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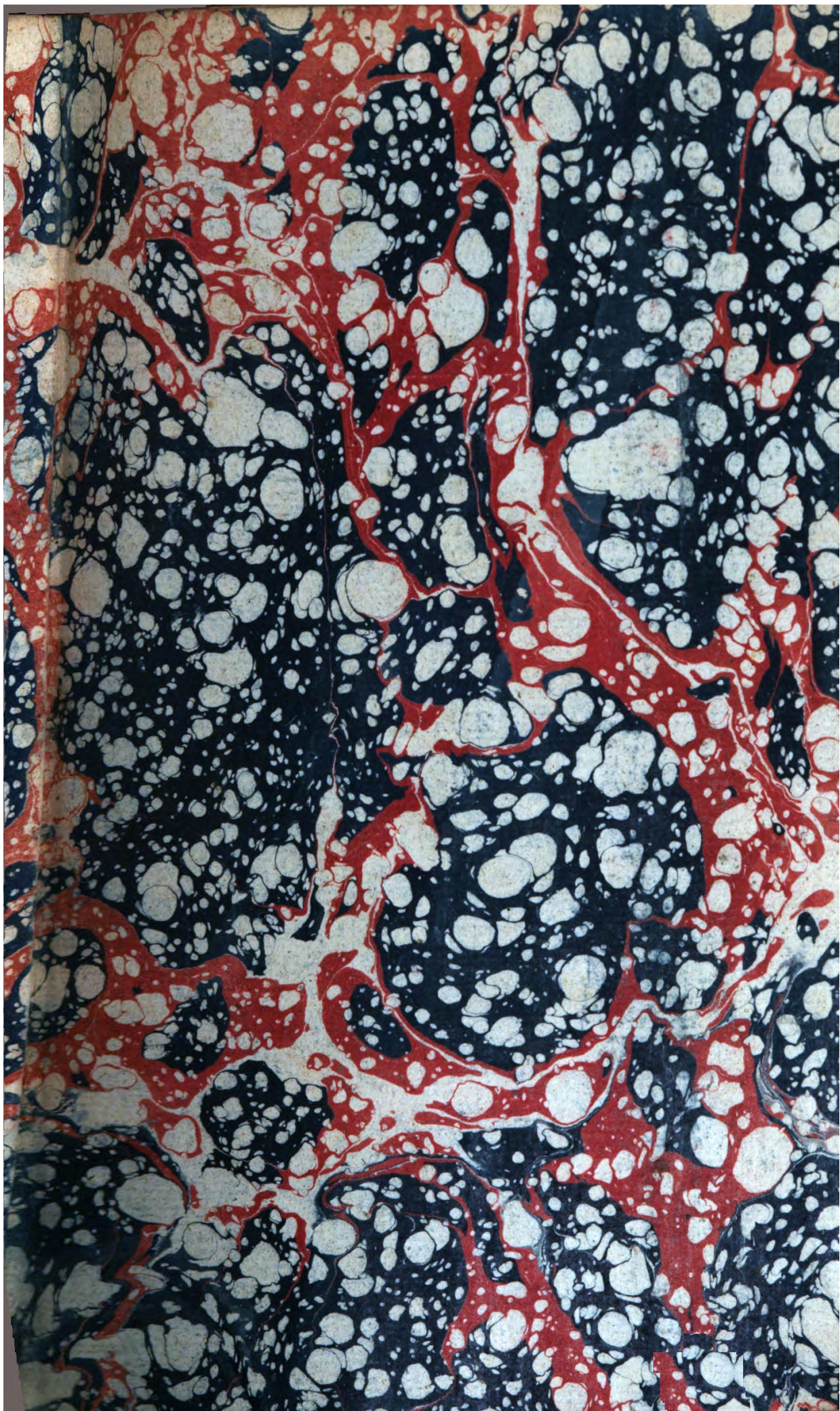
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Arch. G. III. 4.

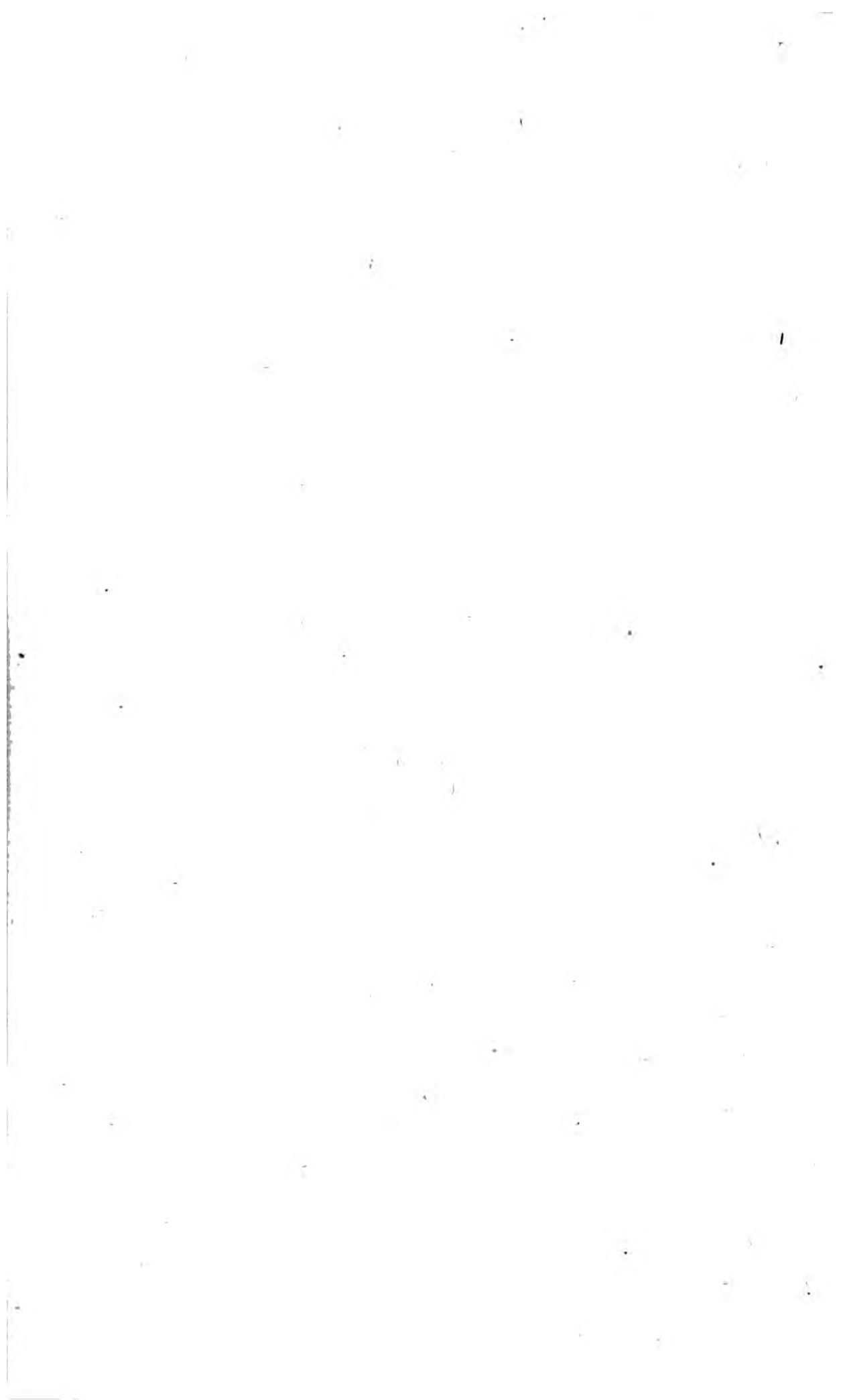


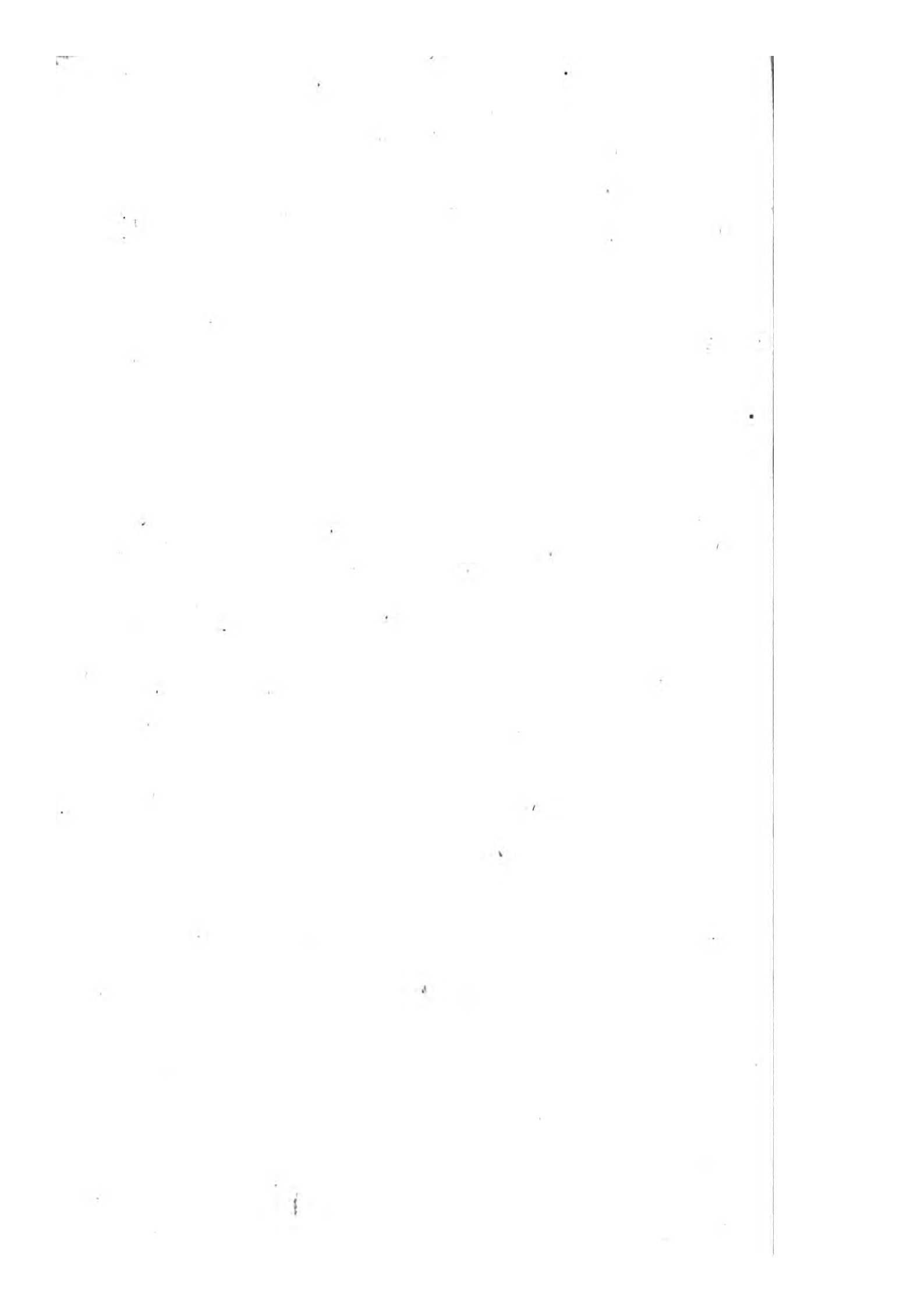
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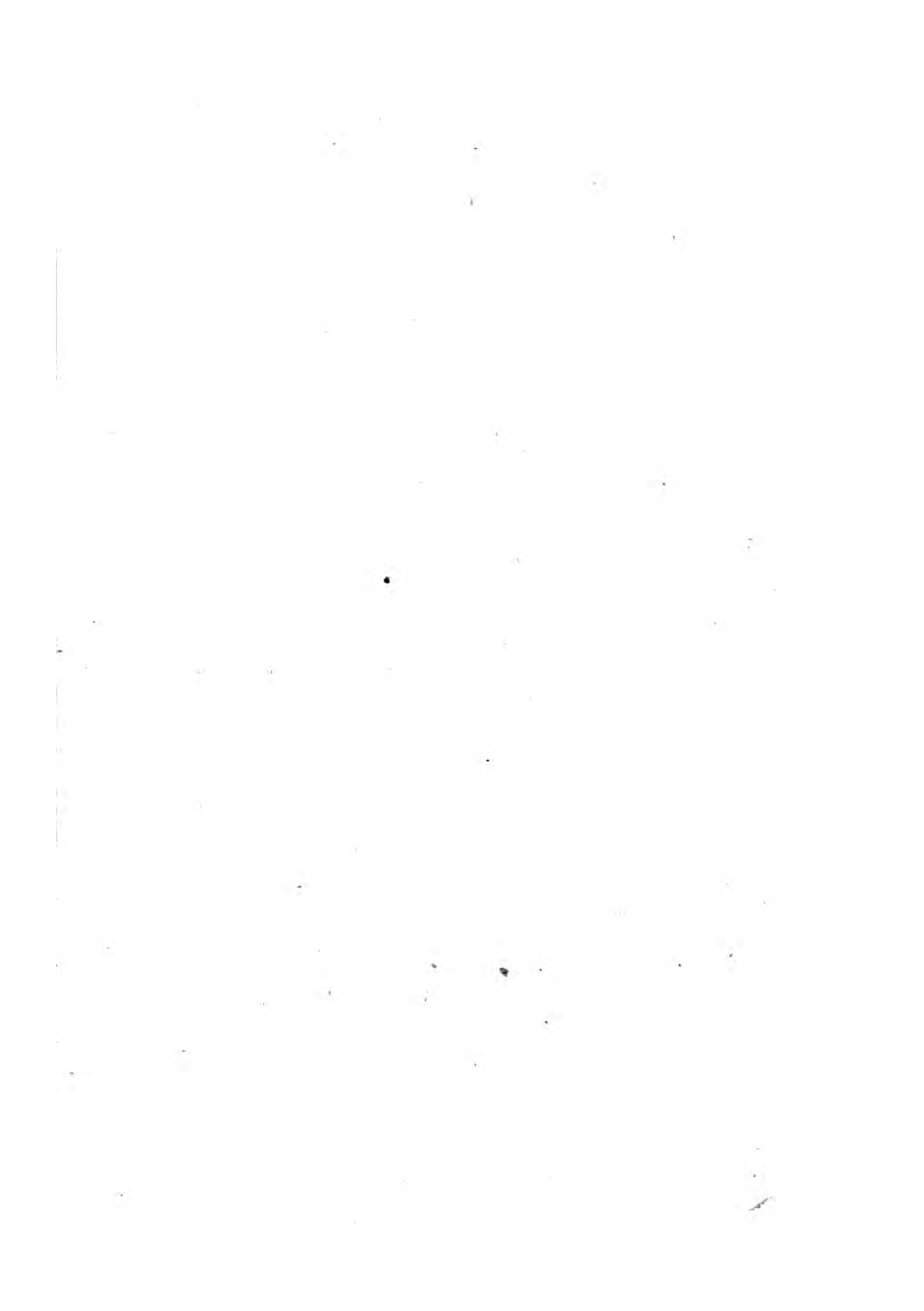


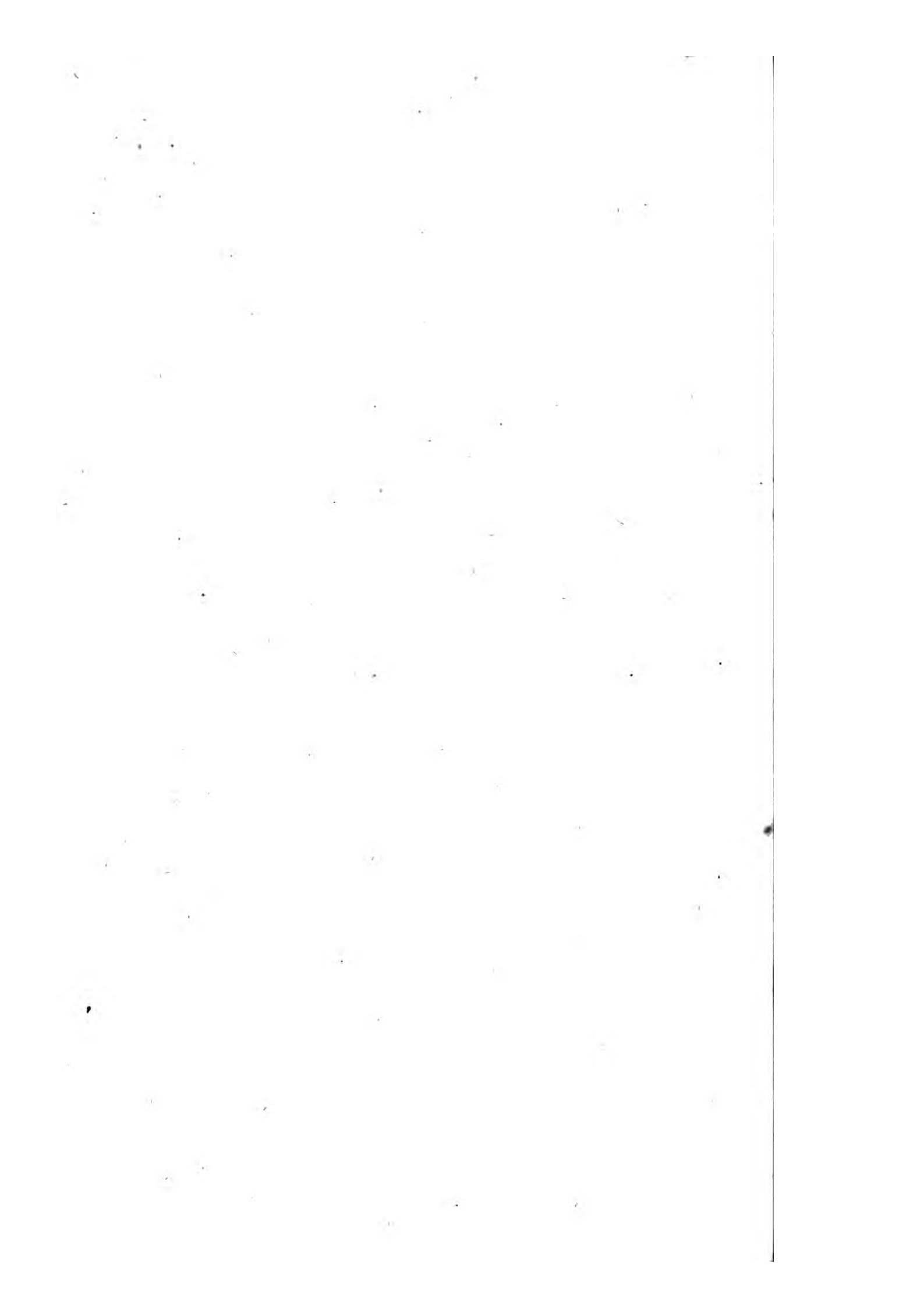
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~~Arch. G. III. 4.~~
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SEVENTEEN
SERMONS

ON
SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

By *JOHN ROGERS*, D. D.
Late Vicar of ST. GILES, CRIPPLEGATE, Sub-
Dean and Canon of WELLS, and Chaplain
in Ordinary to his Majesty.

To which are added,

TWO TRACTS, viz.

- I. Reasons against Conversion to the Church of Rome.
- II. A Persuasive to Conformity, addressed to the Dis-
senters. Never before printed.

Being the THIRD and LAST VOLUME of the
Author's Posthumous Works.

A NEW EDITION.

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.

AFTER what has been already so fully said relating to this excellent author and his writings, in the Preface and Life prefixed to the two former Volumes published since his death, there will be the less occasion to add any thing in commendation of his works in general, the world having given sufficient testimony of their excellency, by the good reception they have met with in confirmation of it; it will be necessary therefore only to acquaint the reader, that these are the

The P R E F A C E.

last of the author's works which will be offered to the Public. His Sermons will appear to be composed with that justness of thought, that strength of reasoning, and elegance of expression peculiar to him, and animated throughout with that truly Christian spirit, as must highly recommend them to the esteem and approbation of every judicious and intelligent reader, who will, no doubt, look upon them as some of the best compositions of this kind that the world has hitherto been obliged with; and it may with reason be presumed they will be promotive of the good end intended by the publication of them.

*As to the two tracts at the end of this volume, it is to be observed, that the former was printed in the Author's life-time, as the reader will find in the Life * prefixed to the last Volume;*

* See Page 35.

The P R E F A C E.

*the latter * was never before printed, being wrote by him for the use of the dissenters in the parish of Wrington in Somersetshire, where he was for some years rector ; and as it is drawn up with great accuracy and judgment, in a very familiar and easy manner, adapted to common understandings, it is esteemed well-deserving to be printed with the other.*

* Ibid. 24.



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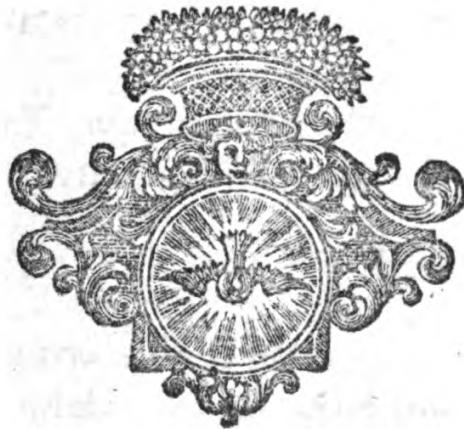
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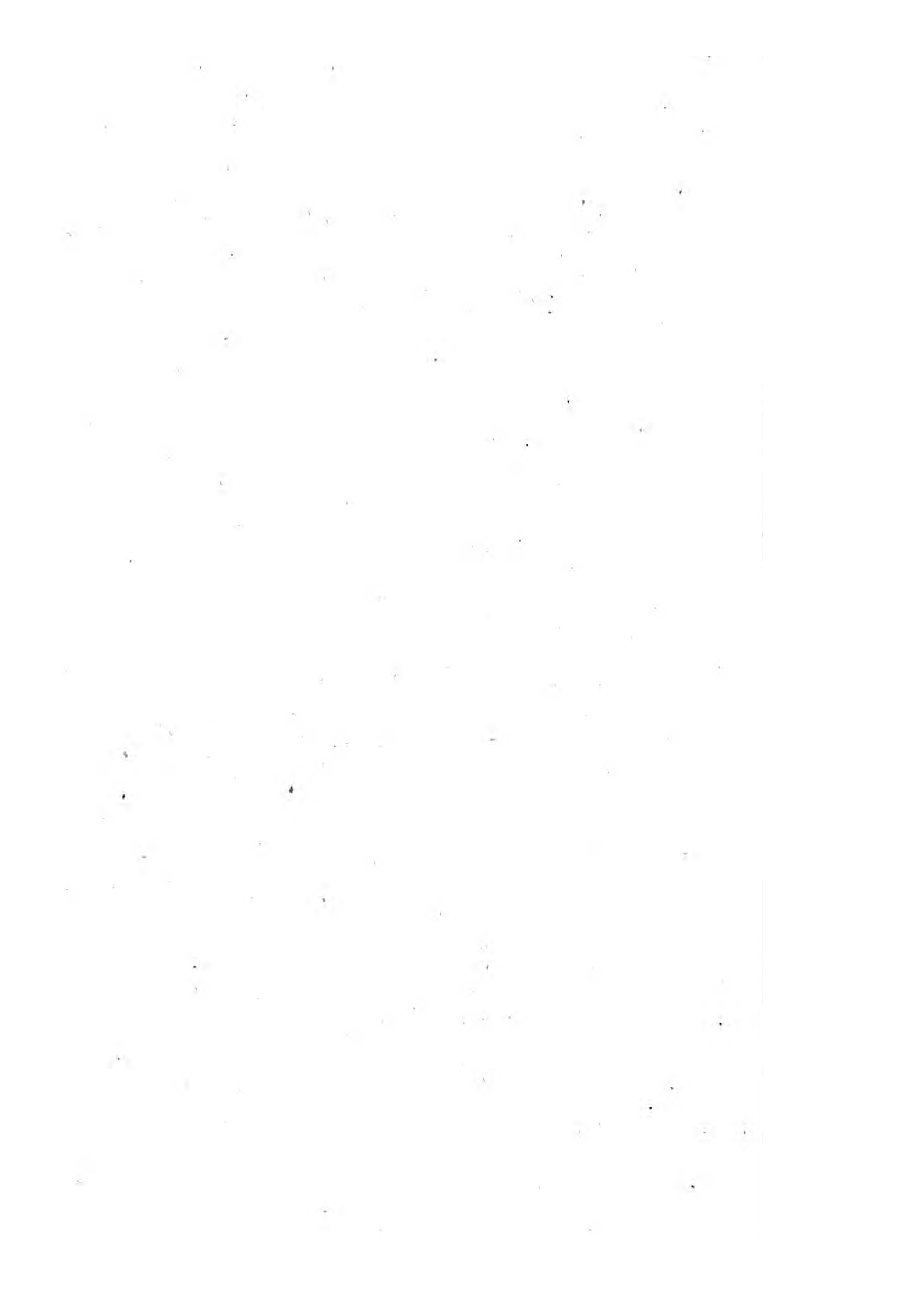
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and Maintained.

GALAT. vi. 7.

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked:
for whatsoever a man soweth, that
shall he also reap.*

THE mind of man, fallen and polluted as he is, seems yet to be carried by a natural and scarce resistable impression to the desire of future as well as present happiness. Whenever he reflects, he finds in himself a consciousness of his own immortality, and a concern for his allotments in that eternity which is to succeed this life: and as it is one of the first conclusions of natural reason, that all his happiness or misery must depend on the favour or displeasure of that Supreme Being who

B made

made and governs the world; so his conscience is perpetually reminding him to secure an interest in the favour of God by such actions as are agreeable to his will, and to prevent his displeasure by avoiding such as are offensive to him. Even in a state of nature, though the determinations of God concerning human actions were but obscurely and imperfectly known, yet the serious part of mankind have always acted with a deference to the slender notices they had of them: and endeavoured to intitle themselves to the divine favour, by those observances they thought acceptable to him; and expected to be happy in no other proportion than they acquitted themselves of that obligation. But still the strong propensity of our nature to evil, the prepossessions of lust, and the near and tempting satisfactions with which vice and immorality solicit our corruption, inclined men to hearken to every expedient that proposed to reconcile their duty with these gratifications, and secure to them the present interests or pleasures of vice, without a forfeiture of the rewards of virtue. And it is no wonder if while men had little more than a conjectural knowledge of the will of God, and the expectations of futurity, they were persuaded to believe that
man

man might sin, and yet live, that God was either not offended with their transgressions, or at least was too merciful to resent them in eternal inflictions: and they indeed are capable of some excuse from those times of ignorance in which they lived, and the imperfect direction they were under: but now, when under the gospel God has plainly and expressly declared his will, when he has clearly revealed the terms of happiness, for men any longer to delude themselves with false and unwarranted expectations, and presume on performances short of what he has commanded, or to imagine, as the apostle reproves us in the 11th verse, that God will act with a respect to persons, or save us from any other motives of his favour than the sins or innocence of our lives, is a weakness which admits of no excuse, a *crime that implies no less than mocking God*: it is disputing his veracity, justice, or authority, and prescribing to him the conditions of his own favour; and what one could hardly imagine a rational creature, intent on happiness, could be guilty of. And yet notwithstanding God has pronounced the consequence of every action of men, notwithstanding he has positively told us that he only who doth righteousness shall be happy, and that

4 *Rewards and Punishments*

who committeth and persists in sin shall be certainly damned; yet still our corruption is for finding out some evasion to soften the rigour of the law, and reconcile our lusts and vices to our expectations of happiness. The words of the apostle before us were intended to obviate one of the most dangerous delusions of this kind, *viz.* that either there will be no such strict and accurate review of the actions of men, or that God in his final determinations will be more favourable than he has threatened, and make larger allowances than he has promised; persuasions which this scripture directly contradicts; assuring us that the day will come when every moment of our lives will be recognized by God, and pronounced upon for eternity; that none of our frivolous excuses will divert his judgement in that day; that he will impartially execute the sanctions of his laws, and render to every man according to his deeds; and without any respect of persons proceed invariably by the rules he has laid down. Those who have sinned without law, shall perish without law, and those who have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law. According as the law of God was known to them, their obedience shall be exacted to it, and eternal and immutable

ble allotments decreed in proportion to our observance or neglect of it.

That this important doctrine of religion may have its due weight with us,

I shall endeavour

First, To confirm the doctrine here asserted, that God will impartially render to every man according to his works; *whatsoever we sow that shall we also reap.*

Secondly, I shall shew that that this law is agreeable to his justice, consistent with his mercy, and therefore what we must expect his veracity will fulfil.

Thirdly, I shall shew the weakness of those arguments by which men deceive themselves into a contrary expectation.

Fourthly, I shall persuade you to apply this doctrine, by shewing what influence it ought to have on the present conduct of our lives.

And *First*, I am to confirm the proposition here asserted; that God will impartially render to every man according to his works, *whatsoever we sow, &c.*

This is a conclusion which natural reason might deduce from a due consideration of the attributes and perfections of the Deity. For

if God be the governor and judge of the world (which is implied in the very notion of a God) he cannot but take notice of the behaviour of his subjects; and if he be infinitely just, he must one time or other impartially distribute justice, and distinguish the good from the bad, by different allotments of reward and punishment. Nay, the very Heathens went farther than this, and from the visible inequality wherewith happiness and misery were dispensed in this life, ventured to infer a future state, in which the divine justice would set all these irregularities right, and put an exemplary difference between vice and virtue.

It is true, the assertions of natural reason concerning these truths could never rise higher than to fair probabilities. It was very agreeable to the common notions of the Deity that there should be such a revival, but what the determinations of God were, could with no firm assurance be concluded, till he had revealed his will to mankind, and laid open the whole scheme of his providence in the gospel. It is therefore thence we, who acknowledge that revelation, are to be informed in the counsels and resolutions of God: and if the doctrine of my text be there positively and indisputably asserted, we have the same arguments

arguments for the truth and certainty of it, as we have for our profession of the Christian religion.

