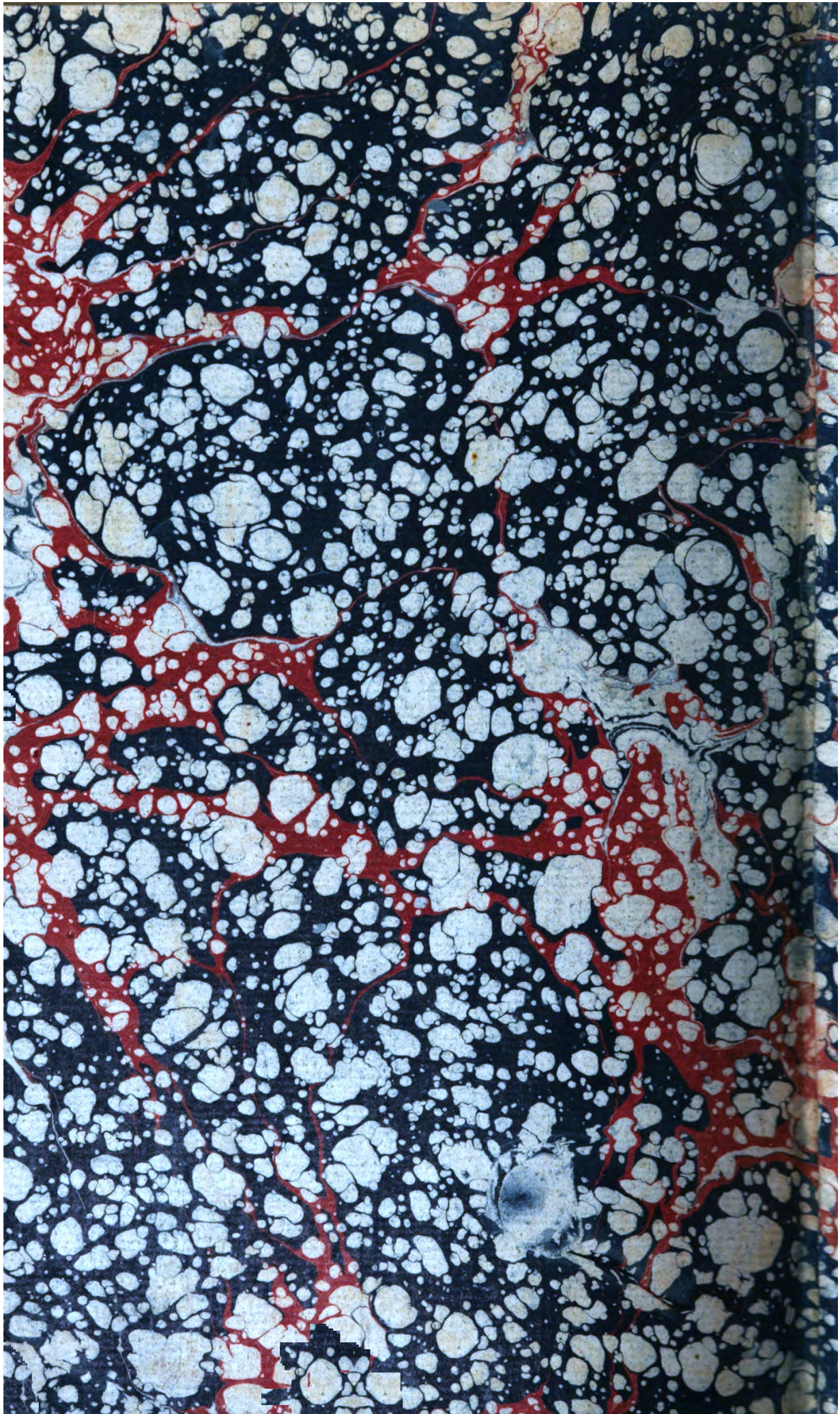
F I N I S.











Arch. G. III. 3.