Now our Blessed Saviour, in all the representations he has given us of his last coming to judge the world, has positively declared that he will pronounce an impartial and irreversibile sentence on all the actions of men. That his sentence will be strict and impartial, he assures us *Matt. vii. 22, 23.* where we are told that no particular instances of obedience, not the owning his authority, nor zeal for his honour, will be an equivalent for the omission of any part of our duty: that he will not excuse any work of iniquity even in those who have the nearest pretensions to his service and favour, and to whom he has communicated many distinguishing instances of divine power; who have prophesied in his name, in his name cast out devils, and done wonderful works; but if they have been negligent in the practice of their duty, they must expect to fall under the common malediction, *I know you not, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*

That this sentence will be irreversibile, he assures us *Matt. xxv. 46.* *And they (i. e. the wicked) shall go into everlasting punishment,*

and the righteous into life eternal. His apostles also after him constantly preach the same doctrine to their converts.—That the day is appointed, in which he shall judge the world in righteousness. That we must all receive the things done in our body, according to what we have done, whether it be good or whether it be bad. And in my text, whatsoever we sow, that shall we also reap; which he more fully explains, in the words immediately following, he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.

This view is indeed the great principle and foundation of Christian obedience; and, if we take away the certainty of this prospect, the gospel will scarce have any motive engaging enough to recommend it universally to the choice and practice of mankind. St. Paul himself has acknowledged, *that if in this life only we had hope, we were of all men most miserable.* And though these words are generally thought, and no doubt were, spoken with a special regard to those trials of contempt and persecution, to which that age of the church was peculiarly exposed; yet if there were no certain prospect of retribution in another life, I cannot see why this conclusion might not

not be farther extended to many other instances of human conduct: *let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*

It is true, we may very properly argue against the excesses of vice from the temporal inconveniences that are consequent to them; but yet a man may be temperate even in vice itself, and break thro' a great part of the restraint of the gospel, without being exposed to those inconveniences; for it is not only the excess that we are there forbid, but even the most moderate use of an unlawful pleasure. And were we in any age to recommend the duties of the gospel, from the merely physical and natural consequences of human actions, I am afraid we should very difficultly persuade men that there was more wisdom or pleasure in the severities of mortification, or the restraints of self-denial, than in such a pursuit of our interests, or gratification of our appetites, as neither lessens our reputation, impairs our health, nor discomposes the mind, which yet may be very inconsistent with the precepts of Christianity.

There is indeed one present consequence of virtue, from which the ministers of religion may very forcibly recommend it in every instance of duty, and which is infinitely an
overbalance

overbalance to all the engagements of sensual pleasure; and that is, that peace and satisfaction which springs up in the mind upon the conscience of having obeyed a command of God. But the pleasure of this reflection lies in the encouragement it gives us to hope for the favour of God, and the rewards of immortality: so that, properly speaking, this motive is not merely temporal, but includes the prospect of a future retribution, and derives all its force from the expectation it gives us of the divine munificence in that day: in sum, this is a motive which alone is capable of determining a rational being acting by foresight and conscious of immortality: this is what the wisdom of God has thought fit to apply to the hopes and fears of men as the sanction of his laws; the threats and promises contained in this are agreeable to his justice, consistent with his mercy, and therefore what we must expect his veracity will certainly fulfil; which is the second particular I proposed to speak to. And

1st, This determination is agreeable to the divine justice. The perfections of the deity (as I observed) necessarily imply a sovereign dominion over his creatures, and this dominion must consist in an authority to prescribe laws

laws to their conduct, and exact obedience to those laws: and since a law without sanctions differs nothing from an advice, it is necessary that the divine laws should be armed with such penalties and rewards as may be sufficient to engage the observance of rational creatures: these I told you were, and it was necessary they should be, future and eternal, and such as God expressly revealed to our hopes and fears in the gospel; and that his justice is bound strictly to execute these is evident, because it is what he has obliged himself in a covenant to do; and the omission of it will leave no difference between him who serves God, and him who serves him not. And though human justice many times does and ought to remit something of those penalties it has affixed to its laws; because no human wisdom can foresee all those circumstances which may extenuate the guilt of an action, and excuse the person from the crime intended to be reformed; yet the divine justice, which is subject to none of these imperfections, cannot be thus obliged to alter his determinations, or reverse the sentence he has pronounced. Infinite wisdom has already weighed and considered every possible circumstance of the actions of men; he has
known

known from all eternity both his own and our works, and therefore nothing new can possibly intervene, which might make it just or necessary for him to change his resolution, or alter the thing that is gone out of his lips. And as an impartial execution of the divine laws is thus agreeable to his justice, so

2dly, It is abundantly consistent with his mercy. Though the actions of God, *whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts*, are sometimes difficultly accounted for by us; yet we may always be assured that in every action there is an exact harmony and concurrence of all his attributes; and though his laws are more immediately expressions of his wisdom, justice, and authority, yet his infinite goodness and mercy were equally consulted in enacting them too. No circumstance, which can plead for the compassion of the judge, was at that time unknown or unconsidered by him, and since it did not prevent the making the law, it can be of no more force to prevent the execution of it. But, to convince our selves of the consistency of his justice with his goodness and mercy, let us farther reflect on the easiness of those performances, by which we may attain the proposed reward, and avoid the penalties threatened

threatened to disobedience. Had God proposed terms of his favour above our abilities to perform, we might then with some reason have resented his laws as a barbarous insult on the weakness of his creatures. Or had he made the ordinary standing conditions of avoiding his threatened displeasure, the submitting to a life of misery and torment, and renouncing all present happiness, tho' even upon these terms our duty would have been the wisest and most rational choice; yet the infirmities of our nature would hardly forbear complaining of his infinite power, if this were the general state of duty, the constant and natural condition of the service required by God. But how great soever the penalties are he threatens to the breach of his laws, yet if the performances by which they may be avoided are easy, agreeable to our nature, and generally consistent even with our present interest, no one can complain of hardship in the law, or an unreasonable severity in the author of it. Now what is there in all the ordinary duties of Christianity, which is above the common abilities of man to perform? and how few are the instances in which it is not our temporal interest to comply with its commands? has God proposed any truth to

our faith, without sufficient arguments to induce our assent? or has he enjoined any duty on our practice, which wise and good men have not in all ages recommended, from some immediate advantages consequent to the performance? Even the severest duties of religion have the present encouragement of a satisfied conscience, and a joyful assurance of being rewarded with a distinguished share of glory. These are supports which can reconcile us even with delight to the greatest distresses of obedience, can make the confessor triumph in bonds, and the martyr in flames. And, what is yet a farther argument of the divine compassion to our weakness, he has provided us with a ready and effectual assistance in the graces of his holy spirit, which can make us equal, and even superior to all the difficulties of obedience. So that after all our objections and complaints, we must at last be forced to acknowledge, *that the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*; that as is his majesty, so is his mercy. He requires no more from us than our own capacity, and the assistance of his spirit will enable us to perform; and wherever we unavoidably fall short of the strictness of the precept, he has compassion on our infirmities,

firmities, and allows us to renew ourselves by repentance, and reinstate ourselves in his favour again. Now these are terms of happiness so easy, so just, and so reasonable, so agreeable to the goodness and compassion of God, that no penalties can be too severe for those who refuse to comply with them. Upon what pretence can men expect to escape, if they neglect so great and withal so attainable a salvation?

Since therefore the laws of God are enacted with so much justice, and yet tempered with so much mercy, what farther have we to expect but that he should invariably execute that sentence he has pronounced on all the actions of men, that *whatsoever we sow, that should we also reap.*—*God is not a man that he should lie, or as the son of man that he should repent: bath he spoken, and shall he not perform it?* And since, as I shewed before, God has plainly and clearly revealed this prospect to the expectations of men, we cannot without reflecting upon his truth and sincerity imagine he can change his decree, or contradict so express a declaration. And he who can understand so important a part of the laws as the sanction, with such a liberty of interpretation, as if God designed by the severity

verity of the expression only to strike a terror into his creatures, and never intended strictly to execute the penalties he threatened, may easily interpret away the force of the whole law, and dispense with the obligation of every precept of it. But this will be to represent Christianity as a fable and a fiction, and not a measure of human actions, and a standard of our obedience to God.

The pleas, by which men delude themselves into expectations inconsistent with this doctrine, I shall particularly consider in some farther reflections on this scripture. I shall at present intreat you to agree with me in this conclusion from what has been said, that the day is appointed in which God will judge every action of men in righteousness. Let us not amuse ourselves with vain persuasions, that he will remit any thing of the strictness of his precepts, or act with more indulgence to sin than he has promised. Let us be convinced that the ways of God are equal, and our ways unequal.

He has set open the gate of life, and invited us to enter in. He has plainly directed us to the way that leads to it, and offers us the assistance of his spirit in all the difficulties of the journey : and if we miscarry under
so

so many advantages, our blood must be upon our own head, and we must blame only ourselves for our damnation. Which God of his infinite mercy give us all grace seriously to lay to heart in this our day, to whom, &c.



C

Several



Several Pleas against the Scripture
Terms of Salvation considered and
answered.

GALAT. vi. 7.

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked:
for whatsoever a man soweth, that
shall he also reap.*



IN a former discourse on these words, I endeavoured first to confirm to you the assertion of the apostle——That God will impartially render to every man according to his works, *whatsoever we sow, that must we also reap.* The proof of this I attempted by shewing, that it was agreeable to the reason and expectations of mankind, to the perfections and sovereignty of that God whose creatures and subjects we are, and to the nature and ends of religion, that there should be such an impartial revivall of human actions as this doctrine supposes, a day in which rewards and penalties should be adjudged in exact proportions

portions to the observance or neglect of the divine laws. That it was necessary these should be future, and that God has expressly assured us they shall be eternal. That secondly this proceeding, which God has prepared us to expect, is certainly equitable, since it is the decision of infinite justice; and at the same time consistent with the most extensive goodness and compassion; since it is also under the conduct of infinite mercy, and consequently that it is an effect of the most dangerous presumption to imagine that God will repeal any part of his laws in our favour, or act contrary to those declarations he has made to the world. That therefore we must prepare ourselves for an accurate and punctual execution of them, to reap what we have sown, whether of sin death, or of obedience eternal life; but this is a doctrine so unacceptable to our corruption, that notwithstanding the equity, the compassion, and even the certainty of it, yet men have suffered the slenderest probabilities to delude them into contrary expectations. It is with fondness they entertain the most unsupported notion or expedient that undertakes to soften the terms of salvation, and reconcile the justice of the Deity to their vices.

A particular consideration of these several pleas and hypotheses of sin, is what I reserved for the employment of your present meditations.

And here the first that occurs to us is that treacherous doctrine of the church of *Rome*, of pardons and indulgences for the living, and masses for the dead. And it is no wonder so pleasing a scheme of religion should be so easily and so readily received, a scheme which gratifies the lusts, the idleness, and security of men, and gives them confidence in their expectations of futurity: while it persuades them that God may be rendered favourable to them, and all the terrors of his justice be appeased, without any labour or application of their own. *That one may sow, and another reap*, and their salvation be secured by the imputed services and purchased intercessions of other men.—But has not God decreed, *that the soul which sinneth, that shall die?* And who shall reverse the unalterable decision? or, can any one indeed do more than his own duty? After we have done all, we must be forced to confess that we are unprofitable servants: far from earning more of God than our own salvation, we must at last owe even that, to his pardon and compassion. Alas, who or what
is

is that creature, who can plead purity before that God who putteth no trust in his saints, *who charges his Angels themselves with folly, and in whose sight even the heavens are not clean? What is man then that he should be clean? or he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?* The Holy Ghost has assured us, that even the *righteous shall scarcely be saved*: nay that they themselves are not saved by works (*i. e.*) by a perfect unfinning obedience, but by the grace of God in Christ, by the mercies and forgiveness of the gospel covenant: so that every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. But the scripture has also further assured us, that in heaven are many mansions, different degrees of reward and glory; so that, supposing it possible for any one to perform more than God has precisely commanded, and that this is acceptable to him, yet God can repay it to the full, and if there be any merit in the service, it would be even injustice in him not to reward it in proportionable allotments of happiness to him who performed it. But supposing the contrary of even all this, that any one can do more than God has required, or than Heaven can reward in the person who performs it; by what conveyance can this

overplus of merit be demised, or made over to another? would not the plea be ridiculous even before a human judicature, if a criminal should confess all the offences he was charged with, but pretend to excuse them by producing another that had done more than the law required, and desire the abundance of his friend should atone for his deficiencies, would human justice be appeased by so ridiculous a defence? *And shall not God, the almighty judge of all the earth, do right?* This is indeed a gainful, and no doubt, to the sinner, an acceptable doctrine, but without the least foundation in the known will of God.

Equally groundless is the pretended efficacy of masses for the departed sinner: neither can any instance of such applications be produced from the canonical scripture; they refer us indeed to some passages in the apocryphal writings, which seem to countenance such a practice; but then those books have for good reasons been rejected from the canon of scripture, and were so by the *Jews* themselves, who were the best judges of it, and from whom we received it, and consequently no authority thence is conclusive. And if the truth of the history be allowed, all we can infer from it is, that there was a corrupt practice

tice then crept into the *Jewish* church, which they had no warrant for from the writings of the law or the prophets. And as for that prayer of *St. Paul* for *Onesiphorus*, 2 Tim. i. 18. we have no reason to believe *Onesiphorus* was then dead, and we are very ready to join with them in praying for any man while living, that he may find mercy in the day of the Lord.

The import indeed of this prayer is no more than a Christian and friendly wish, and which might be offered for either living or dead, without the least presumption that such a wish would atone for the sins of the deceased, or alter his condition with respect to God's favour. But besides these superstitions of the church of *Rome*, some who have reformed from them have fallen into opinions equally dangerous to religion, and equally inconsistent with the doctrine of the apostle. Such are those who ascribe our justification to a mere speculative act of faith, exclusive of all regard to our works. Whereas the true extent of that most comfortable doctrine of justification by faith, is no more than this; that since our fallen capacities make it impossible for us exactly to fulfil such a law of works, as it is agreeable to the divine purity to prescribe to us, God has out of his infinite compassion

possession to our infirmities, made a new covenant with us in his son, by which he has promised to accept of repentance instead of innocence, and justify our sincerity, tho' it be short of perfection: the merits and satisfaction of Christ shall atone for our failings, and faith in his blood supply all unavoidable defects in our obedience. But tho' no one can glory in works, and claim salvation as due to them, because no one can perform all that is his duty, and even what he does perform will be attended with imperfection; yet still we are obliged to do all that we are able: neither will our faith in Christ, or the covenant of the gospel, any further avail us, than as it will atone for the imperfection of our service, and render that great work of righteousness, our repentance, effectual to salvation. We shall still be accountable to God for every action of our lives; and wherever we have committed any sin which we might have avoided; or neglected any duty which we might have performed, and not sincerely repented of the offence, we have contracted a debt to God which neither the mercies of the gospel will forgive, nor the satisfaction of Christ discharge. We must expect to reap what we have sown, and perish with the workers of iniquity. Another

Another error of affinity to this, and equally inconsistent with the assertion in my text, is the doctrine of absolute irrelative predestination; which supposes that God by a partial decree has resolved the salvation of such particular men, and the destruction of others, let them live or act how they please; an opinion which equally discourages piety, and hardens profaneness; while it proposes one event to the righteous and the wicked, independent on our own applications, and which neither the prayers of the devout, nor the tears of the penitent can change.—But how is it possible to reconcile this partial doctrine, with that strict justice God has declared he will execute in the last day? or with what consistency can he be said to judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his works, who, without any regard to their lives and actions, shall, by a mere arbitrary decision, adjudge one to eternal happiness, and another to eternal misery. It is indeed to be allowed that the prescience of God implies an exact fore-knowledge both of his own and our actions, and consequently a fore-sight, or if you will a pre-determination of the final allotments of men. But this cannot be conceived by us in a manner
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consistent with the divine justice, unless we suppose the latter to be grounded on the former, and that God has therefore from all eternity determined the final portion of men, because he has from all eternity known how they would determine their own free and voluntary choice of good and evil, whether they would comply with, or refuse the offers of his grace, whether they would serve God or not.

But however this question is resolved, yet no one can hence raise any just conclusion which can encourage him to hope for mercy while he continues in sin; because the only argument we can have for our being included in that happy number finally chosen, is the conformity of our lives to the law of God. *He who doth righteousness* (says the apostle) *is of God, and he who committeth sin is of the devil.* Other mark or criterion have we none, but what will deceive us: so that this doctrine of irrelative predestination may very probably endanger the salvation of men, while it suggests despair to the penitent, and presumption to the sinner; but can never be applied to the consolation of any, or supply us with any other motive for our confidence towards God, than what must arise from the reflection

reflection on our own works, since by them only our election can be judged of.

But still there is another delusion of equal danger, and I am afraid of more extensive influence than the former, which we are not to charge particularly upon any sect or distinction of Christians, but to lament as an effect of our corruption, and a melancholy instance of the fondness of our nature for sin—and that is a persuasion that God is too merciful to condemn a man eternally for a transitory offence, an error which has had the unhappy advantage of being countenanced by some great names, and which the proneness of man to hearken to every project of reconciliation with his vices, too much inclines us to entertain. The mercy and goodness of God is a subject that employs our thoughts and hopes with the greatest pleasure; it is a speculation that sooths our fears, and speaks peace to our souls; and it is therefore no wonder if we indulge our reflections on the deity as kind and benevolent, as the object of our love, the author and contriver of our happiness; but it is with the utmost regret and reluctance that the mind is persuaded to change the prospect, and turn its view to the terrors of his justice, to look upon him as armed with the severity

severity of a judge, and the impartial avenger of all transgressions of his law.—But we are to take care lest while we magnify his mercy, we forget his justice. All the attributes of God are equally infinite, equally essential to him, and are to be conceived by us in a manner consistent with one another. It may perhaps seem too severe to us that God should condemn a mortal frail creature for a compliance with a passion, by which his own happiness is no more affected than it is promoted by our service. Or, if his justice cannot be satisfied without some punishment, yet that an eternal penalty is an over-proportioned resentment of a temporal crime. But God judgeth not according to man's judgment. He, who best knows the exact value or demerit of human actions, has declared death, eternal death to be the wages of unrepented sin. And since the reward promised to a temporal obedience is eternal happiness, it is but just and equitable that the punishment of our contempt should bear a proportion to it. The degrees of guilt are to be estimated not only from the nature of the offender, but also from the nature of the person who is offended by it. For it is absurd to say that a crime receives no aggravation from the dignity

nity of the person against whom it is committed, as an offence against a prince or magistrate is of a higher nature than the same when it affects only a private man ; and what is still farther allowed to add to the aggravation of a crime is, if it be committed against obligations of nature or gratitude to the contrary : how inconceivably then must all these circumstances inflame the guilt of offending man, whose sins are a defiance to the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth, an affront to that goodness to whom he owes his life and breath, and all things, who has endeavoured to engage his obedience by all the tenderneſſes of love, and the most endearing instances of bounty and compassion ? These are considerations which must all be taken into the account, and duly stated, before we can presume to say there is injustice in the most high, that the penalties affixt to our sins are greater than they deserve.

In sum, whatever our weak and imperfect reasonings may suggest to us in this speculation, let us reflect that we are poor dependent creatures in the hands of an almighty creator : let us remember that we have forfeited all claim or right to happiness, when we broke the just conditions of that covenant by
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which we held it; it is not for us animated dust and ashes to prescribe the terms on which God shall again receive us into favour, or argue the justice of his decisions: and since he has positively denounced eternal misery to the breach of his laws, it is our duty to acquiesce in the sentence, and bless his mercy for the means of escaping, he has put in our power. God has been wanting in no expression of tenderness to the sons of men; he has prescribed a righteous law to our observance, and furnished us with capacities to obey it; and wherever our infirmities make us unequal to the discharge, he has given us a Saviour whose righteousness shall be imputed to us, and the sacrifice of whose blood shall atone for our failings. He offers to support our weakness by the assistance of his spirit, and permits us to retrieve our miscarriages by repentance; and that nothing might be wanting to encourage us in duty, he has engaged our obedience by a promise of the greatest rewards that can be proposed to an intelligent and immortal being: and can we farther want instances of his affection for our happiness? can a God do more for his creatures, or a father for his sons? can the obstinate sinner, who despises the riches of so much goodness,
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be used with too much severity? or is it un-equitable or unmerciful that he, who rejects so compassionate a proposal of salvation, should suffer the vengeance of a slighted and abused God? No farther imaginable provision could be made for the happiness of a free and voluntary agent, and had he taken away the liberty of our obedience and made us necessarily good, what use had there been of precepts? and how could infinite justice have rewarded our observance of a law, which we could not transgress? Let us then be assured that those resolutions he has revealed to us in his word, he will punctually fulfil. Infinite mercy and infinite justice were consulted in the making his laws: every argument for compassion was then weighed and considered by him, and since (as I observed) they did not then prevent the enacting the law, no imaginable reason can be given which should prevent the execution of it. But if we will still flatter ourselves in contrary expectations, we do but delude ourselves: God will impartially act by the rule he has established, *Whatsoever we sow that shall we also reap. He that by patient continuance in well doing waits for glory, and honour, and immortality,*

immortality, eternal life; but tribulation and anguish shall be upon every soul of man that doth evil.

Give me leave then in the last place to persuade you to apply what has been offered on this subject, by giving it an immediate influence on the conduct of our lives.

If then God will be thus strictly impartial as the scripture has represented him, if every disobedience of men will receive a rigorous allotment of punishment from the divine justice, *What manner of men ought we to be in all holiness and godly conversation?* With what fear and trembling should we apply ourselves to work out our salvation, and make our calling and election sure? Methinks that should awaken and astonish the security of the sinner, to reflect that every offence he commits will be resented and revenged by a just and almighty God: that a constant register is kept of all his miscarriages, which in the great day of account will be particularly produced, and receive an irreverfible sentence from the righteous judge of heaven and earth. It may perhaps seem too rigorous to us that the supreme happiness of man should be
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made thus difficult to him, and depend on so exact a performance of the *laws of God*: but salvation is the gift of God, which as such he might bestow on what terms he pleased: and be we assured he has not raised the price above the value of it; neither are the conditions so hard as our laziness would represent them, but proportioned to our abilities with so much justice and compassion, that it is our own fault if we miscarry. And if we will still foolishly neglect the means before us, and delude ourselves with fond presumptions on the unrevealed mercy of God, and a groundless confidence, in applications to which he has no where promised success, we must be content to take the consequence upon ourselves. Let none therefore deceive us with any of those weak pretences which seem to widen the gate of life, and soften the terms of salvation. But let us with the utmost vigour and resolution press forward in the old, however narrow, paths to which God in his word has directed us; and if ever we are inclined to think more favourably of our condition, than a just reflection on our lives would encourage: if we are tempted to hope for the divine mercy, while

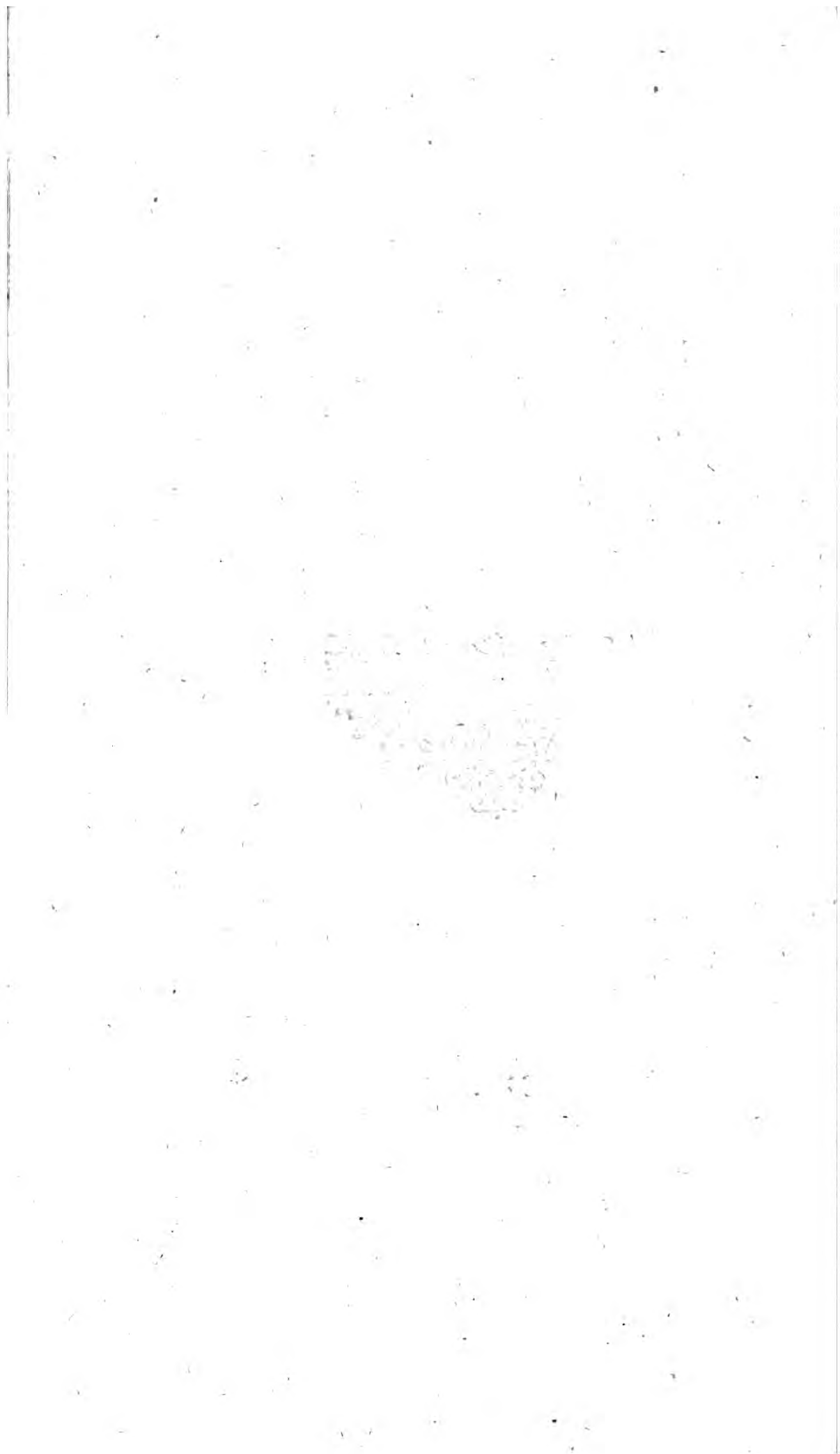
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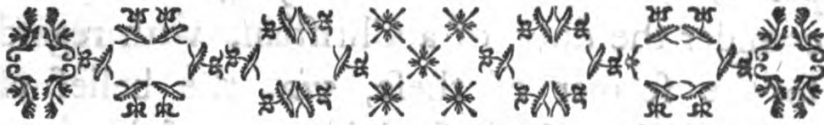
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our works are evil, nay while we continue in any one unrepented sin, let us reject the suggestion as the artifice of an enemy that would ruin our souls, and cheat us of our salvation. God has assured us by his son and his apostles, that he has declared unto us his whole will, and let us not pretend to be wise above what is written, and to know more of his resolutions than he has thought fit to acquaint us with.—He has told us that if we sincerely apply ourselves to obey and serve him in the duties he has required from us, that there is laid up for us a crown of life. This promise his veracity, in which is no variability nor shadow of changing, will most infallibly make good to us. Neither can we with any justice hope he should remit his penalties, if we violate the conditions he has prescribed. For as for that nice distinction that God is not obliged not to be better than his word, it may perhaps be applicable to human determinations, which many unforeseen accidents may make it adviseable to reverse, but cannot without great presumption be applied to the immutable counsels and decrees of God. No——be we assured that as our judge is not unrighteous to forget our
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works and labour of love, so neither shall the ungodly and sinner escape the woes he has denounced against them: the one shall certainly receive those joys he has prepared for them who love and obey him, the other be unalterably fixt in that eternal state of torment which awaits the objects of his displeasure.







The Nature and Reasonableness of Christian Faith.

R O M. X. 10.

*For with the Heart Man believeth unto
Righteousness, and with the Mouth
Confession is made unto Salvation.*



THE first instructions of the Christian religion inform us, that the engagement it lays us under consists of two parts—The belief of certain truths proposed to our faith, and the observance of certain duties prescribed to our practice. Our compliance with both these articles of that covenant we enter into with God is necessary to secure our title to those favours and advantages which he on his part proposes to our hopes; our obligation to both is equal, and a failure in either will be fatal to our expectations. The words of the a-

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postle,

postle, I have now read to you, lead us to consider the duty of a Christian, with regard to the former of these, *viz.* the belief of those truths which God has proposed to our faith. In treating them I shall consider

First, What is meant by believing with the heart.

Secondly, I shall enquire into the object of this belief.

Thirdly, I shall consider upon what evidence we are required to believe.

Fourthly, What is implied in confessing with the mouth.

Fifthly, How necessary these two acts of our faith are to righteousness and salvation.

First, What is meant by believing with the heart. It appears from the verse before my text that the apostle here, by believing, means assenting to such truths as are proposed to our faith by the gospel, upon the authority of God, affirming them to us. By believing these truths with the heart is meant that internal spiritual act of faith, by which we acknowledge the veracity of God, and submit our assent to the testimony of his revelation.

More particularly this expression implies,

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1st, Assenting to these propositions without any scruple or diffidence of the truth of them. For since we acknowledge the gospel revelation to be from God, every proposition or article contained in it is affirmed to us by his authority; and reason itself will no more suffer us to doubt of the truth of what he affirms, than to doubt of the being of a God; since it is implied in the very notion of a God that he can neither deceive, nor be deceived; but this will fall under farther consideration.

2^{dly}, This believing in the heart implies such a persuasion as will engage men to act agreeably to it. Men may profess to believe the revelation of the gospel, and that its words are the law of the Most High, but unless their actions are correspondent to this profession, we can esteem it as no better than an hypocritical pretence to serve some present or secular interest. Nay, what is more, men may really assent to every article of the creed when proposed to them, and contend very zealously in defence of them, yet never make any useful or moral conclusion from these truths for the conduct of their lives. But such men's religion is only in their heads, it has never yet reached the heart, or had any
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influence on their affections. If the Christian faith be truly rooted in the heart, it will bring forth the fruits of righteousness and holiness. *Shew me thy faith without thy works* (saith St. James) *and I will shew thee my faith by my works.* And we may depend on St. Paul's rule, that wherever we see a departing from the living God, there is an evil heart of unbelief, a secret reserve of infidelity at the bottom.

The object of this belief, which is the *Second* thing we proposed to consider, is in general every truth revealed to us by God. Whatsoever the divine wisdom has thought fit to inform us in, whether it relates to his own unspeakable nature and perfections, his counsels and resolutions, or to our duty and moral conduct, we are without hesitation to believe upon the authority of the revealer. I mean moral propositions as comprehended in the general object of our faith, because though these are deducible from principles of natural reason, yet when they are assented to as revealed by God, such assent is properly an act of faith: and it is certain the far greater part of mankind, having neither leisure nor abilities to trace out these conclusions by regular deductions of reason, have under all dispensations received

received them from authority: and he who assents to them because a wise, a righteous, and a holy God has affirmed them, gives as good a reason for his assent, as he who deduces their proof from moral principles. But because the object of faith has been more usually restrained to speculative propositions, (*i. e.*) such as do not immediately assert any practical truth, and the apostle in the words before us has a manifest regard to such, I shall confine myself to the consideration of them. The apostle indeed more particularly refers himself in this place to the two great articles of the Christian system, the mission and resurrection of Christ. The belief of these is first and primarily necessary, as without which we cannot be said to be Christians: but we are not hence to conclude that our assent to other articles is unnecessary. On the contrary, the belief of every other is implied, as a consequence of our assent to these; inasmuch as he who believes Jesus to be the son of the Most High, and that God in testimony of his mission raised him from the dead, must also believe whatsoever he taught as of divine authority: and consequently, whatsoever article we find delivered in scripture, either by our Lord himself, or by his apostles after he was
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risen from the dead, and had commissioned them to preach in his name, is to be received as the object of our faith. The great question that occurs to our thoughts on this subject is, how we may certainly know whether any proposition be a truth revealed to us by God or not; when it is our duty to believe, and when to withhold our assent; and this I shall consider under my third inquiry—Upon what evidence we are bound to believe.

And *First*, In these articles of faith we are not to expect that the proposition should be offered to our assent by internal arguments drawn from the nature of the thing, because our assent to a conclusion so proved, would not be faith but science. All that the most laborious researches, and the most improved abilities of a human understanding can certainly affirm of God, is comprehended in this, that he is a being possessed of all possible perfection. Neither is natural reason capable of any sure conclusion in theology, but what it must deduce from this idea as its principle. And yet we must acknowledge that there may and must be innumerable truths concerning the nature, acts, and manner of existence of God, which cannot be inferred from that definition: and at the same time we cannot
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but confess, that these may be revealed or made known by God, and when they are so revealed, we are bound to believe them in virtue of that natural principle arising from the divine idea, that God is a being infinite in goodness and truth; and consequently such as cannot and will not deceive us. It is therefore absurd in us to deny our assent to an article of this nature, because he who proposes it cannot answer that question of *Nicodemus, how can these things be?* Because it is a subject we are wholly unqualified to judge of, unable by the most intense application of our faculties to comprehend. Where the sublime truths of the gospel, such as might have been discovered by the natural use of our reason, God Almighty, who never makes use of extraordinary means, where ordinary would be as effectual, would either have left us to trace them out by the same natural methods of inquiry, by which we inform ourselves in other things, or at least have offered them to us as deductions from natural principles. But because these truths are such as exceed our capacities to comprehend or conceive, therefore did God recommend them to our assent by arguments fitted only to assure us of the divine and therefore infallible authority of the teacher. We are not therefore

fore to expect that these great truths concerning the nature, acts, and counsels of God, should be clearly and distinctly apprehended and understood by us. *This, in the words of the Psalmist, is a knowledge too wonderful and excellent for us, we cannot attain unto it.* This must be reserved for the perfection of our glorified state, when faith shall be changed into intuition, when we shall see God face to face, and know even as we are known.

The apostle St. *Peter* indeed in these words in *1 Peter* iii. 15. *Be ready always to give answer to any man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you,* may seem to imply that the articles of our faith are capable of being explained and accounted for from principles of reason: but the apostle's meaning can be extended no farther than this, that we are capable of giving a reason why we believe them, *viz.* because they are revealed to us by God; than which a stronger argument cannot be given for human assent. The only argument therefore, that can demand our belief of these mysterious incomprehensible truths, is the authority of God affirming them to us. But because a divine revelation may be pretended where the Lord has not spoken, the whole force of this argument

gument depends on the proof and evidence of the fact, that the proposition required to be believed is really revealed by God. And here we are at full liberty to use our reason ; nay, it is our duty to demand full evidence that the teacher (upon whose authority we receive them) acts by a divine commission ; to search and examine his credentials by the strictest rules of enquiry, and try what manner of spirit he is of. If the doctrine he advances be manifestly calculated to promote his own secular interest, and if God does not give any outward attestation to it, we have then reason to *suspect* his veracity : and if he asserts any thing inconsistent with the perfection of the Deity, or plainly contradictory to any certain, moral, or natural truth, we may then be assured that this doctrine is not from God, but a pretence and imposture ; but if upon the nicest scrutiny it appears, that we can have no just suspicion of his sincerity ; if he asserts nothing contrary to the clear and indubitable maxims of reason, or to any former allowed revelation ; and if he performs such works as none but God could enable him to perform, we have then all the evidence that can be possibly given us that
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he is sent by God, and consequently is to be believed in whatsoever he shall affirm to us from so high an authority.

That the gospel revelation was thus proved and attested, and that we have all the evidence that it was so, that a fact of that nature and at such a distance from us can admit, I shall at present presume on as granted me.—Whatsoever therefore is asserted in the scriptures, we who are Christians acknowledge ourselves bound firmly to believe as a divine truth: and whatsoever is contrary to them, we are assured is not a revelation from God; since if an angel from heaven shall preach to us any doctrine inconsistent with them, we are expressly commanded not to believe him. But since the generality of deceivers pretend to deduce their errors rather from this scripture, than a new revelation, we are exposed to a fresh difficulty, lest we be seduced into heresy whilst we think we assent to the words of God. The scriptures, as all other writings, are liable to various interpretations from the different capacities, artifices or prejudices of men. Now it is certain that no expression is capable of more than one true intended sense; and since all deceivers pretend to have discovered that exclusive of the rest, it is as necessary
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to a right direction of our faith to ascertain what sense of scripture we are bound to receive, as to distinguish a real from a pretended revelation—-In order to give some rules for our direction in this inquiry, I desire to premise,

Secondly, That the sense of the scripture is to be determined by the same rules that the sense of all other books is, the common ordinary acceptation of the words and phrases, together with such helps and assistances as a rational man will in other like cases apply to. That sense which by these methods we arrive to, we are bound to believe; and also whatever is a clear and necessary consequence from the proposition so understood.

The first rule then, that I would offer to persons qualified to judge in this inquiry, is carefully to distinguish such propositions, the subject of which is above our reason, from such whose subject we are perfectly capable of judging of. This distinction some late enemies of the Christian faith have endeavoured to confound; but the justness and importance of it has been asserted beyond all possibility of contradiction, by an eminent light of this church, the late excellent Mr. *Norris* *. In subjects above our reason,

† Mr. *Norris* of Reason and Faith.

it is not an objection sufficient to withhold our assent, that we cannot comprehend why such a particular is affirmed, provided the proposition be clearly revealed in scripture: thus when it is plainly asserted in scripture, that the son of God was made man; that the father, the word, and the spirit are one God. This proposition I am bound to believe according to the acknowledged sense of those words, tho' infinitely above my comprehension; because the manner of God's existence, and what natures he can unite to his own, are subjects which I am utterly unqualified to judge of: what is affirmed of them may be true in the sense assigned, for any thing I or any human understanding can produce to the contrary: and if I am in general assured of the Christian revelation, and that these words are a part of it, I can have nothing to object against the interpretation on this account, that I cannot clearly apprehend why the proposition it delivers is affirmed. And I would here farther observe, that the words, made use of in scripture to propose these mysterious truths to us, cannot exactly and adequately represent them according to those ideas which they have in a superior understanding. For all our words being
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only the signs or marks of our ideas, they cannot in their proper signification convey to our mind any other idea, than those they usually stand for in common use of language. Now we having no adequate idea of objects which exceed the measure and proportion of our understanding, it is impossible we should ever devise any words which can exactly represent them to us. And yet God himself, in the revelation of any truth to us, is obliged to express himself in such words as familiar use has made intelligible to us; but then these words for the reasons above given cannot be used exactly in the same sense, as when applied to those ideas they were first intended by men to signify, and must therefore be understood in a meaning only analogous to that, in as near a resemblance indeed as the disproportion of the subjects will admit; but still at a wide distance from the real nature of those subjects, and the ideas which they have in a superior understanding to ours. From whence it is evident, that he who will confine those words of scripture, which express these sublime truths to us, strictly to the same sense which they have in common applications, must argue from a supposition which is utterly false, and perplex himself with numberless errors.

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Thus if any one should object from the common acceptation of the words against the catholic sense of that article that—Christ is the son of God, and argue from the nature and properties of such generations as occur to us, it is plain his reasoning must be inconclusive; because an eternal generation is what we can have no idea of, and consequently could never frame any word to express; and therefore tho' the words begotten and son come the nearest of any that could be used to express the relation between those two persons of the trinity; yet it is trifling to confine them precisely to the same sense when applied to a supernatural subject, as they have when applied to natural.

From all which it follows, that no certain conclusion can be drawn against the received interpretation of such scriptures, by arguments taken from the common import of the words in other applications, because it is impossible they should have here exactly the same signification; and therefore unless we have some other objection against the sense assigned, we are obliged to admit it. But then

Secondly, Tho' we are not to reject any interpretation of scripture, because the proposition it asserts is above our reason; it being
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impossible for us to comprehend all truths relating to a being so infinitely removed from us ; yet we are not to receive any interpretation as a divine truth, which manifestly contradicts our senses, or any evident conclusion of reason. Thus if any one comes with a pretence of scripture, and requires me to believe that a natural body can be in two places at one time, or that a part of such a body is equal to the whole, this is a subject I am capable of judging of, the impossibility is evident, and I am bound to reject him as an impostor, whatever appearance of scripture he may produce for his assertion ; because I cannot be so sure that any writing is a divine revelation, as I am that these propositions are false. It is for this reason we reject from our belief the doctrine of transubstantiation. Had the words of Christ been alledged in a matter merely above our reason, we might, nay, if they were plain, we must have assented to it. But when they are produced to confirm a flat impossibility, we are sure that cannot be the sense of them (nay this is a doctrine incapable of being proved by the argument of a divine revelation.) For suppose our Saviour himself had intended this sense in the words appealed to, and argued with his

hearers that what he delivered was the word of God, and therefore to be believed, he must have proved that it was the word of God, by working a miracle, (*i. e.*) producing the power of God in confirmation of it. Suppose for instance his first miracle, the turning water into wine; but alas! this could not convince any one: for they might as reasonably believe that the wine which they saw and tasted to be wine was still water, as that the wine which they saw and tasted to be wine was nevertheless blood: they had but the testimony of their senses against one conclusion, and they had the same testimony of the same senses against the other. If therefore a miracle itself could not convince us of this change, neither can the scripture, which derives its authority from such miracles, convince us of it: and consequently, the words must receive some other sense consistent with the use of those faculties God has given us to discern between truth and falsehood, and not destructive of the credit of the scriptures themselves. But to proceed.

Thirdly. In assigning the sense of scripture, it is our duty seriously to apply ourselves to such helps and assistances as are thought reasonable in other enquires of the like nature, and adhere with a resolute faith to that sense
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which in the result of our best applications appears true. To persons of superior learning and capacities, the meaning of scripture is to be determined by the import of the original, the connexion and agreement of other parts of scripture, and especially by the sense in which it was understood by the first ages of the church. For it is not imaginable that the apostles left those to whom they committed the churches of their conversion uninstructed in the meaning of those writings which they delivered to them as the rule of their faith, to which we must add the much greater advantages they had in such inquiries than are possible to us: the language was familiar to them, the force of every expression, and the particular occasions they referred to known, the apostolical traditions fresh and entire, and many writings of the apostolick age were in their hands which are now lost; and consequently it is reasonable to acquiesce in their interpretations as more agreeable to the intended sense, than any learning or application can supply us with at this distance.

With respect to persons of inferior capacities, the

1st Rule is to believe whatever is clear and plain, whenever they have any doubt (and

ever they are tempted to receive any sense different from that commonly taught in the church, they ought always to doubt) the only recourse that can be devised for them is to consult those who are appointed by Christ to be their guides, and who, from their greater capacities or more particular application to these studies, they have reason to presume must understand these things better than themselves: St. *Peter* tells us that *there are many things* in his brother *Paul's* epistles *which they who are unlearned and unstable, wrested, as they did also the other scriptures, to their destruction,* 2 Pet. iii. 16. Where it is observable that want of learning and stability are given as the reasons why men mistake the sense of the scriptures; and that such mistakes are dangerous it is plain, for it is to their destruction: whence it follows, that they who want learning should in any doubt of the meaning of a scripture, not too rashly determine the sense of it, but apply themselves to those who have, and with humility hear their reasons, who may possibly clear up that which was intricate to them before.

Not that I would have men resign themselves blindly to the authority of any person, how great or how knowing soever; but when
they

they have any doubt in themselves, or are pressed by any other man from an appearance of scripture to desert any article they have been taught to believe, it is their bounden duty to consult those who are over them in the Lord, and are set apart to the study of the scriptures; and where the reasons are equal to those suggested by their own mind, or offered by other men, to submit to their authority: in short, where the point before them is such as they are concerned to be resolved in, and they must be determined by some authority or other, to prefer theirs. And if any one who has thus applyed himself for instruction, to those he was obliged to consult, and had opportunity of consulting, and whom he had reason to believe capable of giving it, shall in the result of his enquiry fall into error, he has done what was in his power, and all that is required of him.

This is no other method, than what we voluntarily and from reasons of prudence and discretion take in other cases. If we doubt concerning any rule of health, we consult the physician: if of the sense of any law, we apply to those learned in that profession: and if in the interpreting of scripture, and consequently regulating our faith by it, we had

humility enough to take the same course, I am persuaded we should have less heresy and contention, and more truth and charity in the world.

Having therefore shewn what is meant by believing with the heart, what is the object of this faith, and upon what evidence we are bound thus to believe; I should now proceed to what I farther proposed to offer to you from this scripture; but I shall only beg leave at present to make a short application of what has been already suggested.

Let us then frequently reflect on this branch of our baptismal engagement, the believing all the articles of Christian Faith. The observation of all the moral precepts of the gospel, without the belief of its doctrines, may indeed make us virtuous heathens, but not good Christians. But then as works without faith will not avail us, so neither will faith without works: without these fruits our faith is dead. If our faith be indeed such a firm and settled conviction rooted in the heart, as the apostle recommends in my text, it will operate by love, and manifest itself in the works of righteousness, and be a principle of universal obedience in our lives.

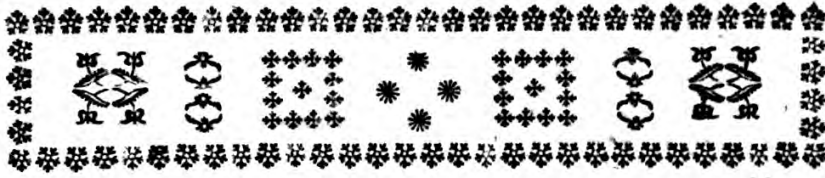
2dly, Let no difficulty of apprehending the
sublime

sublime doctrines of the gospel shake our assent to them, but let us firmly believe because God hath spoken. The apostle arguing with some who would not believe the great article of the resurrection, unless it were explained to them how it was to be performed, how the dead were to be raised, and with what body they were to come, gives them for answer this sharp reproach-----*Thou Fool*----- and is it not amazing folly for a man to dispute the credit of the Almighty? for animated dust and ashes to expect to comprehend the infinite nature, the ways, and works of God? The resignation we owe him as his creatures demands we should not argue with our maker, but believe and obey.

And *Lastly*, since we live in those days of which our Saviour has forewarned us, when many false prophets and false teachers are gone out into the world; all pretending the sacred authority of the word of God in assertion of their errors, let me earnestly remind you of our Lord's caution to take heed that you be not deceived. Though they say to you, lo here is Christ and the truth of his gospel, or lo there, go not after them, neither be led away by them. Let the word of God be the rule of your faith, but let
not

not every pretender to knowledge be your interpreter of it. If you are at any time pressed with the appearance of scripture, which these seducers may produce for their opinions, be not too hasty to hearken to them: it is the sense of scripture, and not the bare letter, must direct your faith. With patience therefore and meekness consult those whom you have reason to think better informed than yourselves, and who are by Christ appointed to lead and instruct you; and above all, offer up your earnest prayers to Almighty God, that he would by his spirit lead you into all truth, preserve you in the purity and unity of the faith, and keep you steadfast in the acknowledgement of that form of sound words delivered unto the saints.





An open Confession of Faith required
of Christians.

ROM. X. 10.

*For with the Heart Man believeth un-
to Righteousness, and with the Mouth
Confession is made unto Salvation.*



IN some former reflections on this
scripture, I endeavoured to explain
what was meant by believing with
the heart, which I observed to you
implied *1st*, A sincere assent of the mind to
such propositions as God is pleased to reveal to
us, without doubt or hesitation. *2^{dly}*, Such
a vigorous lively faith as would engage the af-
fections to God, inflame the soul with divine
charity, and appear in the works of love and
righteousness. I then proceeded to ascertain
the object of this faith, which I in general
defined to be every proposition revealed to us by
God;

God ; but more particularly those sublime articles of the gospel, which distinguish Christianity from all other systems of theology : and then 3^{dly}, I considered to what evidence such assent was required ; when we were to believe, and when to withhold our assent. Under this head I observed to you that the subject of these propositions being many times such as exceed the measure and proportion of our understandings, it is impossible we should judge of the credibility of them by those rules which direct us in other enquiries. The subject is acknowledged incomprehensible by us, such as we cannot certainly determine what may be affirmed of it, and what may not : and consequently, in such cases it is no just objection against the truth of what is proposed, that we cannot perceive the agreement or connexion between the subject and the thing or property affirmed of it ; because there may be such agreement, tho' the subject lying far above the reach and knowledge of our understanding, it is impossible for us to perceive it : and if God, who certainly knows whether there be such agreement or not, affirms it to us, we are surely bound to believe it upon his authority. Where the subject is such as lies within the compass of our faculties ; where
we

we can certainly determine the nature and properties of the thing, either as it is an object of our senses, or liable to the disquisitions of our reason, or the attributes of it are, ascertained by some former revelation, in such a case if any thing be affirmed of it contradictory to our senses, or any evident conclusion of our reason, or the assertions of a former acknowledged revelation, we are not only at liberty to dispute the truth of it, but are bound to reject the pretence of revelation as an imposture; because otherwise we must reverse all criterions of truth and falshood, and leave ourselves no possibility of distinguishing the one from the other---And because the books of the Holy Scripture are confessed by all Christians to be a divine revelation, and all therefore pretend to appeal to them in proof of their opinions, I endeavoured to apply the former rules to the interpretation of those writings, and give some farther directions to preserve us from being imposed on by false pretences of their authority.----- I proceed now in the method I proposed, to consider, *4thly*, What is meant by confessing with the mouth.

This in the first intention of the apostle seems to regard confessing the faith of Christ,

and the several articles implied in that at a time when such a declaration expose the Christian to contempt or persecution from the enemies of his religion. This is what our Saviour meant by confessing him before men, in opposition to denying or being ashamed of him. But in general this expression signifies an explicit and open declaration of our assent to all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. This the church of God always required of those she received into her body by baptism. And therefore we find these articles were very early extracted from the scriptures, and drawn up into certain summaries or creeds, by the several Christian churches, in substance the same, though in terms somewhat differing the one from the other, which their profelytes made open profession of before they were incorporated into the number of the faithful. And in the Western Church that summary was commonly received which is now called the apostles creed.

These creeds or rules of faith, the earliest fathers of the church appeal to, and in all controversies of faith refer those they dispute with to them, as authentick standards of the doctrines of Christianity. This I observe in defence of those primitive guides and pastors
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of the church, from the licentious reflections that of late have been thrown on them as ecclesiastical tyrants, who assumed on the liberty, and imposed on the consciences of their disciples.—Before God indeed the inward assent of the heart and mind made the believer righteous. But the church could be no otherwise assured of such assent, but by an open and verbal declaration of it; without this care, the church could never have preserved itself from heresy: for if no assent to the articles of faith had been demanded, men of the most destructive sentiments might have intruded in her communion and offices, without any possibility of being discerned. And since the Christian church as it had one God, one Lord, one Baptism, so (as *St. Paul* says) it was to have one faith: this unity of faith could no other way be provided for in the society of the church but by establishing some standard of it, to which all who were admitted should declare an unfeigned assent. And afterwards as heresy multiplied in the world, and men prevaricated with those general forms, subscribing or assenting to many articles in a sense different from what was intended in them; more especially in those articles of the divinity and incarnation of our Saviour;

our; it was found necessary to explain them in larger creeds, particularly the *Nicene*, which our church retains in her office of communion; and the *Athanasian*, which on proper occasions she prescribes in her liturgy: and these were afterwards received into the rule of faith, together with the former confessions: but it is a mistake to imagine that these propose any new article to the faith of the church: they only ascertain the sense of the former creeds, and guard against equivocation, by more explicitly asserting what was before implied and intended in those short summaries.

Besides this probationary profession as the condition of baptism, confession of faith indeed has always made a part of the publick worship of God in the Christian church; and therefore we find in the most antient liturgies some form of confession required daily to be repeated in their assemblies.

There are two qualifications which seem necessary to a right performance of this duty.

1st, That this confession be made with knowledge.

2dly, With sincerity: And

First, This confession must be made with knowledge, *i. e.* with an apprehension of what it is we profess we believe. Not that we
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are required to comprehend, *i. e.* clearly and distinctly to understand the reason why the particular expressed in the article is affirmed. This, as I observed before, is in many instances above human capacities, and therefore impossible. As in the article of the incarnation of the Son of God, the Trinity, &c. But tho' we are not required to understand how the unity of the Godhead subsists in a Trinity of persons ; or how the second person of this Trinity united our nature to the divine essence ; yet when we declare our belief of these articles, we are required to understand the import of the proposition we assent to ; *viz.* that by believing in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we believe them to be one God, subsisting in three persons, tho' we cannot comprehend the manner how. And when we say that the Son of God was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin *Mary*, we believe that Jesus, who was the Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, very God of very God, was born of the Virgin *Mary*, besides the natural method of generation, by the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost, tho' we cannot comprehend how this wonderful work was accomplished. For without thus much knowledge, we assent to we

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know

know not what ; it is repeating so many words we mean nothing by, and we might as well rehearse our creed in an unknown tongue.

It is therefore our duty carefully to acquaint ourselves with the sense intended in those articles we profess our assent to, according to the best use of our capacities, and the best improvement of our opportunities of information.

But *2dly*, We are to make this confession with sincerity.—By sincerity I mean not the inward assent of the mind, for this is implied in the first act of faith, believing with the heart ; but an acceptance of the terms and propositions we profess to believe in the sense intended in them, without any equivocation, mental reservation, or other elusion of the intent of those who prescribed them. To act otherwise, is to be guilty of a most impious and deliberate lie, in the most serious and solemn matter, while in words we profess to the church of God, that we believe the truths she teaches, and at the same time reserve to ourselves inwardly a quite contrary meaning. Thus, for instance, should one of those hereticks, who deny the divinity of our Saviour, profess as we do to believe him the Son of God, and yet mean no more but that he is his Son in the same sense that all good
and

and righteous men are so, he would be far from assenting to the truth of that article as taught in this church.—Before we give our publick assent, we are indeed not only permitted, but obliged seriously to examine the agreement of every article proposed with the Scripture, by a judgment of private discretion. Neither will I contend that the sentiments of the church ought to have any farther authority with us in this private examination, than to be allowed as a very probable argument for the interpretation of Scripture whence the article is collected. It is a fair, at least a modest presumption, that so many wise and good men, our proper guides, who are intrusted with our direction, and answerable to God for their misleading us, are not mistaken, and would not deceive us. This is a deference we in all other cases pay to our superiors; and unless any considerable objection appears against what they affirm, their authority is to be submitted to. And as where any such objection either from reason or scripture, appears against the article proposed, we are bound in conscience not to give our publick assent to it; because this would be solemnly affirming what we believe to be false: so for the same reasons when we do come to make a decla-

ration of our faith, either as members of any church, or in order to be admitted members of it, we are not at liberty to impose our own sense, on the terms used, but are guilty of horrible dissimulation and hypocrisy, if we do not assent to the articles proposed to us in the same sense, in which that church is known to teach them.

Proceed we then to the

5th thing I proposed in this discourse, *viz.* to shew how necessary these two acts of faith, believing with the heart, and confessing with the mouth, are to obtain the two great effects ascribed to them in my text, righteousness and salvation.

By righteousness is to be understood our justification or reconciliation from a state of enmity and sin, to a state of grace and favour with God. And that this, according to the terms of the Gospel, must be the effect of such a faith in Christ as is here recommended, is evident from those express testimonies of St. Paul—*We are justified by faith,* and again in another place—*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Much controversy indeed has been raised from the seeming contradiction of this doctrine to that assertion of St. James, where he tells

tells us, *that man is justified by works, and not by faith only*, Jam. ii. 24. But this difference is easily reconciled by the explication I gave of believing with the heart in my former discourse, *viz.* such a persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, as would engage us to act agreeably to it. So that St. *Paul* and St. *James* mean the same thing, *viz.* a faith fruitful of good works, as is evident if we compare the 21st and 23^d verses of the ii of St. *James* with *Heb.* xi. 17. and *Rom.* iv. 17, and 18. where both refer us to the same instance in confirmation of what they assert, *viz.* that of *Abraham* offering his son, and consequently must both mean the same thing—a faith operating by love, and manifested in works of obedience. This is that faith which is rooted in the heart and affections, which was accounted to *Abraham*, and will be imputed unto us for righteousness.

Faith indeed, or assenting to the truths revealed to us by God, is a necessary act of homage we owe to his veracity. *He that believeth these* (as St. *Paul* says) *hath set to his seal that God is true*, and he who denieth or doubteth of these (as the same apostle assures us) *makes God a liar*, since he believeth not the testimony that God has given. And he

who thus affronts the majesty, and blasphemes the attributes of God, renounces his allegiance, and forfeits all title to his favour.

Neither is it sufficient, that we believe some articles of the faith, if we reject others ; for that the greatest hereticks, nay heathens have done : but we must believe all that are known and understood by us, or that we are obliged to know and understand. This obligation indeed, with respect to the extent of it, doth not lie equally on all men. Some general articles may be assigned, without the belief of which, no one can be intitled to the name of a Christian : these every disciple of Christ, even of the lowest capacities, is bound to understand and assent to. But this cannot be esteemed to be all that is required from persons of greater capacities, and who are more fully instructed in the Christian religion. Every doctrine that is taught in the Scriptures was certainly intended to be believed by the disciples of Christ ; and all that we know to be there taught and understood are equally to be believed by us, because all are asserted by the same authority : but all these doctrines are not equally required to be known, understood, and assented to by all,

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It is indeed necessary that some common form or summary of faith should be proposed, as a qualification for men's admittance into the external society of the church: and agreeably (as I observed) certain summaries or creeds were in all ages of the church required to be explicitly professed by those who were received into the church of Christ, by baptism. But we are here enquiring what we are obliged to believe with the heart, and not what we are obliged to confess with the mouth. It is fit that the rulers and pastors of the church should not in the summaries they require to be professed, descend to the very lowest of human capacities, but adopt a form of common use to the common and ordinary apprehensions of mankind. It is fit also that these summaries should comprehend such a foundation of the Christian faith, as, if they are understood and attended to, will lead us into a complete knowledge of that religion. But yet I think we may safely affirm, that many whose capacities will not reach to understand some articles even of the Apostles Creed, may nevertheless know and assent to so much of the Christian faith as may render them acceptable to Christ. And on the other side,

ties may be obliged to assent to several doctrines which are not expressly contained in that creed. With respect therefore to the belief of the heart, we may affirm that every disciple of Christ is precisely bound to assent to all those doctrines, which every Christian as such is obliged to understand and assent to, and either to more or fewer according to his capacities or opportunities of knowledge. To assent to all he does understand, whether he was precisely bound to understand them or not; and to believe no authority affirming any thing contrary to them. But farther, unless this assent affects the heart, we cannot expect righteousness should be affixed to it: without this property, it is only a bare historical faith, such as St. *James* says, *the devils themselves have, who believe and tremble.* They know and believe that Jesus is the holy One of God; and unless our faith has possession of our heart, unless it inclines us to own him for our God and our Saviour, unless it creates in us a firm reliance on his merits and intercession, a graceful adoration of his infinite mercy and sincere resolution of obeying his will, it is no better than the faith of those apostate spirits, and will no more be imputed to us for righteousness than theirs is to them. And *Lastly,*

Lastly, It must be sincere and immoveable, and in that sense too rooted in the heart. No temptations of difficulty or interest must make us depart from it : it must stand the shock of persecutions and reproaches ; of the flatteries of pleasure, and the terrors of affliction. And if through these trials it endures unto the end, it is then that belief of the heart which will evidence our sincerity before God, and enroll us among his righteous and faithful servants. But,

2dly, Let us also consider how this external confession with the mouth, required by the apostle, is necessary to salvation.

That this is necessary in the first instance I gave of it (*viz.* when such confession is required from us by a heathen, or heretical inquisition, as a test of our being Christians) is plain, because not confessing the faith in such a case is renouncing it, and we know *that he who has denied the faith is worse than an infidel*. Our blessed Lord himself has expressly suspended salvation on this profession. *Him* (says he) *who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father and the holy angels, and, on the contrary, He who shall deny me before men, him will I deny*. He indeed, who to procure the favour or avoid the dis-

displeasure of men, shall renounce or refuse to acknowledge any one article of that faith by which he hopes to be saved, may by the same applications be prevailed on to deny all, and consequently must in the sight of God be looked on as a deserter of the Christian religion, is attainted with the guilt and exposed to the penalties of total apostacy—Neither is it to any purpose to plead in such a case that we believe with the heart, for God has expressly demanded to be honoured with our lips too: and not confessing with our mouth is apostacy.

But farther—this external confession is not only necessary to salvation, when the not doing implies a renouncing our faith, but also if we regard it merely as a declaration of our Christianity, because without such a declaration we cannot be admitted in the church of God. Our Saviour, in his last commission to his apostles to convert the world, tells them, that *He who believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he who believeth not shall be damned.* Now it is plain this belief required of such necessity to salvation was an oral or verbal profession of it, because it was such a belief as was required to baptism. For tho' God, who sees the heart, and is witness to
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the most retired thoughts of the mind, might approve a man's faith before such profession of it, yet the church, and ministers of God, to whom the baptism which was to be given upon this faith was committed, were but men, and consequently could no otherways be satisfied of the inward persuasion of any convert, but by his open and verbal declaration of it. And agreeably (as I before took notice) we find an open rehearsal of, or assent to, the creed required from all persons, who at any time came to be baptized into the Christian church; by themselves, if adult, and by sponsors, if infants.

This is what enrolls us into the household of faith, adopts us into the family, and intitles us to the privileges of the Gospel of Christ: and tho' it be not a certain evidence, yet it is a legal presumption that we are inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Let us then in conclusion from what has been offered on this subject, exhort and encourage one another to embrace and hold fast that faith, which God has revealed to us in his gospel.

Were it only proposed to us as a matter of curious speculation, methinks we should value so noble a system of theology, which gives so easy a solution to those great doubts which
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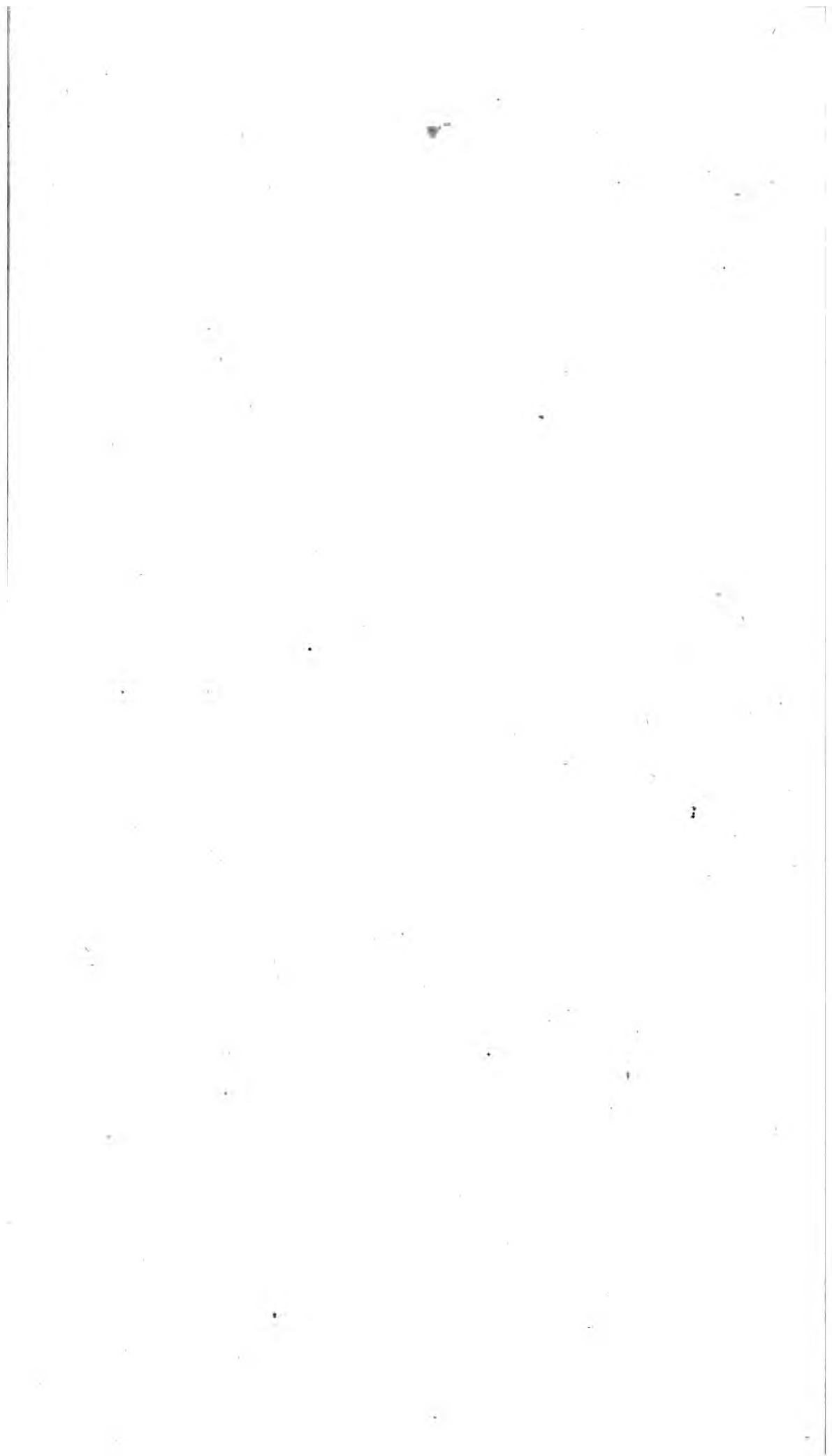
had so long perplexed the inquiries of mankind, and declares to us so much of the nature and will of God, and the future state of the souls of men : a knowledge which the wisest heathen had in vain endeavoured to attain : discoveries which many kings and righteous men have desired to hear, and have not heard—But with what zeal and application should we labour to acquaint ourselves with this divine philosophy? With what openness of heart, and humility of understanding should we receive its doctrines, when we reflect that the happiness of man is the end for which God revealed it to the world? That that righteousness which had in vain been sought for in the works of morality, and that eternal salvation which the hopes of man knew not how to aspire to, is now proposed to us upon a sincere acknowledgment, and a steady confession of this faith.

And let us particularly congratulate one another that we are educated in a church, where the faith of Christ is taught without mixture and corruption : no article either recommended to our belief, or imposed on our profession, but what is founded on the unerring word of God, explained by the purest antiquity. Let us not then be wanting
to

to our own happiness, or neglect to improve so great a blessing. Let us carefully apply ourselves to understand, let us with courage profess, and with constancy adhere to the faith delivered to us: and let us daily reflect on that solemn engagement of our baptism, in which we have sworn to abide in this faith to our lives end.

And *lastly*, Let our faith in Christ be an active, lively principle, working by love. Let it appear that we acknowledge him for our Lord and Saviour, by our reverence of his authority, our zeal for his honour, and our obedience to his commands: then shall God impute it to us for righteousness, then shall we receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.







The Defects of our best Performances
an Argument against Presumption.

LUKE xvii. 10.

So likewise ye, when ye have done all those Things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable Servants: we have done that which was our Duty to do.



IT is, I confess, a very mortifying employment to so vain a creature as man, proud of reason and liberty, to reflect on his own insufficiency to happiness. The first irregular passion that appeared in our nature was a desire of being like God, independent on any foreign support. And though the miseries that attended this vain ambition of our fore-father, soon convinced man that he had forsaken the well of life, and cut himself off from the only
source

source of his happiness ; yet still it was with great reluctance his pride could be brought wholly to recede from its pretensions. He was forced indeed to acknowledge the hand whence his felicity must be derived, but then he would fain receive it rather as a debt than a favour, as a reward he could earn by his services, and for which he gave God an equivalent in his obedience. This is indeed an error of less arrogance than the former, but still too great a presumption for a creature, and especially for so weak and impotent a being as fallen man. It betrays an unmortified remains of the original corruption of our nature, and argues a haughtiness of too much affinity to our first parents transgression. And therefore our Blessed Lord, who was manifested in the flesh to destroy that work of the devil, and restore our nature to the purity in which it was created, is particularly solicitous to apply remedies to this fundamental disease ; to bring every proud and arrogant thought in subjection ; and reduce the soul to a true spiritual humility. And accordingly in his first instructions to his disciples, we find him recommending a poverty of spirit, as a qualification without which none could be admitted into the society of his
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his kingdom—*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God—*

And lest the honour of this new relation to God, and the perfection of those services to which the gospel directs us should become a fresh motive to human vanity, he in my text assures us, that tho' we observe every precept of our religion, and do all that is commanded us, yet even this can supply us with no just pretence to merit; we may still confess ourselves unprofitable servants, and that we have done no more than we were bound in the strictest obligations of duty to perform.

I shall endeavour to assert the justice of this determination of our Lord, by shewing that, even on supposition we could perform all that religion requires from us, yet still we have nothing to presume on : because

1st, The utmost we can do is no more than our bounden duty.

2^{dly}, It is a service unprofitable to God, such as he is no ways advantaged by, and therefore under no obligation of debt to requite.

These are the two arguments used by our Saviour in my text, which I shall enforce.

3^{dly}, By observing that the performance itself cannot be insisted on as an act strictly our own, but must be ascribed to the assistance of divine grace, working in us; and

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that all the value of it is derived from the mediation and atonement of Christ.

And 1st, The utmost we can do is no more than our bounden duty. That God has a full indisputable right to our obedience, and may prescribe to us any actions or services which do not simply exceed our capacities to perform, is a conclusion implied in the very terms of the relation between God and his creature. If he had proposed his laws to us without any encouragement of reward, this subjection had obliged our obedience. Or if we look for motives of gratitude to this service, can any be greater than the unmerited favour of our creation? This is a debt under which we are born, and which our most accurate services can never discharge. And if to this original debt, we add the continual instances of support and protection we receive from his providence, the account must still rise higher upon us, and by these daily and perpetual accessions be amounted to so immense a sum, that the vaineft presumption of man can never hope to repay it. And if we farther consider the great spiritual mercies, with which God introduced the proposal of the gospel to us, his amazing condescension in submitting the Son of his bosom to
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the shame and agonies of the cross, that he might redeem us lost and ruined by sin, and restore us to the happiness we had forfeited, what services of man can be able to return so vast an obligation? Can the purest saint on earth reflect on that hopeless state of misery to which he was fallen, and those wonders of divine love by which he was rescued from it, and presume to say, I have paid my Redeemer all that I owe him? Can he imagine his most punctual observance of those laws he has enjoined is more than he is bound by previous obligations? or can he seriously think that he merits any thing by complying with his own interest in so merciful a proposal?

Alas! all we do, or all we can suffer in obedience to him, can bear no proportion to what he has done and suffered for us. And if our best services cannot discount his past favours, much less can we plead them in demand of his future. And therefore whatever farther encouragement he is pleased to annex to our obedience, must be acknowledged as a pure act of grace and bounty, and received with the humility of supplicants, and not challenged with the insolence of a claim.—

But perhaps tho' we cannot assume any merit to ourselves, for obeying those laws he has

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prescribed to us, yet we can do more than he has commanded us, and by this superabundant service lay obligations on God, and acquire a right to be rewarded for it.—But that no man ever did, or can do more than he is bound to by the gospel, is evident, because he is there strictly obliged to do all the good in his power. The ambition indeed of meriting something of God, has too often induced men to set a religious value on actions which he has no where enjoined—But then what grounds have they to believe that these performances are acceptable to him? The standard of good and evil to us is the will of God, and the only assurance we have that what we do is well pleasing to him is because he has commanded it. *If thou wilt enter into life* (says our Lord) *keep the commandments*—But if men will be wise above what is written, and fondly imagine they can oblige God by observances which he has not directed, they have sowed the wind, and will reap the whirlwind; and must expect to be sent away with that mortifying reproof—*Who has required this at your hands?*—But tho' the utmost we do, and the most perfect obedience we can pay, be no more than we are precisely bound to, both by our natural subjection to his authority, and the gratitude we

owe to his manifold mercies ; yet if God were any ways advantaged by these our services, mankind would have still some pretence to insist on a return, and offer somewhat that divine justice might seem obliged to reward : but this plea also must be entirely discarded, for our Lord has assured us—

2dly, That after we have done all, we are unprofitable. Can a man be profitable unto God (says Eliphaz to Job) as he that is wise is profitable to himself? Or is it any gain to him that thou makest thy way perfect? And so Elihu expostulates with him upon the same principle: If thou be righteous what givest thou unto him, or what receiveth he at thy hands? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man. This they appeal to as a maxim of general and indisputable truth, and very justly infer from it, that allowing all *Job* had pleaded in vindication of himself, yet even the strictest innocence could lay no obligation on God, which from the pure merit of the service he was bound to return. God is a being infinitely happy in the enjoyment of his own perfections, and needs no foreign assistance to complete his fruitions. The same equal, unalterable glory surrounded his throne from all

eternity, before man or the world were created, and it is debasing his idea into that of a creature weak and indigent like ourselves, to imagine his greatness supported by attendants and retinue, or his wants relieved by any external supply. No—our observance of his commands, tho' by his infinite mercy it be a means of advancing our own, is yet no addition to his felicity, which is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and can receive no improvement from the adorations of men or the service of angels; and consequently our most dutiful performances cannot lay any obligation of debt on our Creator, or presume upon any intrinsic value which his justice or gratitude is bound to reward.—But tho' our Lord in this place recommends a modest and humble opinion of our services only from these two arguments, that they are bounden duty, and derive no advantage on God, which was all the application the preceding parable led him to; yet since both he and his apostles have frequently taught us to infer the same doctrine from this farther consideration, that neither the performance nor merit are strictly speaking our own, I shall endeavour

3^{dly}, To give the conclusion, deduced from the two former, the additional force of this argument also. The

The pride of man indeed, so long as he is allowed to assume the performance wholly to himself, will perpetually be trying to explain the notion of merit in a sense consistent with his pretensions, and by some delusive subtilty or other distinguish himself into a title to it; but if it is proved that the performance itself is no otherwise his, than as he concurs with a superior agent, without whose assistance he could do nothing, it is vain for him to assume the merit to himself—Now it is one of the first principles of Christianity, that God is the author of every good and perfect work in us. *Without me* (says our Saviour even to his chosen disciples) *you can do nothing.* And again, *No man can come to me except the Father draw him.* It is from his grace alone we receive ability to will and to do what is right in his eyes.—Much disputation indeed has been spent about common and special, sufficient and irresistible grace, the manner in which it operates upon our souls, and its consistency with human liberty. And perhaps all the difficulties that curious heads may raise in these inquiries will never be wholly accounted for by us in this life. But whether divine grace be equally offered to all or not, or whether he inclines us to duty by a special direc-

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tion of our will, or only by representing the motives of religion in so clear a light to us, that from a just perception we determine ourselves to comply with them, it is certain that nothing is more evidently asserted to us in scripture than that God works in us both to will and to do what is good, and that of ourselves we are not able to think one good thought.—It is too just a character of our fallen and depraved nature, that the thoughts of man's heart are only evil continually. The weakness of all our faculties, and the strong aversion of our will from duty, have been confessed and lamented by the greatest examples of piety. St. Paul himself complains of *this law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him in captivity to sin*: and acknowledges every good and virtuous action to be wholly owing to the supernatural assistance of divine grace; and that the glory of them was not his, but Christ's working in him. It is his Holy Spirit that kindles devotion in our breast, infuses into us good desires, and enables us to execute our pious resolutions. And as the same apostle argues, *What have we that we did not receive? Now if we did receive it, why do we glory as tho' we had not received it?* This
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single reflection should methinks be sufficient to subdue every high and insolent conceit of our own righteousness, that in our best performances to God we give him but of his own, and that even our inclination and ability to serve him we receive from him. But supposing even farther, that the performance might be called our own (as in a sense subordinate to the operations of grace it is acknowledged it may) it is what could be no just motive to our presumption, whatever the action is, because the merit of it is not ours, but Christ's. The covenant, by which God had obliged himself to reward our obedience, was broke and forfeited by our first parents; and by the terms of this second covenant in which we now stand engaged, it is through Christ, and him only, that God is reconciled to accept any service at our hands; it is his intercession, and the price and ransom he has paid to divine justice that has prevailed on him to indulge us a second trial of our obedience; and it is hence alone that our actions can receive any value in his sight: and therefore, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise*—To our Redeemer only belongs the merit and glory of our services, and to us nothing but the gratitude and
humility

humility of pardoned rebels. Far from being able to intitle ourselves to new favours, the utmost we could do could not have atoned for our past apostacy. It is the blood of Christ, wherewith we are sprinkled, reconciles the Deity to our alms and our prayers: it is his righteousness, in whom the Father is well pleased, that inclines him to regard our devotions; and through his mediation only they are intitled to a reward.

Hitherto we have considered human actions under the favourable supposition made by our Saviour, that they were punctually agreeable to the divine laws: and if upon even this supposition we can discover nothing of merit in them, if when we have done all that is commanded us, we have no claim upon the justice of God, and can acquire no other title to his favour but what the divine compassion and the mediation of Christ gives us, how must it mortify all our vain presumptions, to consider human obedience, as it is in fact and reality, full of weakness and imperfection?

Let the most exact piety among us search and examine his own heart, and will he not find his best observances alloyed with frailty and corruption, the most regular and innocent day of his life stained with some transgression;

sion; some evil he has done which he might have avoided, or some good he has omitted which he might have performed? Some guilt or other will occur to the best of us in such a recollection, which will tell us we are debtors to the justice of God, and liable to the penalties of his laws—So that even supposing something of merit might properly be ascribed to any particular act of virtue, yet this could in the general account be no foundation for a claim of reward, because the value of it would be abundantly outweighed by the demerit of our offences.

For there is real demerit in every sin, the wages of which is death, and the guilt of it so extensive, that whoever offends in one point is pronounced guilty of the whole law; and since the purest among men is conscious to himself of numerous offences, shall a confessed criminal insist on merit, shall man born in sin and laden with actual transgressions challenge the justice of his Creator to an account, and demand rewards from that power by whose mercy and forgiveness alone he must escape damnation.

Let us not then think more highly of our services than we ought to think, but humble ourselves before the throne of grace with the
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modesty of creatures and the contrition of sinners; and let us adore the infinite compassion of God in Christ *who has made him sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* In him, and him only, our mixed and imperfect services find acceptance before a pure and holy God. Though in ourselves we are less than nothing, though our righteousness be as filthy rags, yet as we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, as we are washed and cleansed with his blood, God is pleased mercifully to regard our weak endeavours, to encourage our hopes of his favour, and permit us to approach him with the confidence of sons.

Hence then we may collect the true foundation of our title to happiness, and the proper temper of mind with which we may reflect on our own performances. And

1st, The merit of our obedience is what we cannot rely on, because (as we have seen) it is not only imperfect, mingled, and adulterated with sin; but supposing it perfect, it is no more than a debt we are bound to pay from previous obligations, which we can in no instance perform by our own strength, and which, when it is performed, confers no advantage on God, and consequently has no claim

claim on his justice for a return—*Could any law have been given* (says the apostle) *which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.* Could any service have been performed by man which could have earned eternal happiness of his Maker, God would have spared the Beloved of his bosom, the mercy of our redemption would have been superfluous, and Christ had died in vain.— But since no action of a creature could properly earn any thing of his Creator, and since by sad experience of the strength of our nature in its greatest purity, it was impossible for us to perform such conditions of his favour, as would become the holiness and majesty of God to prescribe, our happiness could no other way be provided for, than by the mediation of some person who could offer unto God an equivalent for our offences, satisfy his justice, and intercede for the acceptance of such an obedience as our infirmities left us able to perform.

The last therefore and only recourse of our hopes is in Christ: it is through faith in him, and in virtue of the promises, sealed to us in his blood, that our imperfections are assured of forgiveness, and our repentance is intitled to reward. Neither is there any other name

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or any other merits proposed to man, in whom and thro' whom he may receive pardon and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2dly, Then the proper temper with which we are to reflect upon our performances, is with an humble acknowledgment of our own unworthiness, and a lively gratitude to our Holy Redeemer, by whose atonement our Heavenly Father is reconciled to our services, and by whose grace we are enabled to perform them. But tho' it be an arrogance of the greatest danger to our hopes to say with Job, *I am clean without transgression*, or to insist on the intrinsic merit of our actions; yet we may be conscious to ourselves that we have obeyed God in several instances of duty without presumption, and reflect with comfort on the sincerity of our endeavours without any imputation of vanity; because tho' our obedience have no value in itself, yet it is what is rendered acceptable to God thro' the merits of Christ; and tho' our failings and defects are without number, yet still we may rejoice in a conscience void of offence, if by the sincerity of our repentance we have complied with the terms of the gospel, and intitled ourselves to the pardon offered by it.

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We may then be sensible we have done our duty with arrogance, we may hope favourably of our interest in God, without presumption, and what is the peculiar joy and glory of the Christian dispensation, we may confess ourselves sinners without despair.—

But tho' God will accept of a sincere, tho' imperfect obedience, yet this can be no secure argument to us to remit our applications, or give ourselves up to a lazy and unactive dependance on his mercy. The utmost indeed we can do will be short of our strict duty, but still the utmost we can do we are bound to perform, and the omission of any service in our power is a sin, which if not repented of, will exclude us from any share in that compassion we are so ready to presume on. When the debt is beyond our ability, forasmuch as we have not to pay, God will for Christ's sake forgive; but as far as we are able to discharge it, he demands the utmost farthing. And tho' our best performances cannot have the nature of obligations on God, yet still they are required as conditions of his favour, and as such will be regarded by him: and our happiness, in the final determinations of his justice, will be allotted in proportion to them: he who hath sowed much shall reap
I much,

much, and he who hath sowed little shall reap little.

Let us then press forward to the high mark of our calling, and with a stedfast faith pursue our salvation in those methods to which God has directed us, neither diverted by vain presumptions, nor discouraged by any unreasonable despair. And because of ourselves, as of ourselves, we are capable to do nothing, let us implore the divine assistance, which out of weakness can make us strong, support us in all our conflicts, and make us equal to the difficulties of obedience. And wherever we are conscious to ourselves that we have failed of our duty, and sinned against our Creator, let us, with humble confidence in his promises, intreat him to accept our repentance, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, and dealing with us neither according to our prayers or deserts, but according to our wants, and his own rich mercies in Christ Jesus, in whom he is always well pleased.

To whom, &c.


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The Order and Connexion of moral
and positive Duties.

M A T. xxiii. 23.

— — — *These ought you to have done,
and not to leave the other undone.*

 UR Blessed Lord, among other instances of ostentation and hypocrisy, which he reproves in the *Pharisees*, takes notice of an affectation to distinguish themselves, by a punctuality in some duties relating to the outward polity and support of the church, while they neglected others of greater moment, judgment, mercy, and faith. Their exactness in the former observances, *which descended to the paying a strict tythe, even in things of so minute consideration, as mint, anise and cummin,* he does not disapprove, but declares the omis-

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sion would be sinful. They were things which they ought not to have left undone. But then there were other duties of much higher importance than these, which demanded a prior regard from them, faith, judgment, and mercy; the omission of which, the most scrupulous observance of those other precepts of the law would not excuse. To these their first and principal attention was due; but the other were still duties, and not to be left undone. In which short, but full decision of our Lord, we are manifestly taught,

First, That the precepts requiring faith, justice, holiness, mercy, and the like, are in the order of religion prior, and in their obligation more necessary, than any positive institutions; and particularly than those which provide for the outward œconomy of the church.

Secondly, That the duties of this latter kind are, in their proper order, of necessary obligation, and cannot without sin be omitted by us. And therefore,

Thirdly, That the duties of both kinds are consistent with each other; the one may be performed, without leaving the other undone; and consequently we ought not to separate the one from the other. And, 1st,

1st, The precepts requiring faith, justice, holiness, mercy, and the like, are in the order of religion prior, and in their obligation more necessary than any positive institutions; and particularly than those which provide for the outward œconomy of the church.

In these, considered as inward dispositions or habits of soul, the proper essence of religion consists; and the outward acts of these duties are therefore called religion, because they are the natural presumptive expressions of such inward dispositions of soul. The great end of all religious institutions is to direct and engage men to a just reverence for, and submission to the Deity, and under the awe of his authority, to such a behaviour as will express in ourselves, and diffuse among others, these dispositions of heart towards God; in sum, to engage men to the practice of all those duties which promote the glory of God, our own, and our neighbours happiness.

The first in order among religious duties is faith, . *for*, as the apostle says, *He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them who diligently seek him.* Without a firm persuasion of these

truths, it is impossible to conceive how any man should be induced to love or reverence God, or to pay that religious homage and adoration he owes to him ; or how any moral action performed by him can properly be called religion. A man may be just, temperate, or merciful ; but unless he performs these duties in obedience to a divine command, they are not religion : and to such religious obedience no man would be induced, unless he believed, that by it he should engage the favour, and avoid the displeasure of God.

From faith then, as from their first spring or principle, are derived both those immediate duties of the soul towards God, such as love, honour, &c. and also the whole chain of moral virtues, whenever they are considered under the notion of religion. To plant this principle, to cultivate these fruits of it, and to subdue the reluctances of corrupt nature, which are opposite to them, is the great work of religion : and where these graces are improved into the fixed habit of the soul, and appear in a constant influence on our life and actions, there religion has brought forth its perfect work. These then are to be considered as the primary duties of religion ;
such

such as are in themselves excellent and perfective of our nature; which repair the image of God in us, and render us acceptable to him, and are for their own sake commanded by him. But because the weakness and corruption of man's nature is such, that without the aids and assistances of divine grace, he cannot form in his heart those dispositions towards God, or in his actions perform that obedience which religion chiefly prescribes, it becomes a necessary part of his duty, diligently to use and attend to all such means, as are either by the positive institution of God enjoined, or have in their nature and tendency, a fitness to be applied by the holy spirit, for the derivation of these graces and aids to us. For this end has the Christian religion required our observance of certain positive ordinances, and annexed, by special promise, the graces of the Holy Spirit to them: such are the sacrament of the New Testament. And in this order of means, we are also to consider all duties relating to the outward polity and administrations of the church, by which the Holy Ghost works on us, in a manner suited to our faculties and capacities as reasonable beings. *Faith*, the first and principle of those graces which lead us to God, the Apostle

tells us *comes by hearing*: and therefore, though faith be a duty of much greater dignity and importance than hearing, yet hearing is also necessary as a means to beget faith. *But how* (as the apostle proceeds) *can they hear without a preacher? Or how can they preach except they be sent?* And consequently, it is necessary for the production and preservation of that faith which the gospel teaches, that some persons should be commissioned and appointed to preach it. And since with regard to all those other duties, which we suppose to be of prior obligation, instruction, exhortation, reproof, and an application of the motives of the gospel, are necessary to direct men in the knowledge and extent of what is required from them, and to excite and quicken them in the practice of it, such appointment of preachers is as necessary with respect to all these duties, as it is with respect to faith. And since being formed into a regular society or church, in which some should be set apart and distinguished by office, and by special duty bound thus to instruct men in the laws of God, and admonish, and rebuke such as openly transgress them, and to administer those outwardly ordinances to which the graces of Christian Religion are annexed, is a provision in its nature the most opposite, and

and by the wisdom of God prescribed, as the most effectual to those ends, it becomes the duty of all who profess obedience to those laws of God, to promote the knowledge and observation of which such society was instituted, to be united in such a society, as the proper and appointed means to enable them to obey those laws; and consequently, as members of it, to do every thing in their station, which the nature of such society requires, and which is necessary to the ends for which it was instituted.

In this order then, the duties of our religion lye before us. In the first rank, are faith, reverence, and love of God. In the second, are the moral virtues, such as justice, charity, temperance, humility, &c. as flowing from the former graces, and prescribed to us by the gospel. In a rank subordinate to both these, and as subservient to them, come those duties which we owe as members of the outward society of the church, *viz.* a diligent attendance on the ordinances and administrations of it, and such a behaviour as may support its œconomy, give effect to its offices and discipline, and render the institution conducive to those wise and good ends proposed in it. To invert this order, and place

the confidence of our religion, either in our moral virtues, exclusive of faith and the love of God, or in our exactness in ecclesiastical duties, exclusive of both the former, must be attended with very evil consequences: for the most unblameable conduct in either of these respects, unless founded on faith and the love of God, will not be that religion he requires, or be excepted by him as Christian obedience. And as to the latter, they are in their nature and intention but means; and derive all their excellency from their subserviency to those ends they are designed to promote. And therefore I readily agree, that whoever shall teach, that a precise regularity in ecclesiastical duties, observing the rules and ordinances reverencing the visible authority, and supporting the outward œconomy of the church, is either the sum or the principal thing in religion, and shall persuade men to place their confidence in such regularity, without regard to those former duties, handles the word of God deceitfully, and teaches a doctrine of the greatest danger to the souls of his hearers.

2dly, These duties, though of inferior consideration to the former, yet, in their proper order, are of necessary obligation, and cannot without sin be omitted by us.

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For though these duties are in their nature of the thing only means, and therefore may not in any competition be preferred before those prior duties, the promotion of which among men was the end for which this society was instituted, and the duties relating to it commanded; yet when we consider them as the most proper and effectual means, common prudence will require us to apply to these means, as the natural and ordinary way of attaining that end: but when we farther consider them as a means appointed by God, we have not only the highest conviction of the fitness of these means, and ought on that account to be determined to the choice of them ourselves, and do all in our power to promote the influence of them on others, but our compliance with and obedience to this institution becomes our strict duty, as a positive obligation laid on us by God, and equally necessary with our observance of those other positive ordinances and means of grace, the sacraments of Christian religion. We are therefore obliged to comply with this institution, in the duties of our several stations in it, both as a means chosen by divine wisdom, and therefore the most fit and proper to promote piety, justice, and mercy, and also as

a means prescribed and commanded by divine authority. And these duties when performed in obedience to the command, and in support of the institution of God, are properly religion; and are as truly expressive of our faith, reverence, and love of God, as acts of justice or charity performed upon the same principle.

The necessity indeed, under which we are obliged to these duties, is to be understood with this exception——That it is neither naturally nor morally impossible for us to perform them; but the same exception is also implied in other commands of God; and therefore it is frivolous to argue against the necessity of these duties, from cases in which it is impossible for us actually to perform them; since the same argument will prove that justice or charity are not necessary duties, because there are innumerable cases in which by external circumstances it is made impossible for us actually to perform them. If it be said that no circumstances can render the disposition of the heart to justice, mercy, &c. impossible; we say the same with regard to all duties of outward communion with the church; and that an habitual disposition of the heart is as much required in one case, as in the other.

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But, as to actual performance, that is certainly a necessary duty, which obliges whenever it is possible to perform it. No other necessity is contended for; and if a duty which obliges under these terms is not of necessary obligation, it will be hard to assign any that is so.

When we come indeed to consider the comparative necessity of these duties with others, these, as I have said, are to give way to those of prior obligation, in such a competition they cease to oblige, and when they cannot be performed without the omission of what is more necessary, the preference of them becomes sinful: but nevertheless, in their proper order, they are necessary duties; and within that extent oblige to a strict observance. God declared under the Jewish dispensation, *that he would have mercy rather than sacrifice*; but where the latter might be performed without the omission of the former, no one can question but he required it at their hands. God commanded both, and therefore obliged to both; and where obedience to both commands was consistent, a regularity in moral observances would not excuse men's neglect of these instituted duties. It is observable that our Lord, in the scripture before us, not only requires

quires the performance of these duties, but descends even to the lowest and most inconsiderable instances of them ; and determines, that the tithing even mint, anise, and cummin, was a duty which ought not to be left undone. A decision which not only comprehends all positive institutions, but concludes *a fortiori* for all duties of greater importance in the oeconomy of the church, if these little punctualities, which could not be esteemed strictly necessary either to preserve the order, or support the ministers of the church, if, I say, these could not be left undone without sin, how much greater must be the sin of treating with contempt the ministers and ordinances of it, and rebelling against the authority placed in it? And if the performance of the former duties of justice and mercy, would not, in the judgement of our Saviour, excuse the omission even of such minute observances of this latter kind, as are here referred to, much less would it excuse the omission of such duties as are of greater moment, and necessary to the very being and subsistence of the church as a society. The conclusion which arises to us from these premises, and to which I beg your principal attention, is what I observed,

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3dly, That these duties are very consistent, the one may be performed, without leaving the other undone; and therefore they ought not to be separated from each other.

For it cannot be imagined, that divine wisdom should choose and appoint such means to enable us to perform our duty to him and our neighbour, as are themselves inconsistent with our performance of these duties. Now that the positive ordinances of the Christian religion are prescribed, not only as marks and terms of outward union between the disciples of it, but also as means of deriving on us the spiritual graces and privileges of that dispensation, has been before observed, and cannot be questioned by any one who is in the least degree acquainted with the holy Writings. And it is certain that the whole social constitution of the church and every administration of it was designed to the same end; and when blessed and sanctified by the spirit is a most effectual means to promote it. And therefore whatever is necessary to the church as a society in general, or as a religious society in particular, or is by special institution appointed in this society by Christ and his Apostles, must be esteemed by us under this character of a means of grace. Now it is evident that in
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the church of Christ, as a visible society, an authority must be committed to some persons over others ; some rules of outward behaviour must be observed, as terms of union between the members of it, and some forfeiture be incurred by those who transgress these rules, because without these a visible society, as such cannot be conceived. If we consider the church as a religious society, the nature of these rules and the powers of these offices must be such as are proper to improve men in the knowledge, and engage them to the practice of religious duties : and, lastly, when we consider it under the particular idea of the Christian religious society, these rules, offices, and administrations, must so far as is specially prescribed, be agreeable to that prescription, and in the nature, extent, and execution of them, such as may direct and preserve men in obedience to the laws of the gospel. And consequently these officers themselves, and whatever is necessary to their office in the society, considered under either of these characters, *i. e.* whatever measure of power and authority in them, and whatever measure of submission and obedience in their inferiors, is necessary to render their office effectual to the ends proposed in it, must be esteemed as
means

means of grace appointed by Christ and his apostles, the founders of this society ; and not only consistent with our duty to God and our neighbour, and that spiritual holiness prescribed by the gospel, but the most effectual way to attain that holiness, and perform those duties.

It is readily acknowledged by us, that all authority committed to men may be abused, and particularly that the superiors of the church may, either through ignorance or wickedness, prescribe such observances as are inconsistent with our prior obligations to God; and whenever they do so, the rule of our duty is plain, we are to obey God rather than man. At the same time it is most evident, that their authority may be exercised in a manner not only consistent with the supremacy of God and Christ, but highly serviceable in the promotion of men's obedience to it. When the superiors of the church enjoin the outward observance of such duties as the laws of Christ enjoin on the conscience, it is manifest that obedience to them must be consistent with obedience to Christ, because the same actions are obedience to both. And since it is necessary for the due and orderly performance of public worship and other public religious

religious duties, that some actions or circumstances of action should be determined, and brought under some common rules, and yet the laws of Christ have not specially determined and defined these actions or circumstances, it must be left to the society itself, *i. e.* to the persons in whom the authority of it is placed, to determine them. And if what is thus prescribed be not forbidden by Christ, our compliance with such prescription cannot be inconsistent with our regard to Christ and his laws; because we may obey the one without disobeying the other. And since Christ has instituted this society, and thereby enjoined the duties incumbent on each member according to his station in it, obeying the superiors within the proper limits of their authority, is obeying Christ, and they who despise them, despise the ordinance of Christ by which they are appointed.

How then will those men answer it to Christ, who shall teach and persuade men to regard all ecclesiastical duties as mere niceties and trifles of no consideration in the sight of God; and, under pretence of asserting Christian liberty, shall advance such principles as exclude all human authority, all distinctions or order and office in the church, and consequently

quently demolish the whole fabrick of the society, and subvert the very foundations upon which it is built? If they tell us, (as in effect we have been told) that the internal faith, holiness and purity of heart which recommend us to God, may as well or better be attained by every man's shifting for himself, and acting independently on any ecclesiastical union; what is this but rejecting the methods which the wisdom of God has prescribed for the attainment of these graces, and pretending to know better how to obtain his favours, than he himself does, from whose bounty we must receive them? Means of grace (as we have confessed) may, through the iniquity of those to whom the administrations of them is committed, become means of subversion; and those powers which were given for edification may be misapplied to destruction; and where this is the case, we are doubtless at liberty to leave the means, and pursue the end as well as we can without them: but to depart from the ordinary prescribed means of grace, merely in presumption that we can prescribe better to ourselves, is an affront to the wisdom of God, and a transgression of his positive law: but to reproach and vilify these means is little less than blasphemy, and doing

despite to the spirit of grace. If no more be meant by the clamours of this kind which have appeared among us, but to remind men that the immediate duties they owe to God and Christ are of the first and chief importance, to what purpose were they raised? In this conclusion we all readily concur with them. If any among us had taught, that, provided men were precisely regular in all ecclesiastical duties, revered the authority, supported the offices, and complied with the rules and outward ordinances of the church, it was no matter whether they loved or honoured God, or were just or merciful to men, good reason there had been to appear with zeal in opposition to them. But can this be pretended? nay supposing this provocation had been given, even then great care ought to be taken, lest while we remind men of the regard they owe to these primary duties of religion, we bring the other into contempt and abhorrence; and, in contradiction to our Saviour's rule, so argue with them for the doing of one, as at the same time to persuade them to leave the other undone. Certainly the adequate remedy in such a case, is to represent the proper order in which these duties are to be considered by us, to assert the necessity of each,

each,

each, of the former, as of prior obligation, and of the latter also in subordination to them: but to break out into declamations against all submission or regard to the authority or ordinances of the church, is running into another extreme of as great danger in its consequences as that we intend to remedy; and which must utterly subvert the social constitution of the church: for unless some members be distinguished from others by authority, and some submission be paid to authority, the church cannot subsist, or be even conceived in idea, as an outward society: and if outward society of the church be destroyed or rendered impracticable, the Christian religion, which the institution of that society was intended to preserve, will be in evident danger of perishing after it. There is therefore a manifest connexion between these ecclesiastical duties and those of prior importance: such a connexion as there is between the proper means and the ends they are appointed to promote; and if the one be not performed, the other will be in great danger to be left undone. If it be assigned as the occasion of those doctrines we complain of, that ecclesiastical duties have been much preached and inculcated among us, and thereby the attention and regard of the

I 2 people

people too much engaged to them ; I answer that, supposing the fact true that these duties have been frequently and earnestly inculcated, yet if they have been pressed only within their due limits, and in their proper subordination, no great mischief could arise from it. Whatever is really and truly our duty, though comparatively less necessary than some others, may certainly be taught, without any just offence. And whenever any part of our duty is endeavoured to be brought under contempt and disregard, if the ministers of the Gospel insist more especially on that, they do no more than becomes their office ; and if the attention of the people be, in such circumstances, especially engaged to such duties, it is a very happy effect of their application. I may securely appeal to publick knowledge and testimony whether the ministers of our church have neglected to instruct their flocks in the more important branches of our Christian duty : but when great and open assiduity is used to disengage men from all those principles which are the bonds and ties that unite us together as a society, and upon which alone we can subsist in such union ; when all the offices of this society and the authority necessary to render them of any use or effect, are traduced
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and reviled, and the whole œconomy of the Church is exposed to popular scorn as priestcraft and imposture, and men are told the less they regard any of these things, the more acceptable they will be to Christ, we may surely be permitted to remind you of the tendency and danger of these doctrines, and our own heart must condemn us as unfaithful to Christ if we neglect to do it.

Upon the whole, let none deceive you with a pretence of spiritualizing your religion, while they dissuade you from all regard to those outward ordinances, and those relative duties upon the observance of which the order, union, and even the being of the church as a society depends. In preaching a primary internal regard of conscience to God and Christ, and that faith, love of God, righteousness and mercy are of prior importance, we cheerfully join with; but while we chiefly remind you of these duties, we persuade you also not to leave the other undone. These duties, while thus considered in their proper order, agree with a perfect harmony, and mutually enforce and promote each other. Both may certainly be performed by us, and both are required from us by our holy religion, and therefore what God hath joined together let no man put asunder.



The Case of teaching for Doctrines
the Commandments of Men stated
and considered.

*In vain do you worship me, teaching
for Doctrines the Commandments of
Men.*

 HE Words of the Scripture have been so often and so variously argued from, in disputes of almost daily occurrence among Christians, and errors of such unhappy consequence have arisen from the misapplications of them, that I hope your attention may be usefully engaged in considering the import and extent of them.

Our Lord is here reprovng the Scribes and Pharisees, the great masters of *Israel*, for imposing on the people some commands of their own, or traditions from their predecessors, as of equal obligation with the precepts of the
I 4 law.

law. Thus they had taught, that he who eat with unwashed hands contracted a legal uncleanness as he who had touched a dead body, or was under any of those other circumstances for which the law pronounced a man defiled. But this was the lightest part of their charge. They had not only added several of these trifling observances to the divine system, but had taught some doctrines of a more dangerous character, which made void even the moral commands of the law. Thus though an express precept of God, and even nature itself, required a man to honour his father and mother, and support them in every exigence and distress of life, yet they had presumed to teach, that if, when a man's father or mother asked any thing from him, he told them it was *Corban*, a thing devoted to God; or as I think it is better explained if he told them—*I offer this to the treasury in the Temple to propitiate God to you*, he fully satisfied the law of honouring his parents, and was not thenceforth obliged to do any thing more for his father or mother. Thus did they make void the law of God by their own traditions. These were the instances in our Lord's view in this reproof; and by attending to them we shall be led into a proper application of it. Let us then consider, I.

I. The objects of this censure, or the persons specially affected by it.

II. When they are guilty of the crime here censured, the teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

III. In what sense they who are guilty of this crime are said to worship God in vain.

I. The objects of this reproof were the Scribes and Pharisees, the public authorized teachers and expositors of the law. They who, as our Lord elsewhere says, sat in *Moses's* seat, and had on that account a very large and extensive authority in directing the conscience and prescribing to the actions of the people: an authority which Christ himself was so far from disowning, that he confirms it to them in terms of great comprehension—*Whatsoever they say unto you, that do*—The limits and exceptions to this general assertion of their authority will appear to us in the farther consideration of the scripture before us. What I here observe is, that the persons, to whom parity of reason obliges us to apply this scripture in the Christian church, are those to whom the office of instruction, direction and command is committed in that society:

society: for these sit in Christ's seat in the same extent of delegated commission that the others did in the ecclesiastical seat of *Moses*. Indeed, the nature of the thing require, that in a society formed upon a system of revealed prescriptions as its primary law, some persons should by a distinction of office be appointed to direct men in the application of these prescriptions, to inculcate by doctrine, and by the rules of the society to require, obedience to them: because without such provision it is scarce possible that men should be united in a social observance of them. And agreeably in my text they are supposed both to *command* and *teach*; and both these offices they not only lawfully might, but were in duty bound to discharge. But then it is here also implied that this authority was committed to them under certain restrictions, beyond which the exercise of it was criminal in themselves, and without obligation on others. What are the limits and extent of this authority is indeed the great question we are here concerned to consider, the decision of which will in a great measure fall under our next inquiry, which is

Secondly, When they, the teachers and rulers of the church, are guilty of the crime here reprov'd, of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For

For the better clearing of which it will be of use to us distinctly to consider,

1st, What is meant by commandments of men.

2^{dly}, What by teaching them as doctrines. Now the commandments of men may be distinguished, according to the matter of them, into three sorts.

1st, Where the matter of the human command is the same action that God has enjoined by his law. For human authority not only may, but ought to command what God has commanded; particularly in such a society as a Christian church, formed, as I observed, upon the laws and precepts of the gospel as its foundation, it is necessary, that the injunctions of that revelation should be prescribed by the laws or rules of that society, as terms of union between the members of it. For a Christian church in its proper idea is a combination of men agreeing to live together in a social observation of the laws of Christ. Now because it is hardly possible that such a design can take effect, if every one be left to obey the precepts of the gospel, in what sense or by what actions he pleases, it is requisite that the laws of the society should ascertain by what special actions those

those laws of the gospel should be obeyed, which are made the condition of union between the members of it. And therefore that principle which has been sometimes asserted—that the proper subjects of human laws are such actions as are left perfectly indifferent by the laws of God, is to be understood with due explication, *viz.* That these are the only actions which human authority enjoins without any previous obligation, but as conclusions of its own prudence and discretion; such as it may reverse or alter as it sees occasion: whereas in things previously directed by a divine law, human authority is tied down, and limited, as to the matter of its laws: but nevertheless the prescription of these duties, as a condition of union with an outward society, is properly a human law.

A 2^d sort of commandments of men are such whose matter contradicts or interferes with the prescriptions of the divine law. And such are not only those which either expressly forbid what God has commanded, or command what he has forbidden; but such also as invert the prescribed order of God's commands, and direct a law of prior and superior obligation to be neglected and set aside, in preference to one of lower and less important consideration.

sideration. Such was the instance referred to in my text—the devoting any thing to God, or offering it to his service, as a propitiation for ourselves or others, was what the law permitted, commended, and in some circumstances require: but when it was enjoined in preference and excuse of that honour men owed to their parents, it became a commandment of men of this character, such as made void a law of God.

A 3^d sort of commandments of men are such whose matter is actions in their nature indifferent, and neither commanded nor forbidden by God: such were the washing hands before meat, and those other frivolous observances which our Lord condemns: and such also are many other rules of a better character, ascertaining the outward circumstances of religious duties.

II. Then teaching these commandments of men as doctrines, in proposing them as precepts of the divine law, or of equal authority with them, and obliging the conscience as such.

Now with respect to the first sort of commandments of men, where the action taught and enjoined by human authority is the same that God has taught and enjoined in his law,
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the rulers of the church can hardly be guilty of this crime: for both laws are there materially the same, and the same action is obedience to both; and therefore teaching for good doctrine that the performance of that action is a duty we owe to God, can never be chargeable with the offence here condemned.

With respect to the second sort, where the matter of the human command contradicts, or the direction of it supersedes a divine law, to teach or enjoin obedience to such command, to prefer or equal it to a law of God, is the highest and most flagrant instance of the crime here reprov'd. It is ascending into the throne of God, and invading his authority; a sin which, unless he who sits in the temple of God, and exalts himself above all that it called God, had given us examples of it, we could scarce have imagined the most insolent human ambition could have been guilty of.

Well then: In human commands of the first kind, where God and man prescribe the same actions, the crime here reprehended can hardly be committed. In commands of the second kind, where the matter is contrary to the law of God, it can never be avoided. But there remains a third kind where the matter
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of the human prescription is indifferent, neither commanded nor forbidden by God, which is sometimes chargeable with this offence, and sometimes free from it: and this being a case of the greatest difficulty, will require more particular attention.

Now there never was nor never can be any Christian church without some prescriptions of this kind. The laws of God in scripture only direct in general—that certain ordinances should be administered, that Christians should assemble themselves together for publick worship and instruction, that prayers and supplications should be made for all men, that discipline should be exercised, notorious offenders reprov'd, and if incorrigible, cut off, &c. But before these several acts and duties of religion can be fitted for a publick and social observance, a vast number of outward circumstances, such as time and place, outward bodily behaviour, the forms and order of worship, the methods of process in discipline, and many other things of the like consideration must be brought under some publick rules, that the society may act in the observance of them as one body, walking by the same rule, minding the same things. All the provision the scripture has made in these cases
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is some general canons—such as *Let all things be done to edifying—Let all things be done decently and in order, &c.* But the particular application of these canons, the directing by what actions or observances these general ends of decency, order and edification should be provided for, must in the reason of the thing be left to the publick determinations of the society. For provisions of this kind having but a probable efficacy to the ends proposed, are in their nature only matter of prudential consideration, concerning which the sentiments of men will ever be various, some esteeming one usage, some another, most conducive to these ends: and consequently it is not imaginable how men should ever come to a social agreement about these provisions, but by the minor part submitting to the major, or which comes to the same thing, unless the whole body be concluded by the resolutions of publick authority. Thus far then I think it is clear, that things in their nature indifferent, may lawfully and usefully be prescribed in a Christian church. At the same time it must be confessed that this authority may be abused, in such instances as justly fall under the correction of my text.

First, When such things are prescribed as
binding

binding the conscience by direct obligation. For though it may be truly affirmed, that when such things are enjoined by our proper superiors as conducive to decency, order, &c. we are obliged in conscience to comply with such injunction; yet this obligation on the conscience arises not from such human law, but from the law of God requiring obedience to rulers in all lawful things. For nothing can bind the conscience but a law of God, and the doctrine in this case taught is not, that the special action prescribed is required by a law of God, or that the human law, as such, obliges the conscience, but that there is a law of God requiring obedience to superiors in lawful things, enjoined for lawful ends, both which circumstances are here supposed.

Secondly, The prescription of indifferent things will be liable to the censure in my text, when it is taught that obedience to them will excuse disobedience to a law of God. For by such doctrine the human authority is raised above the divine, and has a power ascribed to it of dispensing with, and, in effect, of annulling a law of God.

Thirdly, This censure will also be incurred, when indifferent things are prescribed by men, as means of grace, as having power to con-

vey remission of sins, or any other spiritual and supernatural gifts of the Holy Ghost. For though outward actions, in their nature indifferent, may be means of grace, yet God alone has authority to institute such means, and give them such efficacy. He, who is the author and giver of every good gift, can annex his graces to what actions and conditions he pleases, and accordingly he has done it in the Sacraments of the New Testament, to actions in their nature neither good nor evil, which yet by the institution of God are means whereby we receive inward and spiritual graces, and pledges to assure us thereof. But this is a reserve of the divine prerogative, and cannot without blasphemy be assumed by man.

In all these instances human authority exceeds its proper boundaries, is no longer ministerial, but usurps upon the sovereignty of Christ; and whoever asserts such authority to men, or teaches the necessity of obedience to such prescriptions as parts of the divine law, or of equal authority with it, is guilty of the presumption condemned in this scripture, and teaches for doctrines the commandments of men.

We shall perhaps be better able to apply
these

these reflections, if we consider them as exemplified in a proper instance. Let us then take the use of the cross after baptism. Now if this ceremony were prescribed under the character of a divine institution, or as of equal authority with such: If it were taught, that this is necessary and essential to baptism; or that any of the graces of that sacrament were conveyed by it; that it protected us from evil spirits, or procured to us the assistance of good; or that it excused the omission of any thing enjoined by God, this would render both the imposition and use of it criminal and superstitious. But if this ceremony be prescribed as an action in its nature indifferent, and only as a token declaratory to the congregation that the person is already baptized: or as a proper sign to remind the person himself of the duties which in that covenant he has obliged himself to perform, it can no more be charged with superstition, than any words that might be prescribed signifying the same things: neither can it be brought under the reproof of this scripture, unless it be enjoined as in itself necessary, and men taught to observe it as required by God. And I must take leave to observe, that it is equally an offence against the scripture, to teach that the use

of such a ceremony 'is' unlawful, as to teach that it is necessary: or, in other words, he equally teaches for a doctrine a commandment of men, who teaches men to abhor this ceremony as forbidden by God, as he who teaches them to use it as commanded by him. For it is the same degree of superstition to imagine God offended with what he has not declared himself offended, as to imagine him pleased with what he has not declared himself pleased. In review then of what has been observed, on this case of indifferent things, it appears, that human authority may lawfully prescribe such things for the sake of order, decency, &c. that it is lawful also to teach that obedience is due to such commands, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake, provided we refer this obligation to the divine law, requiring obedience to those who rule over us. But what is here condemned is teaching that these indifferent things commanded by men are directly enjoined by God; or that when prescribed by men they have the same necessary immutable obligation as a divine law; or ascribing a supernatural efficacy to them in deriving the graces of the spirit; or recommending them as equivalents for the omission of any duty enjoined by God. And
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since obedience to superiors is required by a plain precept of scripture, and the unlawfulness of performing indifferent things when by them commanded, is a mere doctrine of men, it follows, that they who teach this doctrine are in a high degree guilty of the crime here reprov'd, and make void a command of God by a doctrine of men. It will concern all who in any of the instances above considered are guilty of this crime to observe.

III. What our Lord has here pronounced, that they worship God in vain.

By worship in this place we are not to understand strictly acts of adoration, for such, neither the teaching the doctrines here censur'd, nor performing what they recommended were : but the word is to be taken in a large sense, as signifying any action whereby men presume they honour God, and perform an acceptable service to him. And therefore, though when any such unwarrantable additions are made to God's worship strictly so called, they fall under the reproof of this scripture, yet the words are not restrained to this subject, but extend to all parts of our religious conduct; and the plain meaning of them is, that it is a vain imagination in men to think they please or honour God, by teaching, im-

posing, or observing the doctrines or traditions of men as his commands, or as equivalent to them. And surely a very little reflection will serve to convince us of this truth. If we love God and will enter into life, the condition is prescribed to us—*Keep my commandments*—If we acquit ourselves of this charge, we need not be solicitous about any thing more. He who shall attentively apply himself to God in the duties he has immediately commanded, and under the rules by which his superiors, within the proper compass of their authority, direct his obedience, will find business enough, and need not amuse himself with devising additions either to his own or other men's burden. But if men will be wise above what is written, and busy themselves in observances which God has no where promised to approve, or place religion in avoiding what he has not forbidden, they earn nothing from him, and when they come for their reward, will be sent away with that mortifying reproach, *who has required this at your hands?* But alas this is a favourable treatment, and such as can be hoped for only by the less offensive instances of this guilt. If men have not only built hay and stubble on the divine foundations, but pul-
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led down and removed some of the building of God to make room for these vain superstructures ; if they have substituted the traditions of men in the place of God's commands, and either claimed, or paid a superior regard to them, this is not barely superstition, but a crime of much higher provocation ; it is usurping the kingdom and authority of God, and must expect the resentment of that sentence, *Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them bring them out and slay them before me.*

From what has been suggested in explication of this scripture, we may observe

1st, How evidently the church of *Rome* is here condemned, who assumes to herself authority of adding to, altering, and even reversing the laws of God. Thus Christ, in the institution of the last supper, commands in express terms, *Drink ye all of this* ; but this infallible expositor has cancelled the obligation of this command, and by her own authority forbid obedience to it. The scripture says, *There is one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus* ; but she has joined an innumerable company of mediators with him, and teaches her disciples to address God through their intercession. Nay the asserters

of her authority have not been ashamed to teach that if her bishop should declare virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue, the actions of men would presently change their natures, and good would become evil, and evil good. With respect to indifferent things, to how many invented ceremonies, such as sprinklings, crossings, pilgrimages, &c. has she ascribed spiritual effects of the highest character, the inward purifying of the heart, driving away devils, and even remission of sins? With what arrogance has she taught that these observances would excuse and atone for the transgression of God's commands? The charge is here fixt with such evidence that no artifice can elude it, and no colour defend it from the censure of this scripture. But

2dly, It is equally manifest that this crime is unjustly imputed to that excellent church of which we are members. For can it be pretended that she has, in any one instance, taught or enjoined what God has forbidden, or prohibited what he has commanded? She claims indeed a power to decree rites and ceremonies for her own membes, the unalienable right of every religious community; but does she prescribe them as necessary, as of equal authority with God's commands, as instituted

instituted means of supernatural grace, or as equivalents for our omission of any duty to God? Has she not expressly declared them in their nature indifferent and alterable, guarded every rite both in the intention and use of it from any possible appearance of superstition? commandments of men she owns them to be, and teaches obedience to them only as such. With what conscience or equity then can she be charged with teaching them for doctrines of God? No, this imputation must fall where it properly belongs, on those who oppose her just authority, and traduce her innocence; on those who teach for doctrines of God, that it is the duty of her subjects to disobey her prescriptions; that God has forbidden the usages she enjoins, and revile them with the odious characters of idolatry, will-worship, and superstition. Till they can prove these assertions from the plain declarations of God's word, they must be content to have the charge returned upon them of teaching for doctrines the mere imaginations of men.

Upon the whole this scripture, as it reflects guilt and dishonour upon our adversaries, so it suggests the strongest reasons for a firm adherence

adherence to this happy constitution in which God has called us to serve him: where the doctrines of God are purely taught, and obedience to his laws constantly inculcated; and yet their just authority is reserved to the commandments of men, where our duty towards each is prescribed in its proper order, and while one is principally done, the other is not left undone.



The



The Duty and Advantages of frequent
Recollection.

PSAL. CXIX. 59, 60.

*When I thought on my Ways I turned
my Feet unto thy Testimonies.
I made haste and delayed not to keep
thy Commandments.*



IN this psalm the holy writer sets himself to recollect, and bring together as it were into one view, the experiences of his whole life. He delivers to us a system of spiritual wisdom, the result of long and just observation upon his own and other men's conduct: conclusions of the greatest use and improvement to all who shall duly attend to them. He begins with declaring in general the wisdom and happiness of those who go steadily on in the ways of duty, undiverted by the numerous temptations to which human life is exposed.

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He then professes the fervent zeal, the earnest and sincere devotion of his own heart to the service of God, *With my whole heart* (saith he) *have I sought thee, O let me not wander from thy commandments.* He goes on to recount the excellencies and perfections of the divine law, the esteem and veneration it deserves, how agreeable it was to the holiness of that Being who prescribed it, how admirable its directions, how conducive to the happiness of man to whom it was prescribed. From these considerations of the law he was led to reflect on himself, to compare his life and actions with this law. And the happy effect which this review wrought in him he observes in the words before us—*When, &c.* From this example of the holy Psalmist I shall observe

First, How proper an act of reason, how necessary a duty of religion it is for every man sometimes to recollect himself and attentively to think on his ways.

Secondly, How great spiritual advantages the practice of this duty will bring with it.

First, It is a proper act of reason, a necessary duty of religion, for every man sometimes to recollect himself, and attentively to think on his ways. For this purpose God
endued

endued man with this noble faculty of reason, that it might be his light and his guide, enable him to distinguish between good and evil, and direct his actions to the attaining the one, and avoiding the other. This is his privilege above the brute creatures, who tread on in a line with little regard to past or future, that he can look forward and backward, compare his past and present conduct with the proper rule of his actions, and consider the tendency and consequences of them. To enable us the better to form this judgment, to the weak and imperfect light of our fallen reason God has added the clear discovery of revelation, which distinctly ascertains the measures of duty, and acquaints us with the proper determined event of our conduct. For these great advantages we are accountable to God, and it will be our sin if we neglect the improvement of them: it becomes our bounded duty to attend to the light that shines round us; and it is of infinite concern to us to lift up to its direction, and in order to that, to keep the holy rule of our duty always before us, and adjust our actions to it. And since, among the variety of temporal amusements that surround us, the best of us are apt to grow remiss and inattentive to our way, the
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most opposite remedy is what is here prescribed to us, to stand still sometimes and consider whither the paths we are in will lead us, whether it be necessary for us to turn back again and set out anew from the point whence we have deviated, or if we are in the right way, whether more vigour and application be not requisite to bring us to the end of our journey, and assure our title to the hope that is set before us. Without this care and consideration, he who is in a wrong course will go blindly on in his error, insensible of his danger, and incapable of recovery: and he who is in the right way, will be so but by chance, and want that satisfaction and applause of his own mind, which is the greatest encouragement to perseverance in duty. And as God has enjoined on us this duty of pondering our ways, prepared and disposed us for it by suitable faculties, and excited our attention by the importance of the interest we serve by it; so he has appointed conscience to be a perpetual monitor, to remind us of our obligations to comply with it. The great artifice of our spiritual enemy is to hide us from ourselves; to amuse our passions with a continual succession of pleasures; to keep our attention always engaged in the pursuit of
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some delusive phantom of temporal happiness. But in spite of all his assiduity, the conscience, even of the most careless and profligate, is not wholly to be silenced. Our faculties cannot hold out in a continual hurry of passion. The eagerness of desire will unavoidably cool and remit, and conscience will then take the advantage of the interval, and when all is calm and still within will intrude into our retirements, and demand our attention. It will remind us that we are accountable to a being whose omniscience cannot be deceived, to whom our most secret actions, even our very thoughts and desires, are open, who is greater and more intimate to us than our own hearts, and knoweth all things; whose justice we cannot elude, whose power we cannot resist; who has engaged our obedience by wonders of love; and has denounced a sentence of irreversibile misery on the ingratitude of the sinner. Or however men may be able to shift off these reflections, and stupify the mind against the impression of them by diversions and pleasures, while health and youth, quick and strong returns of appetite make us capable of being thus amused, yet the melancholy time will come when either sickness or age shall have mortified every capacity of pleasure, when every
appetite

appetite shall expire and nauseate the objects it now doats on. Then will conscience rise up and set before us all these considerations with an importunity not to be resisted. Some time or other we shall be forced to attend to its suggestions and think on our ways. And how much wiser a choice is it to consult and advise with it as a friend, than to stay till it appears against us with the terror and reproaches of an angry judge, to think on our ways while we can do it with hope and comfort, with a trust in the divine goodness, rather than defer the necessary work till it is obtruded upon us with all the agonies of confusion and despair; in short, to consider our danger while it is in our power to prevent it, rather than sleep on in a stupid security till the evil is come too near to be avoided. God indeed sometimes awakens men out of his lethargy by present afflictions; engages their attention to their ways by some uneasy consequences arising from them; but while the reflection stops here, and is carried no farther than these temporal appendages of sin, it is only the physick but not the cure. But when we are carried on to consider this whole life as a state of probation for another, to look forward to the consequences of our actions in that important futurity,

turity, how far they encourage us to hope for the divine favour, or expose us to his displeasure in those final allotments that await us in another world, we then properly think on our ways in a religious sense. These are the reflections which the example of the psalmist, the dictates of reason, and the precepts of religion recommend to us, and from which we may expect those great spiritual advantages ascribed to them in my text. Which I proceed

2dly, To consider :

When I thought on my ways (saith he) I turned my feet unto thy testimonies,

I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

The first effect of this reflection was, it raised in him a resolution to amend his ways, to change his course of life, and be careful that his future actions should be better conformed to the will of God : and *2dly* it quickened him to an immediate and perfect execution of this holy purpose; he delayed not the time to keep his commandments, And

1st, It is scarce possible for a rational being intent on happiness to have before him in present consideration the laws of God, the penalties and rewards annexed to them, the ten-

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dency and event of human actions declared and determined by them, and at the same time to observe in his own life a contradiction to those laws, a conduct threatened with the heaviest inflictions of divine anger, without some check upon his spirits, some remorse for the evil of his ways. He cannot but pause a little, and stop short in his course, and consider how he may escape the terrors of that prospect which is opened before him. Men indeed immersed in sense, and intangled in the bondage of long habits of sin, will strive hard to shift off the force of these reflections; but the only way they can do it is by diverting the attention to some other object, amusing themselves with company, pleasure, or business, some pursuit or other that will keep the mind warm and engaged, will hurry it away from home, and not suffer it to dwell long on these domestick considerations. If they are seriously attended to, their effect can hardly be avoided. For man cannot will or desire evil as evil, choose a greater evil to decline a less, or prefer a trifling good to an infinitely greater, when he distinctly perceives the value of each. Now the infinite disparity between eternal misery and a transient uneasiness, between everlasting happiness and the present satisfactions of sense,

sense; is too obvious and apparent to admit a deliberate comparison. These important prospects must be entirely removed out of sight, the eye must be taken off from them, and fixed wholly on those temporal scenes, before it can be deceived into a preference of them. And consequently there wants nothing but due attention to determine our choice to virtue and religion. Hence it is; that wicked men are represented in scripture, as men who forget God; who have no understanding; consider not their ways; neither is God in all their thoughts. If he was, if they truly reflected on his majesty, justice, and power, considered their ways, and compared them with his laws, and remembered the eternal penalties of disobeying them, it could not but awaken them to resolutions of piety and repentance. The hardiest sinner when he sees hell open before him, and that the paths in which he walks lead directly into the mouth of it, cannot but shrink and retire from the terrible prospect. If he has any hopes left of escaping, he will turn his feet, endeavour to retrieve his error, and regain the ways of duty and salvation. Something of this impression every man feels in himself proportionable to the mistakes and failings which appear in his

conduct whenever he seriously reviews his life. He who is most perfect among us will find something wanting, something to be corrected by his future care, and undone by repentance: but on him who has offended much, the impression will be yet stronger; the unpardoned load will lie heavy upon him, and unless he be hardened past recovery, will drive him for refuge, to that duty which alone can give rest to his soul. And as such reflection on our ways will convince all, in whom the seeds of grace are not utterly extinguished, of the necessity of repentance; so

2dly, It will with the strongest influence persuade the immediate dispatch of that duty. He who by a reflection on his life, is convinced of the danger he is in from his sins, and the necessity of repentance to rescue him from it, wants only one thought farther to engage him without delay to address himself to that work. Let him but duly consider the uncertainty of the time allotted him for that necessary performance, and a day, an hour will appear too long to defer it. For can he who has before him in distinct view the infinite hazard to which his soul is exposed by his sins, who perceives that if he is called before his Judge in that unpardoned state, he is un-

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done to all-eternity, and observes that there is nothing between him and this fatal irretrievable event but that thin partition of an human life, can he sleep under the terror of such a thought, and leave his *All*, his very hopes of happiness to so dreadful an uncertainty? These reflections will unavoidably arise and present themselves to the sinner, whenever he attentively considers his ways, the nature and consequences of his actions; and he must be lost to all sense and desire of Heaven or fear of Hell, who can stupify his mind against the impressions of them. They whose office leads them to attend the beds of sickness, see in daily examples how irresistibly these reflections persuade to present repentance, when the near apprehension of death forces men to attend to them. Now whenever they are equally present to us, they will equally influence our resolutions: and consequently there wants nothing but thought and consideration to give them the same effect at any other time, as they are found to have when the terrors of death stand before us. It will farther occur to the sinner in the train of these reflections, that if he stifles his present convictions, and resists the present motions of grace, his recovery will become more difficult; the impression will be weaker in the next return, and

more easily over-ruled by the delusions of sin ; that if he goes on in sin after this check and remonstrance of conscience, his guilt will be aggravated not only by the repetition of his crimes, but by the light, the convictions, the calls of grace against which he will offend ; that in the diseases of the soul, as well as those of the body, a relapse is generally more dangerous than the first approach of the distemper : that if he hardens himself against his present convictions, and proceeds to heap sin upon sin, God may justly be provoked to withdraw his grace, and leave him to go on without thought or reflection, till he comes to the brink of the pit, and shall have neither space nor ability to escape. These are reflections closely linked and connected to each other ; and whenever the sinner attentively thinks on his ways they will unavoidably arise and present themselves to his mind ; and if any arguments can engage him to make haste and set immediately about his repentance, these must prevail ; if he is insensible to these, his case is desperate, there remains nothing farther to be offered from which better success can be hoped for. In truth all the delusions by which men cheat themselves into a delay of this great work will be found, when traced to their principle
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to proceed from inattention to our own conduct the reflection on guilt is burdensome and uneasy ; and therefore we change the scene as fast as we can, and will not suffer the mind to dwell upon it. We defer the consideration of our ways, and in consequence of that, defer our repentance.

Upon the whole then, may appear the wisdom of the advice here suggested to us in the example of the Psalmist ; of what importance it is to think on our ways, to stand still sometimes and make an estimate of our state, and attentively examine our conduct by the laws of God. Great are the advantages which even the best men will receive from such applications. They will hereby be refreshed with that spiritual pleasure which arises to the mind from the approbation of our own actions : they will be enabled to go on with comfort and cheerfulness ; to judge of their own proficiencies ; whether they have duly improved under the means of grace afforded them, and pressed forward with that alacrity they ought, to the high mark of their calling. They will hence be assisted to confirm and strengthen the weak parts of their virtue, to discern the approach of their enemy, and guard against his temptations. But of much greater importance is this

duty to the sinner. All the hopes of his recovery depend upon it; and without it he is undone for ever. Unless he considers his ways, he will never be truly sensible of his danger; and unless he be made sensible of his danger, he will never think himself concerned to avoid it. Before he can be induced to turn back and retreat, he must first be persuaded to suspend his progress; to look round him and consider whither he is going, if he can but be prevailed on thus far, he will hardly be able to resist the motives of conversion. Sin cannot stand the test of consideration; the delusive charms it puts on may deceive us while we are hurried on by the violence of our passions, and do not give ourselves leisure to examine the cheat; but if we stop our course and bring our object into light, and under an attentive view, the thin disguise immediately falls off; it then appears to us in its proper deformity, the reproach of our reason, an evil the most destructive to the present and future interests of our nature. We shall wonder at the folly of our choice, and detest what we have before pursued with so much fondness and application. But if this duty of consideration be neglected, the sinner is led thoughtless on, from one stage of life to another,

ther, till he is gone too far to make his retreat, till the dreadful scene of vengeance opens to him at once, and he sees nothing behind him but unpardoned guilt, and nothing before him but misery and despair.

And no time can recommend itself with more fitness for this duty, than when we are preparing our souls to meet the Lord at his holy table, and renew our covenant of obedience with him. We should here especially be careful to cleanse and purify our heart from all our pollutions, and in order to that, previously to search and examine our lives, and in proportion to the leisure and engagements of our station, abstract ourselves from the world, and employ ourselves in a review of our spiritual conduct.

A duty thus necessary can hardly be too frequently attended to by us ; the oftener we enter into this scrutiny of ourselves, the less will the burden of it be, and the greater the fruit arising to us from it. But because what is left to be done at any time is too apt to be wholly omitted, it is doubtless a very advisable part of spiritual wisdom, to fix certain periods for this holy exercise.

And agreeably the piety of the church whose rules and ordinances are all intended to
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assist and excite a due care of our spiritual concerns, has appointed and set apart certain times of humiliation, and particularly this holy season of Lent, in which we should abstract our thoughts from the world, and revise our state towards God. The particular designation of this time was indeed founded on some reasons which now cease, *viz.* the preparation of catechumens, by examination and the prayers and fastings of the congregation, for the public baptism at Easter: but though since the general reception of Christianity, when almost all persons are baptized in infancy, this part of the intention is superseded; yet the institution had manifestly a double view, and regarded as well the spiritual improvement of each member of the congregation, as the benefit derived from their prayers to the catechumens. These private advantages of the institution remain still a good reason for our compliance with it.

The mere bodily exercise indeed of abstaining from particular meats or the like, the apostle has determined to profit little; and perhaps has no farther moral use, than as the practice of denying our inclinations in small things, may be a step towards the government of ourselves in greater. It is certain that if the religion

religion of the observer terminates in the bare act of such restraint, it is of no value at all in the sight of God; and if the restraint reaches no farther than some particular gratification, while all others are indulged, the penance is so slight, that it cannot deserve so much as the name of mortification. But a general uniform abstinence, an avocation of our passions from the entertainments of sense confining all our appetites of pleasure to straiter and narrower limits than we may at other times innocently allow them, is certainly an exercise that very much fits and disposes us for those thoughts and reflections, whence a true spiritual improvement will arise to us. When we have called off the mind from all foreign amusements, we shall be more at leisure to attend to what passes at home; be able without interruption to call to remembrance and ponder her ways, and weigh every action in the balance of the sanctuary: to observe what error wants to be rectified, what lust to be subdued, what infirmity to be strengthened, and what virtue to be improved. This is the proper observance of that humiliation which is prescribed to us, and if we thus employ this time of godly sorrow, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, our labour will be rewarded

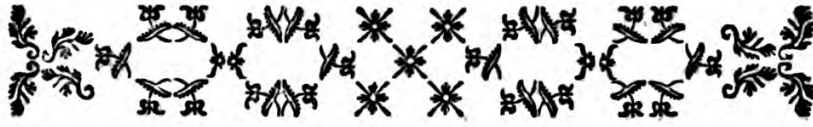
156 *The Duties and Advantages, &c.*

warded with peace of soul and spiritual joy. The triumphs of victory will attend our conquest over sin, and the most difficult paths of duty will be rendered smooth and easy, while our hopes are supported with the promises of God, and a filial confidence in his favour.

To which God of his infinite mercy give us grace to entitle ourselves, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.




The



The Necessity of a chearful Obedience
to the Divine Will.

MAT. vi. 10.

*Thy Will be done in Earth as it is in
Heaven.*

 VERY petition of that perfect form of prayer which our Lord has prescribed to the devotions of his disciples, contains so noble a direction of the soul to God, and so just a comprehension of what a creature should desire of his creator, that our thoughts can at no time be better employed to every purpose of religion, than in a serious and deliberate consideration of what we are there commanded to offer.

And

And that spirit of impatience and discontent, ambition, revenge and profaneness, which too visibly reigns among us at this day, calls upon every true Christian to address his father which is in Heaven, with a peculiar warmth and fervency, in the petition I now recommend to your meditations.—It is God alone who can govern the unruly wills and affections of men. It is the holy influence of those graces we are here taught to pray for which must assuage the malice, compose the passions, and enliven the devotions of men, and restore peace and religion to a thoughtless and divided world.—I shall endeavour to assist your devotions in the daily use of this petition; by considering.

I. What it is we request of God when we pray that his will, &c.

II. I shall shew the reasonableness and necessity of offering this petition.

III. The happiness that will attend such a frame and disposition of soul, as our Lord in these words commands us to pray for. And

I. Let us consider what it is we request of God when we pray that his will may, &c.

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To understand this it will be of use to us to consider the will of God as it is commonly distinguished into the will of his providence, and the will of his laws.

The will of his providence are those eternal counsels of his wisdom by which every action and movement of nature, and all the various events and revolutions of human affairs are ordered and disposed. The same almighty spirit, which spake the word and it was made, continues still to support, conduct, and animate the whole frame, even those works of nature which seem to us the most variable and contingent, all obey his direction and appointment; *fire and hail, snow and vapours, and even winds and storms fulfil his word.* And all that appears to us so fortuitous in the public affairs of kingdoms, or the more private events of human life: all that we are so ready to account for from the skill, the passions or the negligence of men, are but the execution of the divine counsels, the scheme is laid and every step of it wrought out by a superior direction, and what we call fortune, chance, or fate here below, has another name above, and is there called the power, the wisdom, and the providence of God.

Now

Now with regard to this will of his providence we are in this petition taught to pray that God would dispose our souls to be intirely resigned to his appointments. That whenever, by any unexpected direction of the works of nature, he shall frustrate the labour of our hands, and defeat our schemes of success and happiness, we may submit with meekness to his holy pleasure, or whenever divine justice shall inflict any national calamity on the sins of the people, or whatever private or personal affliction shall at any time befall us, we may be able to calm our passions and compose the reluctances of nature, and submit our own will to the divine with the resignation of old *Eli*; *It is the Lord, let him do whatsoever seems good unto him.*

In this request we particularly pray for those graces and virtues which have a more especial tendency to dispose us to this resignation to providence: such as

1st, Humility, which corrects every arrogant thought, and mortifies all our presumptuous claims of favour from heaven. Reminds us of our own demerits, and convinces us that the least blessings we receive are greater than the best of us deserve.

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2dly, Content, or an easy un aspiring temper which rests satisfied with its present share of the bounties of providence, neither envies the more liberal allotments of other men, nor repines at its own.

3dly, Patience, and a chearful submission to whatever pains and afflictions we are at any time called to suffer. And

Lastly, A quiet subjection to the authority, a full trust in the goodness, the wisdom, and the promises of God: these are virtues of so close an affinity and connexion, that one of them can hardly subsist without the other, and are all of them necessary to form and perfect that resignation to providence, that intire subjection of our own will to the will of God, which we are here taught to pray for. Not that it is unlawful for us so far to consult our own desires as to request such events and dispositions of providence as each shall apprehend most conducive to his own happiness, because otherwise we must exclude all temporal blessings from the subject of human petitions; the sick must not pray for health, the poor for relief, nor the afflicted for ease; but the temper required of us in this petition is, that we request these blessings with an intire submission to the will of
M God.

God. That though the event we ask for may seem to us most agreeable to our happiness, yet to refer ourselves wholly to the divine wisdom; and if any other determination shall appear to him either fitter for us or more subservient to the ends of his providence, and the promotion of his glory, to acquiesce and even rejoice in the execution of his will. But besides this will of his providence we observed that this petition comprehended also

2dly, The will of his laws, or, that system of rules and precepts, whether natural or revealed which God has prescribed to the actions of men; and more especially that most perfect declaration of his will vouchsafed to mankind in the gospel of Jesus Christ. With regard to this will we here pray that God would enable us to walk according to the rule set before us, and be perfect in every good word and work. That he would strengthen all our infirmities, mortify our lusts, subdue our spiritual enemies, and supply us with such a measure of his grace as may deliver us from the bondage of our own corruption, and make us equal to the difficulties of obedience.

2dly, As we are bound not only to obey the divine law ourselves, but also to recommend as far as we are able, the same observances to others,

others, so we are here taught to pray, that this submission to the will, and obedience to the laws of God, may universally prevail through the whole earth; that the secret influences of his grace may descend on the hearts and regulate the practice of all mankind; and *lastly* that this obedience to the will of God on earth may be as near to the perfection of that service which is paid him in heaven, as the infirmities of human nature will permit. That the same zeal and alacrity to do his will, the same chearful, constant universal devotion of the heart to his service, may appear in the conduct of men, as inspires those sacred ministers of his will above, and equally perfects the obedience and the happiness of heaven.

The reasonableness and necessity of offering this petition to God is the *second* thing I proposed to consider.

And *first*, No temper or disposition of mind can more properly become a rational creature than that resignation to the wisdom and providence of God, we are here taught to express and desire. Can it consist with the humility of a creature to expostulate on the counsels of the Almighty, and give rules to
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the governor of the world? Shall men especially, shall animated dust and ashes, the lowest of all intelligent beings, who depends on the favour of God for every moment's subsistence, for every pulse of life, shall he take upon him to argue with his maker, and prescribe to him how he shall order the works of his own hands?

God has most expressly asserted his right to do whatsoever he pleases in heaven and in earth, and assured us that it is he who presides over nature. That in all her works she moves by his direction and obeys his commands. That it is he who weighs kingdoms in the balance, and disposes the affairs of nations. That the wills and passions of men, and even the hearts of the greatest princes are in his hand, and that he turns them as the rivers of water. That every event of human life comes to pass by his special appointment; that affliction does not spring from the ground, nor trouble from the dust, but that it is he who visits the offences of men with rods, and their sins with scourges. And as this supremacy of providence is a just foundation for the worship of his creatures, so it is equally an argument for their submission to his will in the government of the world. But this disposition

sition will appear especially reasonable, if we reflect that God is a being of infinite wisdom, sees the most remote trains and consequences of things of which we are ignorant. That we may be foolishly requesting our own ruin: and that he may most effectually consult our happiness by denying our most passionate desires.

That his most severe dispensations are conducted by unerring justice, and that we may always securely depend on him that his anger will never be over proportioned to the demerit of our sins. That if at any time he suffers affliction to fall in a more distinguished measure on men of virtue and piety, it is intended as the means to convey some spiritual favour to them of infinitely greater value; that lastly his goodness and benevolence to his creatures appears in every work of nature and providence. That man especially has been distinguished by the most eminent marks of his favour by a most affectionate provision for his support in this life, and directed by the most amazing instances of love to the attainment of a better. And therefore if we seriously reflect on our own weakness, ignorance, and passion, how unfit we are to lay the schemes of providence, and adjust the various

interests of the world, and even to judge what is most for our own happiness, what more prudent and reasonable request can we make for ourselves than that a being equal to the mighty province, a being infinitely wise, just, and good, and disposed to do better for us than we are able either to ask or think, that this God would execute his own will, and dispose of us and our concerns as should seem good in his eyes.

It has been objected to this doctrine by some ancient * sceptics, and from them taken up by some † modern enemies of religion, that God in the works of nature acts only by a general will. That he has established the great machine upon certain and unalterable laws of motion which it invariably pursues in a regular succession of causes and effects. That even the several events of human affairs flow from necessary and unchangeable causes, and are in every instance to be accounted for as unavoidable consequences of the passions, the skill, or the power of the agents. That therefore this established will of providence always is and always must be executed without interruption. And consequently it is

* *Lucian,*† *Blunt and others.*

absurd

absurd and impertinent in us to trouble ourselves with praying for that, which will equally come to pass whether we pray for it or not.

To this it may be sufficient to answer in defence of our using this petition, that the objection proceeds upon a mistaken sense of it, by which no one ever intended to request that God might be able to execute his own pleasure, but that we may by his grace be enabled to subdue our own weak and passionate desires, and submit with a perfect complacency of mind to his determinations; a request which will always be reasonable, and equally become the devotions of a creature whether God acts by a general or by particular wills.

But this objection had a farther view, and was intended not only to discountenance this petition, but also to expose all prayer for temporal blessings as a ridiculous superstition. For if the works and motions of nature and the events of providence are necessary and unalterable, to what purpose do we pray for a particular direction of them in our favour? It would lead me too far from my subject to give a distinct answer to this objection. It might be proved that God proposes moral ends as well as natural in the works and events of providence, that the objectors, espe-

cially those who pretend to acknowledge a God, but seem very unwilling to acknowledge a future state, are obliged to confess it necessary he should do so, because on that supposition the justice of God is bound so to direct and order the events of this world, as they may punish the vicious and reward the virtuous actions of men; and since this cannot be done by an established immutable course of events, which could never have the nature of punishments and rewards, it follows that providence must frequently interpose its particular direction. But I hope it may be sufficient in a Christian audience to observe that the scriptures every where represent God as acting by particular wills, as immediately influencing the counsels and actions, the wills and passions of men, and by especial efficacy producing every event in the affairs of the world. As particularly directing the works of nature, promoting or suspending its operations by occasional acts of power, either in compliance with the prayers of his servants, or in executing of his justice in the government of the world. And therefore it is not improper or unreasonable to pray for such events as we apprehend best suited to our particular exigencies. Though the submission we owe to his

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his authority, and the confidence we ought to have in his wisdom and goodness, require us to refer ourselves ultimately to his good pleasure, and acquiesce in whatever event he shall think fittest for us.

But II. It is also highly reasonable that we should pray to God that the will of his laws should in the most perfect manner be obeyed by his creatures.

This is evident, because it is the most rational desire of a creature that the glory of his creator, and his own and his neighbour's happiness should in the most effectual manner be promoted. Now the glory of God is no way made so visible and conspicuous as by the ready and universal obedience of his subjects. He then appears in the majesty of his kingdom, when his authority is acknowledged, and his commands revered and obeyed throughout his dominions. Had the laws of God, indeed, been mere arbitrary impositions, the wanton exercise of unlimited power; had they enjoined us a painful servitude without any prospect of reward to encourage our observance, though even upon these terms the sovereignty of the author had required us to submit to them, yet the duty would have been but heavily complied with, and men would have been dif-

difficultly induced to profess such a complacency in the command, as is implied in this petition : but when we observe that the intention of the divine laws is to lead and conduct us to happiness, to promote the public and private interests of the world, to preserve the ease and tranquility of our abode here, and direct us to eternal felicity hereafter; with how grateful a devotion should we address our heavenly father, that his will may be done on earth, that such kind and merciful proposals may be universally complied with ? To which let me add, that this must be a request especially acceptable to God, as it expresses a noble and most extensive charity, and consequently is proved also reasonable to us, by all the arguments that plead for that virtue ; it is beseeching God, that all his creatures may effectually pursue the methods he has prescribed for their happiness ; and in other words praying for the salvation of all mankind. But the enemies of religion have endeavoured to discourage also this petition to the Deity. All that we can mean (say they) in this petition is that God would enable his creatures to obey his laws : now it is implied in the notion of every equitable law, that the persons to whom it is directed should be en-

endued with abilities to obey it, and consequently it is idle and frivolous to ask that of God which we are already possessed of—But though man be endued with abilities to obey the divine laws, yet in the exercise of these abilities he is not a necessary but a free and voluntary agent; as he can obey so he can also disobey. What we therefore pray for in this petition is not that God would give any new faculties or powers to the human nature, but that he would so direct and assist us by his grace in the use of those we already have, that we may actually comply with the laws he has prescribed to us.

That the several duties he has required, exceed not human abilities, is evident, because they are no more than have singly been performed by numerous examples of virtue in all ages. But yet it is more evident from universal experience that we may transgress them. Even the best and wisest men have felt and lamented a corruption in their nature, which their strongest resolutions could not intirely subdue. The number and variety of temptations we are exposed to, the ferment and disorder of our passions, and, what religion has farther discovered to us, the arts and malice of a spiritual enemy, who goes daily

daily about seeking which of us he may devour, are circumstances of our danger which abundantly convince us of the reasonableness and necessity of this petition. That God would support our infirmities, defend us from the enemy, and enable us in every instance of duty, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. But this objection is still farther urged, that those very difficulties and infirmities, which account for the necessity of our requesting those assistances from God, which may enable us to do his will, are at the same time an argument, that it is impossible for us to do it in that perfect manner, in which it is done in heaven; and therefore this circumstance in the petition must be allowed an absurdity, since it is praying for what we confess it impossible for us to receive. But the reply to this is very obvious, that in the same sense and for the same reasons that our Saviour commands us to be perfect as our father which is in heaven is perfect, we are here directed to pray that our obedience may be as perfect as that performed in heaven. And if it appeared not unreasonable to God to propose his holiness as our example, which even angels themselves must despair to equal, much less is it absurd in us to desire the holiness of angels,

angels, though we acknowledge it impossible for us to attain to it. In sum, though God, through the satisfaction of Christ, will accept of a sincere though imperfect service, yet the law runs still in the same form and requires an exact compliance. The mark and pattern proposed is still the highest moral perfection, this is what we are commanded to aspire to, and no request can be more proper for us to offer than that God may enable us by his grace to come as near it as is possible.

Give me leave then to recommend this petition to your most earnest and fervent devotions, and persuade you to co-operate with the divine grace, in forming your souls to that holy disposition we here pray for by representing

Thirdly, The inestimable happiness that will attend it. If we would inquire into the source and cause of human misery, from what bitter spring it is that so much complaint and disquietude is derived on the world, we shall at last be forced to ascribe it all to this one irregularity, the opposition of the will of man to the will of God. Our creator designed us for happiness, and if with patience we would attend his direction would infallibly lead us
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to it. But vain man will be wiser and stronger than God, will be laying schemes and forming projects of his own, and contend with the Almighty for the execution of them. But alas the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand ; and when we have toiled and wearied ourselves in a fruitless contest, after all our struggle and reluctance we are forced to submit, and gain nothing by the dispute, but to be dragged on with torture in a way where a willing compliance had led us with pleasure.

In a man resigned to the will of God, we have the noble image of a soul raised above the strife and hurry of the world, safe in his fortunes, and easy under every event of providence. What the bounty of his creator bestows on him to day, he enjoys with an humble and chearful content, unmolested by any passionate fear or desire; and relies with a filial confidence on the same wisdom and goodness to provide for him on the morrow. He prays indeed for those blessings which appear most agreeable to his station, and applies himself to all rational methods for the attainment of them, but still leaves it to a wisdom superior to his own to determine what is best for him, and feels no disappointment in a contrary disposition. Even under the severest

severest calamities, he can support himself with reflecting that they are sent by a just and benevolent being, who will not afflict him beyond measure, and never willingly grieves his creatures: and that his present sufferings will prove the means of some greater blessing, which he could not have attained without them. Thus amidst all the various events of life, he preserves an unshaken tranquility, and is carried gently down the stream of providence, secure in the affection and skill of his governor, and prepared to find an equal pleasure in submitting to his conduct, and obeying his commands.

On the contrary, all our counsels where God is not taken into the scheme are vanity and vexation, *We sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.* Our soul is perpetually tossed to and fro, the sport of conflicting passions, tormented with a thousand anxious fears in all its pursuits, and left in every disappointment to blasphemy and despair, unsatisfied with the present, and apprehensive of the future, without possibility of any settled enjoyment in this world, and without any comfort in our prospects of another. I might farther represent the happiness we pray for, when we request that the will of God's laws may be obeyed, but the pleasures
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of obedience are a subject you have been often entertained with.

Let us only reflect how much more desirable a place the world would be, if the will of God was done on earth; if men were as just, as charitable, as good-natured, as ready to assist and forgive one another, as God has commanded. Whence come wars and fightings, and all the miseries that torment and disquiet mankind, but from our own lusts and wickedness; it is the root of sin that brings forth these bitter fruits, and it is there the only effectual remedies can be applied. Let us but retrieve the innocence, and we shall at the same time restore the peace and tranquility of paradise: and in whatever proportion we now in this present life imitate the obedience that is paid to God by his servants in heaven, in the same shall their happiness be our reward, in that state of glory and immortality which we hope for hereafter.





A Love to public Worship, and Places dedicated to it, recommended.

PSAL. lxxxiv. 1.

How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!

THE composition of this psalm is, with some uncertainty, ascribed either to *David* when he fled from *Saul* into the land of the *Philistines*, or when he was driven from *Jerusalem* by the rebellion of his son; or to some later prophet, speaking in the name of the captives at *Babylon*. The latter conjecture appears the less probable, because many expressions here used can hardly be reconciled to the state of the *Jewish* worship in the days of the captivity,

tivity, when (as *Jeremiah* laments) the tabernacle was taken away, the places of assembly destroyed, and the solemn feasts and sabbaths forgotten.

But whoever was the author of this psalm, there appears in it the character of a truly devout soul, breathing forth his affections to the service of God, and all that related to it. In application of this scripture, I shall endeavour to recommend his example to your imitation, as it expresses

- I. A devout affection to the public worship of God, and for the sake of that,
- II. To the places dedicated to it.

For the tabernacles of the Lord were therefore amiable to him, because, as he tells us, *They that dwell in his house were always praising him.*

That God is to be worshipped, is a first principle of natural religion, immediately arising from the acknowledgment of a Deity: and that we are obliged to a publick and social performance of this duty, might be inferred as a consequence of that principle. But the scripture before us rather leads me to recommend the publick worship of God to your
love

love and esteem, than to enforce the obligation of it as a duty. And

If we love the master, we shall love the service he requires from us, and with especial delight attend those duties by which his holy name is more eminently honoured, his sovereignty acknowledged, and the glory of his kingdom manifested to the world. Now the power and majesty of God's kingdom among men, never appears in so visible lustre as in the congregation of his saints, where numbers of his creatures and subjects are assembled before him, and with united hearts and voices address sacrifices of prayers and praise to his throne. What transports of pleasure must such a scene infuse into a man who loves and honours God? An overflowing delight will fill his soul, and his heart will dance for joy, when he beholds around him such an image of heaven; the fairest resemblance that earth can afford of that holy and happy assembly, *who cease not day and night to ascribe honour, and glory, and power to him who sitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was slain for the sins of the world.* If we find in ourselves a coldness and indifference to this service, we may be assured all is not right within us: our soul must be distempered and our spiritual

appetites depraved and vitiated, if this spiritual entertainment, this food of angels be tasteless and insipid to us. It was a consciousness of guilt and nakedness made *Adam* attempt to hide himself from God, and rendered that presence which was the joy of his innocence a terror and burden to him.

As God is the supreme and ultimate object of a good man's affections, his rest and his confidence, the center of all his hopes and desires, so the greatest felicity, he is capable of in this life, arises from acts of communion with him. God indeed is never far from any of us: he is about our bed, and about our path; his presence is always open to the addresses of his servants; he attends even to every ejaculation darted up from the shop or the field, and in every place, and at every season sheds down his graces and comforts on the faithful worshipper. But as the influences of his spirit never descend more freely than in the courts of his sanctuary, so the soul is there peculiarly disposed to receive and enjoy them. The concurrent devotions of the assembly open and enlarge every spiritual capacity, awaken our zeal, and warm our affections. We find by all experience how apt the same passions are to spread and
diffuse

diffuse themselves through numerous assemblies of men, how easily they catch and take fire from one another: and the observation holds as well in religious assemblies as in any other. The affections proper to the offices we are there engaged in, are kindled by communication from one to another; and the coldest breast must burn with divine love, when every heart around him appears wrapt in that holy flame. To a soul thus disposed to receive him, the spirit of joy descends in more abundant consolations, and gives him drink of his pleasures, as out of a river. From the experience of these heavenly communications proceeded those earnest longings of the *Psalmist* to appear in the courts of God. In the land of his exile, when he dwelt with *Mesech*, and had his habitation among the tents of *Kedar*, God he knew was with him, heard and answered his prayers, and in the midst of his sorrows his comforts refreshed his soul. But still something was wanting which solitude could not furnish. His affections did not rise with that fervour and vivacity to meet and enjoy God, as they were wont to do in the service of the tabernacle, when he went with the multitude, and brought them forth into the house of God. His devotions were comparatively

faint and languid, and the spiritual pleasures of the closet were not equal to those of the sanctuary. The holy man felt the disparity, and expresses the emptiness of his soul by the most eager and impatient appetites of our nature—*My soul (says he) is athirst for God—as the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God—When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?* Thus amiable to a devout soul is publick worship, considered as an act of communion with God.

It is farther endeared to us, considered as an act of religious communion with one another. For this is a service which equally promotes the glory of God in the highest, and peace and good will among men. It is in these holy assemblies we appear as servants of the same master, as children of the same father which is in heaven; and recognize those engaging relations which unite us to Christ and one another. Every fierce and unbenevolent passion must here be calmed, and with whatever resentments our secular interest and pursuits may divide us from each other, yet surely in the house of God we shall walk together as friends. For how can malice, envy, or revenge remain in our hearts, when we are
mutually

mutually imploring the graces and blessings of heaven for each other? Can we hate him, whom we behold intreating God to pour his benefits upon us? Can we withhold our forgiveness from him, whom we here see humbling himself in a penitent confession of all his offences? Whom we beseech God to hear and forgive, and whom the conditions of that pardon we are praying for ourselves, call upon us to forgive? Here, if ever, the insolence of the rich, and the envy of the poor, all those disquietudes, which are apt to arise from the different stations and conditions of men, will be softened and appeased. In the duties of this place, we all present ourselves before the great and glorious God as creatures and sinners; and how must the pride of man be humbled, when he reflects on himself under these characters? How little must the greatest among men appear in his own eyes, in comparison with that infinite majesty before whom he stands? How trifling the advantages of fortune or authority he possesses? How inconsiderable the distance at which he is removed, from the meanest of his brethren? We behold here high and low, indigent and wealthy, bond and free, kneeling before the same altar, equally permitted to approach the

Lord of heaven and earth, equally related to him, equally entitled to his promises and favour; all aspiring to that better country, where these temporary distinctions must for ever cease and be abolished. With what influence must such a sight reconcile the several ranks and orders of men to each other, dispose the rich to humility and compassion, the poor to gratitude and content, and diffuse love and amity through the whole assembly.

Yet farther will publick worship be recommended to us, when we reflect that the most express encouragements of success are given to this service. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, our Lord has promised to be in the midst of them. The united prayers of a devout congregation offer a kind of holy violence to heaven, and address the mercy of God with a force which he will not resist. We are redeemed as a church, sanctified as a church, the favours and privileges of the gospel belong to us as members of a church, and it is here only we worship as visibly united in that character. It is here we eat of the same spiritual bread, and drink of the same spiritual cup, and partake in those ordinances which Christ has instituted as means of grace, the ordinary pledges and seals
of

of the remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. It is here we receive the comfort and instruction of the word of life, are confirmed in the faith, and exhorted to obedience, by those whom Christ has appointed for the work of the ministry, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of his body.

In sum: it is here the holy angels of God more especially attend upon us: it is here we express and keep up our communion with that heavenly host, *with the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, with the spirits of just men made perfect, with God the judge of all, and with Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named.* If therefore there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if we have any sense of the honour of those great relations to which we are here admitted, if any taste of the spiritual pleasures of communion with God and his saints, with joy and gladness shall we attend the returns of these holy assemblies, and seek here the comfort and refreshment of our souls.

And

And if our hearts are truly affected towards the publick worship of God; all that relates to it will be venerable to us, and the duty which this scripture I am

2dly, To recommend to you will in consequence engage your regard: if we love the service, the places set apart and dedicated to it, the tabernacles of the lord, will be amiable in our eyes.

For though God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, though his immensity cannot be confined by walls and roofs; but he is every where present to those who adore him in spirit and in truth, yet the Holy Ghost has thought fit to ascribe to places consecrated to his solemn worship, the honour of his peculiar residence. Thus he is said to have dwelt between the cherubims of the mercy-seat; the temple is called his house, his court, the habitation of his holiness, the place where his honour dwelt: and we find a respect suitable to these high characters paid towards it by the greatest examples of piety enjoined as a duty of religion.

It may perhaps be objected that the expressions, the precedents and precepts here referred to, were accommodated only to the legal

gal oeconomy, a dispensation that consisted of outward observances, a ceremonious regard to outward things and ritual consecrations: that the gospel has abolished these old things, and prescribed a religion of a quite different genius, purely spiritual, and wholly abstracted from these externals, and therefore the argument will not hold from the one to the other, now that whatever was typical in the law, or merely of positive institution, ceases to oblige Christians we can easily admit: that the service peculiarly insisted on by the gospel, is the internal devotion of the heart to God in spirit and in truth, we also acknowledge: but that a reverence for places dedicated to the worship of God, is either an expired part of the law, or inconsistent with the spirituality of the gospel, we cannot allow.

Our blessed Lord, the author of our religion, far from discouraging such reverence, declared his concern for it by an act of zeal, the most remarkable of his whole life. In the reproof of other crimes, he was meek and lowly; even the blasphemies and indignities offered to his own sacred person, he bore without resentment or complaint: but when he saw the house of prayer, his father's house,

house, prophaned, the fire kindled within him, and broke out in a holy transport of indignation against the offenders. And the argument arising from this example of our Lord extends with parity of reason to Christian temples : for we cannot imagine, that irreverence shewn to the worship he himself instituted, should be without offence to him, who was so highly provoked with that shewn to a worship he came to supersede.

But how comes it to pass that the same measure and kind of reverence should be censured as a Judaical superstition, when applied to temples, which, in a parallel case, is universally acknowledged a Christian duty ; the treating at least one day in the week with peculiar respect, as holy to the Lord, is, I think, confessed to be a duty in the practice and doctrine of all, who call themselves Christians. Now a place set apart for divine worship acquires just the same relative holiness, that a day set apart to the same purpose does : and consequently the arguments that prove a reverence due to the one, must be equally conclusive when applied to the other. If we look for an express command for such respect to either in the writings of the New Testament, we find none : and in
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the Old both are joined together in the same precept; *ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuaries,* Levit. xix. 30.

But in truth the obligation of this duty depends not merely on a positive precept, but arises from the reason of the thing, and is a branch of natural religion; neither can the reverence of God himself be preserved among mankind without it. In our present state, the temperament and passions of the soul will be influenced by outward impressions: through this channel the greater part of our ideas enter: and though some few contemplative persons may want no assistance from sensibles to excite their devotion, and elevate their affections to God, yet the bulk of mankind are not capable of such abstractions, but must be led by the things that are seen, to the things that are not seen. And as we acknowledge there may be danger that some may dwell too much, and place too much of religion in externals; so there is equal danger on the other side, lest while we pursue religion too far into the region of pure spirits, we lose ourselves in vision and enthusiasm. We have bodies as well as spirits, and these mutually act upon each other. If we honour God in our hearts, his temples, ministers, and whatever has relation to his service will
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be venerable in our eyes : and the impressions we receive from these outward relatives, by a natural chain carry our thoughts on to God ; and while we daily habituate ourselves to reverence them, we quicken and improve our reverence towards God, to whom they belong.

But we are farther to remember, that it is the duty of every man not only to love and honour God himself, but also to promote as far as he is able, the same holy affections in others. Now this can only be done by outward and visible acts : it is by these the light that is within us must shine before men. If we would prevail on others to reverence God, our own reverence must appear to them in such visible actions as are expressive of it. And by what visible actions can we more emphatically declare our reverence of God, than by treating with outward respect whatever is sanctified and devoted to his service ? The nature of man is the same under the gospel, as it was under the law ; his passions the same, moved and actuated by the same applications ; and whatever had then a natural propriety to fix impressions of awe and reverence towards God in the minds of men, now is, and ever will be, equally proper to the end of the world. Since therefore God himself
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prescribed an outward reverence to his sanctuary, as an effectual means to preserve among his people a due reverence towards him, this will ever remain a duty, not merely as directed by that law, but as the proper means to an end perpetually necessary, and therefore of moral and perpetual obligation.

Now our *reverence* to the temples of the Lord will especially appear,

First, By an awful deportment on all occasions of our approach to them.

Secondly, A care to preserve them in decent and comely repair. And

1st, Our demeanour in and towards the house of God should be such as may acknowledge its sacred use and relation, and apparently distinguish it from all places of common and secular application. As to the particular actions by which we should express this respect, the rule that must govern us is plainly this—Such actions or gestures, as in common apprehension are marks and signs of reverence, should on these occasions appear in our behaviour. For since (as I observed) this outward behaviour is intended to manifest to others the inward reverence of our hearts, it is necessary it should consist of such actions, as, by those who behold them, will be understood to signify such reverence. This signi-

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ficancy, depending very much on the customs and sentiments prevailing among mankind, will somewhat vary with the opinions and usages of different ages and nations. But if our superiors, to whom the care of outward decency belongs, have particularly prescribed in this case, their direction ought to be complied with ; for by such submission only an uniformity of practice can be preserved in societies of men, and uniformity itself is a part of decency, of great and peculiar impression on all who behold it. Where authority has not interposed, the application of the general rule before suggested is left to every man's own discretion.

Of actions, by which holiness in a place has been acknowledged, the earliest we read of was putting off the shoes from the feet. This was commanded to *Moses* when God appeared to him at the bush. It obtained afterwards as expressive of such reverence, not only among the Jews, but several of the Heathen ; and is at this day retained by many eastern nations, Christians and others. In these parts of the world, uncovering the head has by custom affixt to it the same significance. And if the palace of a prince, and even every ordinary court of judicature demands from us this respect, as proper to express and
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keep up the reverence due to the office and character of our temporal rulers, much more will these reasons oblige us to shew it to the courts of the Lord's house, the palaces of the great king of all the earth.

In general when we enter into the houses of God, we should keep our feet, our whole deportment should be serious and devout, and all our words and actions relating to them should be such as may testify an awful regard to the divine presence, and a pious affection to the holy offices by which he is there served. But

2dly, Our respect to the temples of the Lord should appear in our care to preserve them in decent and comely repair.

That a visible beauty in his temples is acceptable to God, we may conclude if we observe how particularly he himself directed the ornaments of the first tabernacle, and even inspired the workmen with skill, to execute the curious design; and all this elegance and expence he required from his people in poor and distressed circumstances, wandering thro' a desolate wilderness. And afterwards, when the Jewish state became confirmed by the conquest of all their enemies, with what com-

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placency

placency did he approve, and with what blessings reward the piety of *David* and *Solomon*? Of the one in intending, and the other in finishing the most magnificent temple in the whole world: a temple adorned with all the splendor that the most exquisite workmanship, and the most costly materials could give to any building. It was not for any reasons peculiar to the Jewish religion, that God was pleased with the stateliness and beauty of his house, but as it was a grateful acknowledgement to his providence for his manifold blessings, as it tended to raise more venerable conceptions of his majesty, and enliven the devotions of his worshippers: reasons which will ever remain in force, and recommend to all ages an imitation of that great example. To the favour of God we owe all that we enjoy, and our gratitude cannot better appear than in bestowing part of what he has given, in the promotion of his service. *All this store (says David) that we have prepared to build thee an house cometh of thy hand, and is all thine own, and of thine own have we given thee.* And, what was it they gave? Was it only stones and timber, the bare necessary materials for the building?

No,

princes, zealously intent on the work ; and under the encouragement of their example, the wealth of a whole nation was applied: and doubtless if all the temples of this land were brought into one estimate, we ourselves might glory in an expence on divine worship far exceeding this. But what I would infer from the precedent is, that even pomp and splendor in the sanctuaries of God is very consistent with the sobriety of his worship, and the utmost ornament we can bestow on them is defended by this exemple. We honour God with that part of our substance which we thus apply, and the offering will be accepted as an act of devotion to his service.

The proportion of expence due to these works of piety, is to be measured by the circumstances and abilities of a people, and the elegance obtaining in the building and furniture of their own houses. *Lo* (says the man after God's heart) *I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remaineth under curtains.* The disparity appeared such a reproach to the holy man, as he was not able to bear. And as the houses of God in a land flourishing in wealth, and those ornaments

naments of life which are consequent to it, ought in general to be more splendid than where these advantages are wanting; so for the same reasons the more opulent places in any nation ought to distinguish themselves from the poorer and less refined, by a greater care in the structure and ornaments of their temples; and that not only as a return due to God for the more large effusions of his bounty towards them, but as necessary to give its proper influence to the example, and render it promotive of the honour and reverence of God. For the ideas of decency in a temple, and the conclusions arising from it, are relative to the condition of those to whom the support of it belongs. Those degrees of neatness which in one place express a commendable zeal for the honour of God, and the decency of his worship, will in another of greater affluence appear mean and sordid, and are arguments of a prophane and irreligious spirit. Should a stranger, who has seen in our houses an elegance of building without, and of ornaments within, enter into our temples, and find there no appearance of that wealth and plenty, which he has every where else observed, would he not conclude that we

are all children of this world, and that the fear of God is not in this place? If therefore we have any concern for the credit of our religion, we cannot suffer such a blemish in the esteem of the world to rest upon it.

But the decency or beauty of our temples is not only an evidence of our devotion, but by a natural efficacy promotive of it. It enlarges our conceptions of the majesty, holiness, and purity of that being in whose presence we appear, and begets in us affections proportionable to those conceptions. And therefore the Holy Ghost, when he would raise our conceptions of the heavenly *Jerusalem* Rev. xxi. as high as he could, describes it as built of gold and silver, and precious stones. The materials are a collection of all that is valuable in the esteem of men, or pleasant to behold: and if these images of sensible splendor and beauty were, in the judgment of divine wisdom, proper to represent to us the heavenly things themselves, to give us an idea of the peculiar residence of God, and to kindle in our hearts the veneration due to his presence, the like appearances of beauty in our temples must be proportionably conducive to the same holy purposes.

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There is indeed an excess to be avoided in beautifying holy places, but this consists rather in the kind than the measure of ornament. There are a sort of light meretricious decorations, apt to infuse ideas unsuitable to the solemnity of the place, and the sacred uses to which it is designed. The church must not be dressed in the attire of an harlot, but of a grave and serious matron: and provided the ornaments are agreeable to this character, the more magnificent they are, the more effectually will they engage our respect, and dispose us to reverence and devotion.

More might be added on this argument, but the beauty of this holy place reminds that I speak to those who are forward of their own accord and want no exhortation to this duty.

It remains only to be observed to you, that the purity of the worshippers is the noblest ornament of the temple: if this be wanting, our churches with all their decorations will be but like whited sepulchres, outwardly fair, but within full of all uncleanness.

Let it therefore be our farther care, to sanctify and cleanse every one ourselves, our souls, and bodies, from all sinful pollutions. Let

us bring hither clean hands and devout hearts, holy and undefiled affections. Then shall God delight in our temples and our service, hear our prayers, and accept our offerings; till from worshipping in these earthly tabernacles, we are admitted to adore him in houses not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and founder is God.



Excessive



Excessive Wickedness destructive to a Nation *.

PSAL. xviii. 3.

The Overflowings of Ungodliness made me afraid.



BY the overflowing of ungodliness the holy writer may be presumed to mean an uncommon prevalence of wickedness exceeding its ordinary measure and proportion in the world. Wicked men there ever were, and always will be in all ages, and in all countries; but they are sometimes under greater awe, more restrained by shame, or the fear of censure and correction, than at others. But this image represents to us impiety grown to the

* Preached on the *fast-day* against the *Plague*, 1721.
height

height of insolence regardless of all rules, and unrestrained by discipline; when like a swollen torrent, it breaks through those banks and fences of law and authority which were placed as boundaries to its rage, and threatens destruction to all around it. At such a prospect all who are within reach of the evil have surely, great reason to be afraid, to look with horror on the rolling flood by which they may expect every hour to be swallowed up, and apply themselves to make some present and effectual provisions against it. The particulars I beg leave to offer to your reflection from this scripture are

I. That ungodliness may rise to such a pitch of insolence as to be without restraint from laws and authority.

II. Whenever this is the case there is reason to apprehend the greatest evils in consequence of it.

III. I shall consider what conduct is in prudence and duty required from all who are in view of such a danger.

And I. That ungodliness may rise, &c.

That this is no impossible supposition we are assured from the authority of my text;
thus

thus it was in the Psalmist's time ; and the complaints of holy men in other ages give us reason to conclude the same of them. The truth of the fact indeed is too apparent from all histories to admit of dispute, neither can it be wondered at that when the fear of God and the remonstrances of conscience have lost their force, all human authority proves weak and ineffectual. For whatever may have been pretended by some libertine thinkers, the terror of civil laws, and the authority of the magistrate will never be found sufficient to preserve the peace, order, and happiness of mankind, without the assistance of religion. Civil government indeed is ordained for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well ; and whenever it is duly executed, according to this intention, it is confessed very much to promote and secure the happiness of society ; but unless it be assisted, supported, and conducted by religion, all its strength will be but weakness, and all its wisdom folly.

For, besides that the duties prescribed by religion, are in themselves the most apposite provisions for all the ends of society, and consequently the best direction even for the matter
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of civil laws is to be thence derived ; besides this (I say) and supposing human wisdom to have contrived a body of laws the most useful to all purposes of society that can be imagined, yet

1st, If the magistrate, to whom the execution of them is committed, be without any restraint from conscience and religion, this provision will become of little effect : for to him must be left the applications of these laws to particular cases ; neither is it possible for the wisdom of one man to devise so good a law, but that the wickedness of another may utterly defeat it in the execution ; and either by connivance at offenders, or by straining or perverting it in judgment, make it quite contrary to its intention, an encouragement to evil doers, and a terror to them that do well. And whenever his own passions or a vicious interest persuade a ruler to use such expedients, nothing but the awe of a superior power can withhold his compliance with them. And so,

2^{dly}, If the subjects of any community are without any sense of the obligations of conscience, and unrestrained by religion, human laws will be found but a weak provision for
peace

peace and justice among them. For no one upon this supposition will be withheld from the greatest villanies, if he can presume himself cunning enough to elude the notice of the law, or wealthy enough to bribe, or strong enough to resist the execution of it: and it is a conclusion arising from the experience of all ages, that in the same proportion that prophaneness and irreligion have prevailed among any people, all civil crimes have abounded too: of so great importance is it to the civil powers to promote and encourage religion. And whenever through their own corruption or remissness in their office, they suffer this principle to be brought into discountenance and contempt, they destroy their own strongest security, and cut off the bough upon which they stand: their authority itself becomes precarious, without any foundation to rest on that is equal to the support of it, and without efficacy to the ends of its institution. When the wickedness of men has dared so far as to rebel against their Creator, it will soon grow too strong for the reins of human government, and run away with those who preside in it: or, in the allusion of my text, when the flood has borne down its strongest restraint, the fear of God, though publick authority
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and the fear of man may give some check to its course, and preserve here and there a small part from the inundation, yet it will generally be carried down with the stream, and be forced to comply with universal corruption. The justness of my

2d, Reflection from this scripture, or with how great and reasonable an apprehension every wise man must look on such a state of things, must appear if we consider

1st, The miserable consequences which even naturally must attend it. When all the wild lusts and passions of corrupt nature are let loose to their several pursuits, unrestrained by divine and human laws, no person is secured from injury, no property from fraud or rapine. Men will be reduced to a state of war and distrust of one another, obliged to guard against every man they meet as an enemy, without confidence in publick or private faith. Should they be able to protect themselves from open violence, yet from deceit or perjury there is no defence. When the religion of oaths no longer binds, the protection of the laws ceases, and they themselves will be made the instruments of oppression. To a good man especially must this prospect be full of terror. He must look upon himself

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as a sheep in the midst of wolves, armed only with innocence against lawless force and treachery : at the same time marked out by the distinction of his life and character for the scorn and prey of unrighteousness. A peculiar share of affliction he knows will await him from the continual reproaches and injuries of wicked men, from the blasphemies he must hear, and the impieties he must see prevailing round him. Humanity and pity will still add to his sorrows, and his compassion for the public misery increase the burden of his own. Imagination itself can hardly draw a more frightful scene than appears to us when we consider a people broke loose from all bonds of conscience, and restraints of authority : a nation where every one is intent on spoil, eager in the pursuit and rioting in the enjoyment of every dissolute pleasure, and supporting the expence of it by public or private robbery, without faith, justice, or mercy : a nation weak and impoverished by its vices within, and open to any danger that may approach it from without, where there is neither virtue enough left among its members to engage them in its defence, nor honesty enough to be trusted with it : in short, a republic of villains,

disquieting, oppressing, and betraying one another, and miserable even by constitution. This is the just image of a land over-flowed by ungodliness, a prospect terrible enough to justify the Psalmist's fear, if we regard only these natural consequences of the corruption: but much more so when we consider it

2dly, As exposed to the vengeance of an offended God. The natural effects of prevailing impiety are indeed properly inflictions of God, they execute an established rule and constitution of providence, by which it ordained that all sin should be attended with some immediate punishment. This present appendage of sin, it were easy to point out in all private instances of vice: but more especially must the justice of it be acknowledged in national sins, because a community, as such, is capable of being punished only in this life. But besides these which we may call the ordinary penalties of national sins, the justice of God often visits them with some more and signal extraordinary inflictions. And when the corruption is grown to the height here described, when it has overflowed its usual and standing restraints, the divine justice will assuredly distinguish the case by some speedy and visible marks of his resentment.

ment. God has appointed civil government as the ordinary provision against those calamities, which the unbridled passions of men would produce in the world. With this commission is the sword intrusted with the magistrate as his vicegerent, that it should be a terror to evil works. But when wickedness is grown too strong for this restraint, when either by the number or figure of the offenders it defies authority, and demands impunity, this great end of government is frustrated, and the magistrate bears the sword in vain. And then it may be expected that God himself who is the fountain and original of all authority, will take the matter into his own hand, will supply the defect of his ordinance, and, by an immediate interposition of his own power, execute that vengeance which his substitutes are become too weak to inflict: that he will send the sword, the famine, or the pestilence, the great reserves of his prerogative, upon a prophane and incorrigible people.—With what impressions of terror then must every one, who believes a God and a providence, behold himself in the midst of a land, whose trespasses have thus exceeded the power of human correction, and are grown up to heaven?

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ven? When in the image the Psalmist gives of Jerusalem, *he sees nothing but unrighteousness and strife in the city, that wickedness is therein, that deceit and guile go not out of her streets, that the cause of the poor is not judged, nor the prey taken out of the hand of the violent man*; when he sees irreligion, blasphemy, and profaneness prevail as a fashion, and every work of darkness committed in open light, without fear of God or regard to men, in defiance of all laws, and in despite of authority. He knows assuredly that a just and powerful God *will visit for these things, that his soul will be avenged on such a nation as this*: and therefore his fears may very justly suggest to him the most terrible effects of divine anger in former examples, all the evils that an incensed God can inflict on a people who have filled up the measure of their iniquity, and are ripe for destruction.

The conduct which in prudence and duty will become all who are in view of so great a danger is what I proposed in the *third* place to consider. And

1st, The ministers of God are by a peculiar call and obligation required to lift up their voice, and cry aloud, to warn the people of their transgressions, and knowing the terrors
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of the Lord to persuade men to repentance. Their duty and the consequences of their omitting it are very emphatically expressed in the words of God to the prophet *Ezekiel*, *If thou, son of man (says he) dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require this at thine hand.*—They are placed as watchmen, as those who must give an account, and are commanded to be instant in season and out of season, and the more iniquity abounds with the greater zeal and earnestness should they oppose themselves to the rising torrent, and by a faithful discharge of their trust endeavour to repair the broken fences, and restore that reverence and authority to the laws of God and man, which alone can restrain its violence. By such a conduct they will acquit themselves as faithful servants of God, whose ambassadors they are, as dutiful subjects to their prince, whose authority they assert, and as friends and patriots to their country, whose ruin and destruction they labour to prevent. As a departure from God, and a contempt of his laws, is the root of the evil, the principle whence the corruption, the weakness and disorder of all civil constitutions springs, so here the first and most effectual

remedy must be applied. If a true spirit of religion can be revived, if men can be prevailed on to fear God, they will easily be induced in submission to his ordinance to honour the king, not only from wrath, but from a principle of much stronger and surer impression, for conscience sake, and knowing whose authority he hath.

With these applications of the ministry, the civil powers, whose interest is so nearly concerned in the success of them, will doubtless concur and give the utmost support and assistance to an office, which alone can retrieve the influence and honour of their authority.

But besides the special duties of those who are distinguished by a publick character, every private subject who has any zeal for the glory of God, or any concern for the welfare of his country, must labour together with them, and according to his station and capacities, endeavour to dispel the cloud, and divert the impending ruin. And a very little reflection will tell him that the way to do this is first to reform his own life; to abate the number of sinners at least by one, and lessen the burden of publick guilt: and then by a prudent and eminent practice of duty to give
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countenance and encouragement to virtue and piety, and strive to correct the example of the age. And lastly by a resolute application of private reproof and admonition, by a just and open detestation of impiety, and by a vigorous assistance to the magistrate in the assertion of his authority, and the execution of all good laws, to repress the insolence of wicked men, and make the workers of iniquity ashamed.

Upon the whole, every one who fears God, will under so just an apprehension of his judgments set himself with all his strength and with all his might, to reduce within bounds the overflowing of ungodliness, and recal the spirit and practice of religion. If this happy effect can be obtained by the united labours and prayers of good men, God will be intreated for that land, and turn away his anger from it. For thus he has assured us by his prophet—*When I say to the wicked man, thou shalt surely die. If he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right, if he restore the pledge, give again that he has robbed, walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live, he shall not die.* These are the terms upon which God will be reconciled, and his judgments averted from a sinful people. If they can be prevailed on to humble

ble themselves before him, to return to him by a sincere repentance, *he also will repent and return and leave a blessing behind him, and iniquity shall not be their ruin*; and blessed shall every hand be which shall labour in the promotion of so glorious a work. Hard indeed is the task to turn the stream of prevailing corruption, and many are the discouragements that may be expected to attend it; the few must contend against the many, the humble against the insolent, the weak against the powerful: but yet if righteous men how much soever their number may be reduced, shall strenuously unite in the work, they may probably find the success greater than they could hope for.

Guilt has a natural cowardice attending on it: and we are assured if we have but courage to resist him, even the devil himself will fly from us. Notwithstanding all their seeming scorn, there is in the breast of all wicked men a secret dread and reverence of virtue. If a good man assumes the proper courage of his character, his very aspect strikes them with awe and terror; neither can their greatest gaieties stand the shock of so venerable a presence. But whatever may be the event, every good and faithful soldier of Christ will
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remember that his bounden duty obliges him to stand up in the breach, and oppose himself, even singly, to the enemies of his master, how numerous or how powerful soever: and that at such a time to decline the conflict, and content himself with his private virtue, is being afraid of men, and ashamed of Christ. If they can prevail in the glorious attempt, they will have the honour of turning many to righteousness, and rescuing their country from destruction; and if he who saves one soul from death, is intitled by the promise of God to a peculiar recompence, how great shall be his reward who is instrumental in saving a perishing nation? But if their labours are without effect, they will have this comfort, that the reward of success shall attend the sincerity of their endeavours. They have fought the good fight, and God will remember and approve their honest zeal, and make them conquerors, and more than conquerors.

How nearly we of this church and nation are concerned in the case represented to us in my text, and in the reflections that have arisen from it, the occasion of this solemn assembly very particularly calls upon us to consider. We are here met together in the presence of God to humble ourselves before

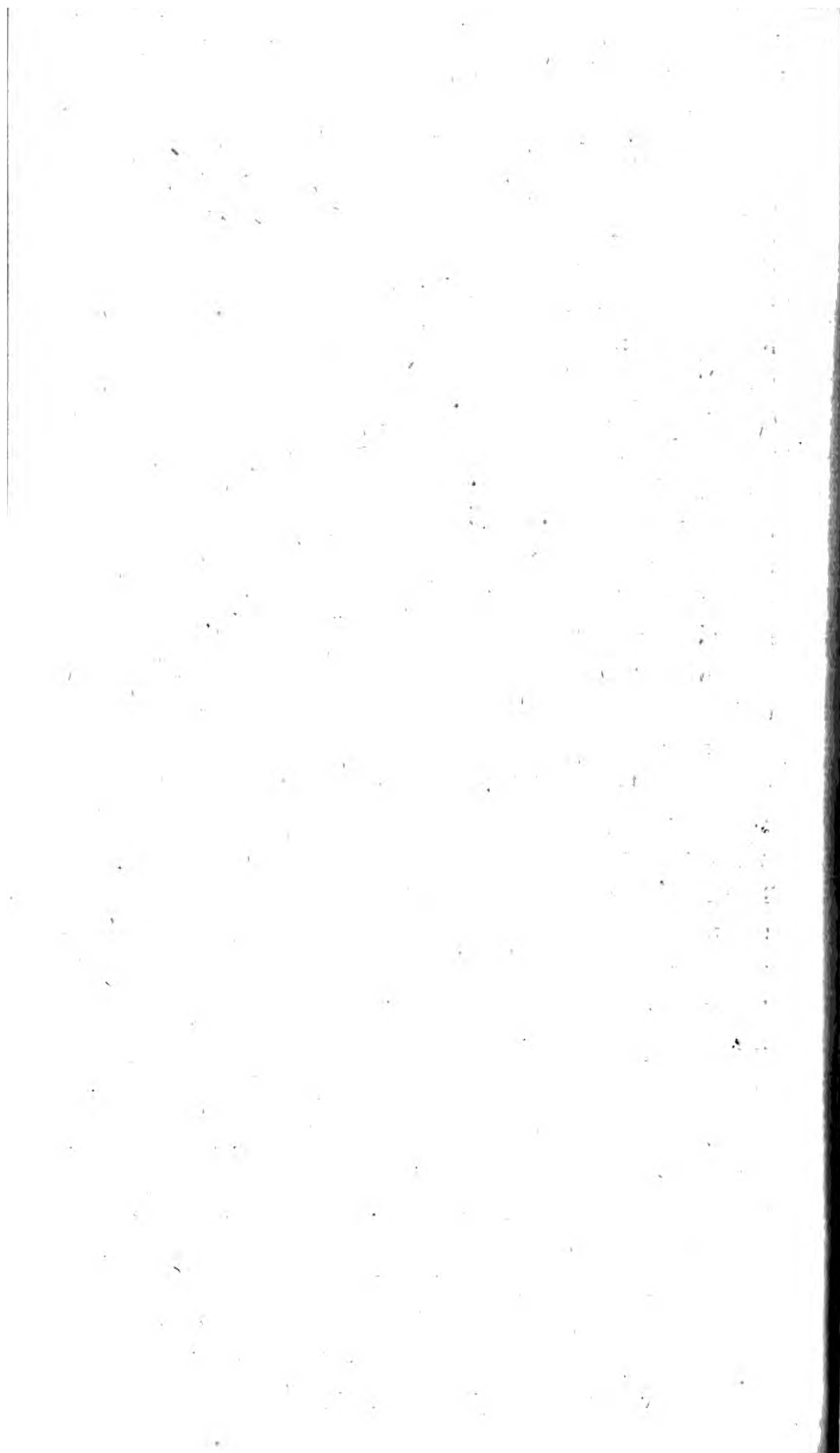
him in the dust of his sanctuary, and by a penitent confession of our national sins to avert those judgments they give us reason to fear. And as we hope to obtain that pardon and mercy we pray for, it will concern us to deal faithfully in the acknowledgment of our guilt, and set our transgressions in order before us.

Blessed be God the righteous are not so failed from among us, but we have still great numbers zealous for his glory, who walk in his ordinances blameless, and in every part of their conduct endeavour to *keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man*. But at the same time it must be confessed and lamented, that infidelity, prophaneness, heresy, blasphemy, and the most offensive breaches of common morality, have scarce ever appeared with more insolence, with more open defiance of the laws of God and man than now. And when we reflect that none of the ordinary provisions against these evils have been wanting in our land, that hardly any age of the church has been served by a more able or a more laborious ministry, that we have wise and excellent provisions in our laws, and that the execution of them has been publicly called for by the supreme authority, in
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order to repress that spirit of libertinism which is gone out among us ; and yet that notwithstanding all these applications, the evils we complain of are not removed, but rather increase and get ground upon us, we cannot but apprehend that we are approaching near to that state which gave the Psalmist so much terror, that if our ungodliness is not overflowed it is yet very nigh full, even up to the brim. A prospect which should surely awaken our fears of divine vengeance, and with the strongest impression recommend to us those duties, which alone can prevent its infliction on us. But more especially should such a prospect alarm us when the arrows of God are abroad, when a devouring pestilence is come near us, even to our doors, and has laid desolate great part of a neighbouring nation. That this quickening and powerful motive might have its due influence on us, the piety of our superiors has set it before us in our common devotions, and in this day of godly sorrow has in the most affectionate manner engaged our attention to it. Methinks when judgment is so near us, we should loose no time in our application for mercy ; every dissuasive from sin, and every call to repentance should be heard with the same impressions as if we were
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laid upon our death-bed, and saw the grave open before us. The sword of God is drawn and hangs over our heads red with the blood of the slain, and perhaps waits only for the effects of this day's humiliation, before it executes his wrath upon us. From this terror the wisdom of human counsels can afford us but a weak defence; though fleets and armies with the utmost vigilance guard our coasts, though a wall of fire and brass should compass us round, yet still we shall lie open to heaven, and, unless our prayers and our repentance avert it, thence will the evil descend upon us. Let us then, in this our day mind the things which belong to our peace. Let us mourn for the sins of our land, and before we depart this holy place, let us resolve each in our station to oppose as far as we are able the growing corruption, and restrain that overflowing of ungodliness which makes us afraid. But especially let us every one cast away the iniquities of his own life. *Behold the judge standeth at the door*; let us therefore immediately while there is yet time and space for mercy, cleanse and purify our hearts, and by every fruit of a sincere repentance appease his anger and prevent the sentence from going out against us. And since above all other
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acts of religion, this happy effect is promised to works of compassion ; since we are told alms will deliver from death, and charity cover a multitude of sins, here let our conversion begin : and let us chearfully comply with the request here offered us in behalf of our indigent brethren. Let it appear by this first fruit of our repentances that the devotions we have offered and the words we have heard this day are not without impresson on us. And let us take care to keep up and improve the holy dispositions we have here received, and the good resolutions we have here made. Let them attend us in our going out and our coming in, in our business and our diversions, and spread lustre and ornament over all our conduct, that others also seeing our good works may glorify God by their conversion, and purity and holiness may be restored to our streets. Then shall God delight in us, and bless us, no evil shall approach us, nor any plague come nigh our dwelling : his providence shall watch over us for good and not for evil, and his favourable kindness defend us as a shield.





The Removal of National Afflictions
a just Motive to Gratitude and Obedience*.

J O H. V. 14.

Behold, thou art made whole ; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.



THESE words of our blessed Saviour were addressed to an impotent man, who had long waited in vain for cure at the waters of *Bethesda* ; something or other still intervened which defeated his nearest hopes, and prevented the success he promised himself from that application. In this despair of relief

* Preached on the 29th of *May*.

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our blessed Lord the author and God of nature came to his assistance, and by an immediate act of his omnipotence made him whole: and afterwards finding him in the temple, reminds him of the great mercy he had received, and leaves it upon his reflections in this pathetick admonition. *Behold, &c.*

From the words arise these plain conclusions.

I. That sin is the cause of afflictions.

II. When God removes the affliction, he expects in return that we should sin no more.

III. If we do relapse into sin, we must expect that a worse thing will come unto us. These three heads I shall consider as general doctrines, and then apply them to the event we are on this day called upon to commemorate.

The *first* conclusion indeed must be asserted under some exceptions, not as universally but as generally true. For afflictions are sometimes sent by God in punishment of our father's sins, who in temporal inflictions *visits the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation.* Sometimes they are sent for the trial of good men, for the mani-

manifestation and improvement of their graces, their patience and fortitude, and to give the world an example of those virtues. Sometimes the whole intention of them is to shew forth the power and goodness of God in their removal ; for this reason our Lord himself gives in the case of the man born blind, *That neither his nor his parents sins were the cause of what he suffered, but that the power of God might be manifest in him.* Charity therefore which hopeth all things, believeth all things, will in most cases allow the afflictions of other men the favour of these exceptions ; for to conclude the wickedness of men from the calamities which at any time lie on them would be a hard and inhuman censure : this would be persecuting them whom God has smitten, and vexing them whom he has wounded. But when the application is made at home, we can hardly err in imputing our afflictions to our sins ; for this will lead us to the best improvement we can possibly make of such events, and the best of us, whenever we reflect on our life, will find guilt enough to acquit the justice of God, and account for the worst we can suffer. When we apply it to ourselves therefore, the conclusion is always safe and useful ; and though with respect to others,

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charity will persuade us to the most favourable constructions, yet the general assertion will be always a true doctrine, and such as deserves our most attentive regard.

Now sin is the cause of affliction, either naturally, or judicially. Naturally sin causes affliction as its proper effect and consequence. Thus riot and intemperance weaken and disease the body, and bring poverty and distress on the fortunes of men ; an indulgence to any passion frets and disorders the mind, and injustice, oppression, slander and calumny, draw after them the retaliations of revenge ; but besides this physical, there is also a judicial connexion between sin and misery, *i. e.* sin, as it is a violation of the declared laws of God, is by him threatened with peculiar and present effects of his anger. Those afflictions indeed which flow by a natural efficacy from the sinful action may be considered in this view as they execute an established law of providence ; but there are many crimes in a very high degree offensive to God, which are not naturally attended with any present afflictive consequences ; such are infidelity of the heart, idolatry, rejection of grace, hypocrisy, &c. and in the present resentment of these sins, the divine justice more eminently appears on the
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seat of judgment, as immediately presiding over the actions of men, and by special and more distinguishable effects of his power, declaring his wrath against those who transgress his laws. Both these kinds of inflictions then are properly punishments, the one executes the decrees of divine justice by an established course and order of nature, the other by occasional acts of power. Now punishments are distinguished by their intention into two sorts, the one vindictive, the other corrective. The ultimate and eternal penalties of sin are purely vindictive, they assert the honour and authority of the legislator, without any intention of advantage to the offender. But temporal inflictions are properly corrective punishments. They are indeed acts of justice and assertions of the divine authority over men, but in these dispensations the severity of the judge is tempered with the affection of a father, a merciful design to bring the offender to recollection, to reform and reclaim him from his sin and prevent his incurring the more terrible consequences of it: this is the end he proposes the fruit he expects his corrections should produce in us, But

2dly, If by our prayers and humiliation he is prevailed on to remove the affliction, we are

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then under a double obligation to comply with this intention, and sin no more. He has then tried all the motives of conversion upon us, he has awakened our fears by the experience of his justice and power, and he has applied to our gratitude by an act of mercy, the most adapted to make impression on us : while ease and indolence flow on in a continual uninterrupted course, we are apt to overlook the hand of providence in them, or consider them with a very slight and superficial regard, as common and ordinary events of nature, or perhaps as the effects of our own skill and management : but when we have smarted under the removal of these blessings, we then discern their value, and have a quick and lively sense of the goodness of God in restoring them to us. And if we have any thing generous in our temper shall be induced to acknowledge his mercy in those returns of praise and duty he requires from us ; and for the future be equally ashamed to affront so much goodness, and afraid to provoke so powerful an anger against us. While the memory indeed of such events are fresh on the mind, few dispositions are so hardened as not to receive some impression of reverence and gratitude from

from them, and form some resolutions of acting agreeably to the engagements they lay on them. But the danger is when the wound is healed, the pain forgotten, and the rod laid out of sight, lest their appetites to their former sins revive again, their old temptations regain their power, and they become as little restrained from complying with them as they were before. But here the scripture before us reminds the sinner of this farther most important consideration, that if he continues thus incorrigible, and is neither reclaimed by his past afflictions, nor by his present deliverance from them, then

3dly, He may and must expect that a worse thing will come unto him. For the nature of corrective punishments requires that the pain and terror of the infliction be sufficient to overbalance the temptation of the offence ; if therefore a less degree of severity be found ineffectual to this end, it is necessary to aggravate the smart to such a proportion as may overcome the obstinacy of the offender ; and as the distemper grows more confirmed, to increase the strength of the medicine which is to remove it. In this order and by these gradations, the divine justice proceeds in visiting the transgressions of men ; if former cor-

rections prove too weak for their intention, he will add weight and terror to the stroke; if the chastisement of whips will not reform men, he will in the next place try that of scorpions. To these advances in judgment we may expect the divine anger will rise, if after such applications we continue to indulge any sin; for our repentance is not sincere, unless it reclaim us from every impiety; but more especially must it provoke his resentments against us if we return to the same sins, for which we have reason to apprehend we were punished before; for this is not merely disobedience, but carries with it contempt of the power and defiance of the authority of God; and in the next return of vengeance we may expect to be treated not only as criminals but as rebels, who have after a pardon relapsed into treason again. This indeed is the most favourable treatment such obstinacy can hope for. It is an act of mercy in God, if after such impenitency he still endeavours our recovery, though with his severest corrections. We have reason to fear a much worse effect of his indignation, that he will resolve, as he did concerning Ephraim, *why should he be smitten any more, he will revolt yet more and more.* That he will give us up to our

our own hearts lust, leave us to go on treasuring up wrath unto the day of wrath, and the revelation of that final irreversibile judgement he has denounced against impenitent sinners.

These conclusions it is of concern to every man to attend to in his personal conduct, and the private events of his own life; but the occasion of this day's solemnity calls upon us more especially to consider them with regard to publick communities of men. And in this view there are some particulars which deserve our farther observation. The first conclusion (that sin is the cause of affliction) with respect to particular men, holds (as I observed) generally, not universally: but with respect to publick bodies and societies it holds always, and without exception. A wicked man is not always outwardly miserable, nor is every sin attended with national penalties on the person of the sinner, but a wicked people can never be happy; a republic of villains must necessarily vex, injure, and disquiet one another, and are miserable even by constitution. And schism, heresy, prophane-ness, infidelity and other like sins, though they do not by a natural efficacy derive any present affliction on the offender himself, yet when by a general prevalency they become

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national, they by a proper and physical tendency corrupt the administrations, weaken the power, and subvert the peace and welfare of a nation. And if we consider afflictions as a judicial consequence of sin, private persons are subject to a future judgment, and therefore the justice of God may be fully executed in the punishments of their sins, though it be deferred to another life. But since a nation, as such, subsists only in this world, the divine justice can appear in the resentment of national sins only in present and temporal inflictions, and therefore we may reasonably conclude, that the temporal penalties denounced against sin, will be more constantly executed on a wicked nation than on private and particular offenders : neither has the gospel made any change in the methods and rules of divine justice with respect to public societies. God indeed, not intending in the dispensation to separate any particular nation to his service, and govern them by a distinct superintendance as he did the *Jews*, but to collect and sanctify out of every people those who by faith and obedience should approve themselves to him, addresses himself in the gospel to each person singly, and argues from such
views

views and motives as were adapted to engage the faith, correct the vices, and improve the holiness and virtue of particular men; such as the certainty of a future judgment in which every man should be accountable for his own actions, and receive an eternal allotment of reward or punishment, according to what he had done in the body. It is not therefore to be wondered if in an application which had this design, no direct address is made to publick communities, and little notice is taken of those temporal good or evil consequences attending a righteous or wicked nation. But nevertheless God still presides over every kingdom of the earth, his subjects they are, though not by a special covenant, as the *Jews* were bound to receive, protect, and encourage his gospel when declared to them, and serve him in a national obedience to the precepts of it on pain of forfeiting his favour and incurring his displeasure. The rule of their duty is indeed changed and enlarged by the gospel, but the penalties of nationally departing from this rule, and the encouragements of national observance of it are the same, which by the general laws of providence before attended a sinful or a virtuous people. And accordingly when our

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Lord reproves the infidelity of the *Jews*, in rejecting him as a national sin, the punishment he denounces against them is a severe infliction of present temporal calamities. *Behold your house is left unto you desolate.*

It is to be observed also farther, that though the persons who compose a society die, yet the political body, the nation, remains, and is continued from generation to generation : and therefore the publick mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to one age, demand the gratitude and obedience of those which succeed ; the advantages arising from them descend, and unless forfeited by new provocations are derived down to latest posterity. As a nation we are to consider ourselves as one continued being, with those who are gone before us, and those who shall come after, obliged to humble ourselves for the sins, to be corrected by the afflictions, and to acknowledge the blessings conferred by God on our fathers, and to take care lest we leave the curse and burden of our impenitence on our children. For if a people whom God has visited in judgment, and afterwards in mercy healed their sores, and delivered them from their distress, if they or their children prove insensible to these applications, though his justice may seem to slumber,

ber, and the stroke may be suspended for a time, yet there is vengeance in store against them, and in one age or other it will assuredly overtake them. He will either withdraw his protection, and leave their own iniquities by a natural efficacy to bring them to desolation, or he will have recourse to the famine, the sword, or the pestilence, the great reserves of his prerogative, and by a distinguished interposition of his power, make them know and feel *there is a God who judgeth the earth.*

In application of what has occurred to us from this scripture to the occasion on which we are assembled, we cannot but observe, that the calamities from which God, as on this day, delivered our fathers, were the greatest which for many ages had befallen these nations. When the wise and excellent frame of our civil constitution was dissolved, and tyranny and anarchy by turns triumphed in its place: when our church, the strength and honour of the reformation, was torn in pieces, plundered of its revenues, and its pastors driven into corners, and instead of that purity of faith, that beauty of holiness, and that sobriety of devotion, which had been the ornament of our temples, and the glory of
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our nation, hypocrisy, prophaneness, heresy, and all the distractions of wild enthusiasm were let loose upon us, and like a torrent overflowed the land. Where these sins prevailed, it is not to be wondered if publick misery followed, the proper and necessary effect of them. As a natural cause they produced their punishment, but they were applied and made to serve by providence as a judicial punishment of other sins also. For it is to be feared that they who were freest from these sins had the guilt of others to account for; that too many, while they abhorred the spiritual pride or hypocritical sanctity of their adversaries, fell into the other extreme, open prophaneness, intemperance and carnal security; crimes which had this particular aggravation, that they were unreclaimed by the example of a prince of the greatest modesty, temperance and devotion that ever adorned a crown. Thus was our land polluted, and by these complications of impiety, God was provoked to call away our guard, and *send evil angels among us*. But blessed be his goodness, who in his anger remembered mercy, and when successful wickedness seemed to have established our miseries, when all hope from arms or counsels was expired, and all who mourned for the afflictions
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of our *Sion*, like the impotent man in my text, fat down in a comfortless despair of redress, the Almighty himself took the cause into his hand, and by a sudden, easy, and almost imperceptible turn, *brought back our captivity, restored our counsellors as at the first, and our judges as at the beginning*, reduced the flood which had laid all waste in one scene of confusion into its ancient channel of the laws, *repaired the breaches of his sanctuary, and set up again the tabernacle of David which was fallen*. A mercy never to be forgotten by the people of this land, and which will demand the gratitude of all generations. To the deliverance of this day, we owe all that can be valuable to us as *Englishmen*: the protection of our laws, and the many blessings that descend to us from the senate or the throne, and what must more especially affect us as Christians, the unspeakable happiness of serving God, in that ancient orderly form of polity, derived from the first founders of the Christian church, in a pure and holy worship, in which the word is faithfully preached, all the ordinances of the gospel duly administered, with all the helps and assistances requisite to a sober and rational devotion.

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We must then examine ourselves, what acknowledgments we have made for so much mercy, and what returns of duty and obedience our gratitude has produced under the sense of so great a deliverance. Are we become a more pure, a more sober, a more devout people than we were before? Have we brought forth fruits meet for repentance? Have we thoroughly purged out the old leaven of malice and hypocrisy, of *schism and heresy*, of prophaneness and infidelity, and that spirit of strife and contention which were the natural and judicial causes of those miseries under which our fathers mourned? If we have not, be we assured the same righteous judge, who visited these sins in the afflictions of our fathers, still rules over the kingdoms of the earth : and though he waits long, and tries to the utmost whether his goodness will lead us to repentance, yet if neither the memory of his corrections, nor the experience of his goodness will prevail for this effect, he will resume the rod, and increase the smart of the infliction, a worse thing shall come unto us.

With great wisdom therefore is the memory of this auspicious day consecrated in our annals to a religious joy, that we may have the great goodness of the Lord in remembrance,

brance, the mighty and wondered works he has done for us, and be annually reminded of the improvements he expects from such application. Let our joy then appear not only in our lips but in our lives. Let not our confidence be placed in the wisdom of our counsels, or the power of our arms, but in the piety and innocence of our lives. Let us every one cleanse himself from his own pollutions, and with a true Christian zeal oppose the rising flood of ungodliness, which alone can make us afraid : then will God continue and multiply our joy to us ; his spirit shall guide our counsels, and bring to nought every device formed against our peace.



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The right Use and Application of
Wealth and Authority *.

J O B XXIX. 11, 12, 13.

*When the ear heard me, then it blessed
me; when the eye saw me, it gave
witness unto me:*

*Because I delivered the poor that cried:
and the fatherless, and him that had
none to help him.*

*The blessing of him that was ready to
perish, came upon me; and I caused
the widow's heart to sing for joy.*



HE holy person, whose example is
proposed to us in this history, obser-
ving how little impression all he had
offered in his defence made on his
friends, with a natural and honest indignation

* Preached before the Sons of the Clergy, December the 4th,
1718.

looks back on the regard and observance that attended him in the days of his prosperity: *When the young men saw him and bid themselves: and the aged arose and stood up. When princes refrained talking before him, and nobles held their peace.* v. 8, 9, 10.

The different usage he now received, he had the greater reason to complain of, because he had never demanded this respect to the mere authority of his station, or the distinction of his fortunes; but had obliged mankind to this return by his virtues, by such acts of justice and benevolence, as ought to engage veneration to the man, under the greatest alteration of fortunes and abilities.

This scripture, considered in this view, as an expostulation of *Job*, conscious of his own worth; and regretting the ill returns made to it, might lead me into a subject to which your attention has been often, and very excellently engaged on this annual festival. I might observe, how every argument that could plead for esteem to the patriarch, might be applied with equal force to those who serve in the sacred offices of this church: how fair a similitude of his holiness and virtues appears in their relation to God, in their pure and constant

stant devotion in his worship, and, according to their abilities, in their munificence and charity. Some resemblance even of his afflictions we might find in the distresses of many of the sacred order : and if we entered into the house of their fatherless children, and lifted up the veil of their widows, we might compleat the image of his sorrows. In one circumstance at least the miseries both of our prophets themselves, and these their holy relicts, might be compared with his, in that they are grieved with the same scorn and indignity that he was, exposed to the derision of *Fools, yea children of base men*, Job, xxx. 8. And I might be allowed to resent with something of his indignation, a treatment so unsuitable to their character, and their merits from the world.

But the words of my text more naturally lead us to reflect on the noble use and improvement this venerable person made of his former prosperity ; to consider our own duty as represented to us in his example ; and the proper objects of our compassion, as set before us in those moving characters : *The poor that cries and is ready to perish : the fatherless and the widow, who have none to help them.*

I shall therefore confine my present discourse to that great and excellent design of charity, upon which this society was founded, and for the promotion of which we are this day assembled. And I hope, it will encourage us in this *Labour of Love*, to observe from these words,

I. The proper use and application of wealth and authority: *To deliver the poor that cries, the fatherless, and him that has no helper; to cause the heart of the widow to sing for joy.*

II. The encouragement we have thus to employ these advantages: *The ear that hears us will bless us: the eye that sees us will give witness to us; the blessing of him that is ready to perish will come upon us.*

Both these general considerations I shall endeavour to apply by observing,

III. With what advantage they recommend the excellent design of this society, and persuade us cheerfully to assist in the promotion of it. And

I. We are here reminded of the proper use and application of wealth and authority; to

deliver the poor that cries, the fatherless, and him that has no helper ; to cause the heart of the widows to sing for joy.

The distinctions which arise from power and subjection, from riches and poverty, from ease and affliction, appear so unequally and irregularly divided among men, and with so little regard to moral reasons, that by some superficial observers they have been formed into an objection against the wisdom and justice of God. But a little more attention will convince us, that they execute a wise and regular scheme of providence ; are necessary to preserve the order and œconomy of human society, and unite and endear mankind to one another. These great and excellent ends they were intended to serve ; and these, if the duties of each condition be complied with, will effectually be promoted by them.

But then wealth and authority must be acknowledged to distinguish us only as superior servants, appointed by our common master, to do justice in the family, and *give every one their meat in due season.* We are not to imagine these favours are indulged us merely for our own sakes, to enable us to live in splendor and ease ; or to make our families great in riches or honours : but we must look upon

them as a public fund and repository, of which we are only stewards and dispensers, permitted to apply but a certain proportion to our own use, and obliged to distribute the rest in the relief of our fellow servants. By this title the poor must be confessed to have a right and property in the abundance of those who are better supplied. Neither is any man farther justified in ingrossing and hoarding up the common bounties of heaven, than may consist with this claim.

These pleas of natural reason and justice, religion has enforced with the authority of a positive command. Every page in the sacred oracles of God reminds us of the tenure by which we hold the blessings of his providence, and our obligation cheerfully to resign them to every demand of charity. I shall not detain an assembly composed of prophets, and those who have been educated *at the feet* of the prophets, and *have known the Holy Scriptures from children*, 2 Tim. iii. 15. with a recital of the places which enjoin this duty: your own recollection will observe how frequently it is commanded; and your piety will remind you with what warmth and earnestness it is recommended by God.

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I shall only take notice, to how noble a measure and proportion the gospel has extended our beneficence. We are there required not only to relieve, but even to divide with the poor; *He that bath two coats, to give one to him that has none*, Luke iii. 11. Nay, to be ready, whenever our Lord calls for *it to sell all we have*, xviii, 22, and *distribute* to the wants of our brethren. To propose even the unwearied bounty of God as our pattern;—*To be merciful as our father which is in Heaven is merciful*, vi. 36. and to esteem it *a greater blessing to give, than to receive*, Acts xx. 35. Thus are we directed by justice, and commanded by religion, to apply the advantages of station, of fortune, with which God has favoured us: and in this generous extent doth the gospel require our charity.

But with regard to the object we are farther to observe, that both the obligations of the duty, and the measures prescribed to it are under some limitations: for though our benevolence is required to be universal, yet our abilities are confined to a much narrower compass, and therefore oblige us to choice and distinction in the external applications of our charity.

The pressure and extremity of the distress, and the incapacity of the object to help himself, have been always esteemed to give a right of being preferred in our compassion. By these two circumstances, the great example in my text seems principally to have been determined in the expressions of his charity: By the former, to *him that was ready to perish*; by the latter, to *him that had none to help him*.

For the fatherless and widow, both these circumstances plead with our compassion; where poverty, sorrow, and desolation meet together; where the mother sits alone, and has none to comfort her, *and the children cry for bread, and no man breaketh it unto them*, Lam. iv. 4. and agreeably, when the prophet would give us the most affecting idea of the calamities of his people, he represents them in this image: *We are orphans and fatherless, and our mothers are as widows*, v. 3. And wherever, through the whole scripture, we find our charity directed with any particular mention of the objects of it, the fatherless and widow stand always foremost upon the roll, and are recommended to the nearest regard of our pity. And it is remarkable, that when St. *James* would give us a short summary of practical

tical religion, he comprehends the whole duty to our neighbour, in *visiting the fatherless and widows in affliction*, Jam. i. 27. Not that we are excused by the apostle from other acts of mercy and beneficence, but he with reason presumed that he who was insensible to these near obligations, would be still less affected with those which were more remote; and if our conduct in some other instances might have an appearance of charity, yet the action was without religion; must be accounted for from some secular principles, and could not flow from a submission of conscience to the authority of God, who by so many clear and express directions, has given these objects the first right to our assistance.

The motives that should especially prevail with us to comply with these great obligations, laid on us by justice and our religion, are that inward joy and complacency which flow back upon the soul from acts of mercy and liberality; and above all those inestimable rewards which the gospel has taught us to expect from these duties; pardon of sin here, and the eternal treasures of heaven hereafter. But,

II. The words we have before us allow us to take some inferior views into the account,

and encourage ourselves from these considerations ; *That the ear that hears us will bless us, the eye that sees us will give witness unto us ; the blessing of him that is ready to perish will come upon us.*

Though the libertine has prevailed with too much success in discrediting our other virtues, he has not yet been able to withdraw the esteem of mankind from works of beneficence and charity. While we are employed in the exercise of these lovely virtues, we appear in the venerable character of substitutes of God, commissioned by him to reach down and distribute his blessings among our fellow subjects : and though the acknowledgments of the poor are ultimately due to God, the original fountain which supplies every want of his creatures, yet an intermediate honour and respect he allows and commands to be given to the hand, through which his bounty descends to them. By this the harmony of providence is preserved in the world, the several ranks and orders of men engaged to one another by a mutual exchange of affections ; all disquieting, unbenevolent passions are extinguished, and an universal charfulness is diffused through human society.

On these returns of gratitude from the objects of our charity, and from the world who are witnesses of it, we are permitted to reflect with pleasure, as a present encouragement designed by God to excite and reward our virtue; and therefore the apostles of Christ have not thought it inconsistent with the spirituality of the gospel, to direct our regard to this motive of action: *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, any praise, to think of these things.* A Christian, the most indifferent to applause, may find even a pious satisfaction in these attendants on his charity, when he considers them as enlarging his capacities of doing good; as giving influence to his example, and authority to his instructions, and deriving honour and credit on his religion. The pleasure we take in these happy effects of esteem is generous and spiritual, and results from the noblest intention of human virtue; *That men seeing our good works may glorify our father which is in Heaven, Mat. v. 16.*

But the other motive here proposed for our encouragement, the blessings of those whom we relieve, is in its nature properly religious; derives all its force from a conviction of our dependance on providence, and the efficacy
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of human prayers; and virtually includes all that we hope for from the divine favour in this world, or the next. The blessings of the poor considered in this view, as improving our interest in God, and assuring our expectations from his bounty, have an immediate spiritual effect in refining our charity from that haughtiness with which we are apt to look upon those whom we oblige; while they represent the objects of our pity as returning us a full equivalent in their prayers. A return, indeed, great and valuable in the accounts of religion; and which though none are too poor to make, yet none are too great; or too rich to desire: for if we are taught *to fear the curse of the poor, when we turn away our face from him, because if he curses us in the bitterness of his soul, his imprecation will be heard by him that made him, Eccles. iv. 5. 6.* with much greater assurance may we expect that God, who delights rather in rewarding than afflicting his creatures, will hear and answer the prayers of his gratitude; that the intercessions he offers for us in the fervour and transport of his joy will prevail with the divine bounty to multiply his favours upon us; especially, since his prayers ascend not alone; but *the ear that hears us and the eye that sees*

sees us, all who are witnesses of our virtue and good works, will join with him in *blessing us*, and with united devotion address the mercy of God to reward us with every recompence he has promised to charity. And I must observe that our title to both these encouragements of our virtue, both the esteem and the blessings of men depends on our preserving a due regard to the nearer or more distant right of the object to our charity. If while we are intent on the relief of the idle and undeserving, we neglect him that is *ready to perish*: if we suffer the tears of the fatherless and widow to fall unpitied and unregarded, the praise of our liberality will be lost in the reproach of so merciless an omission; neither will the blessings of him whom we assist be attended to by God, when opposed by the maledictions of those whose right we pass by, and whom we defraud of our charity. *When one prays* (says the son of *Syrach*) *and another curses, whose voice shall the Lord bear?* Ecclus. xxxiv. 24. When one desires God to approve and reward an action contrary to justice, and his own express direction, and the other intreats him only to execute the penalties of his own commands, the question is easily resolved: the cry of the injured shall certainly be heard, (to use the words

words of the same author) *It will pierce the clouds, and till it come nigh he will not be comforted, neither will he depart till the most high behold to judge righteously, and execute judgment, Ecclef. xxxv. 17.*

From these general considerations of the direction and encouragement here given to our charity, I go on to observe,

III. With what advantage they recommend the excellent design of this society, and persuade us liberally to assist in the promotion of it.

From the direction here given to our charity, it has been already observed, that the extremity of the affliction, and the inability of the object, give a right of being preferred in our compassion: and that by both these circumstances, the fatherless and widow stand intitled to the first expressions of our pity.

But for the fatherless and widow whose relief is intended in this charity, these arguments plead with a force much superior to what they have in common applications. Imagination itself can hardly draw a more affecting scene of misery than the *day of mourning* in the family of a poor clergyman. To how strait and necessitous a condition the unreformed

reformed invasions of Popery have reduced great numbers of our parochial clergy, the melancholy account, returned upon a publick * survey of the land, will not suffer to be longer concealed. Confined within so narrow a compass, it was impossible for the good man while yet alive to make the least provision against this great day of distress. The utmost he could do, by the greatest care and frugality, was to fence against the present necessity: hunger and nakedness were always ready to enter into his doors, and were difficultly kept out by the best management: even that little he was permitted to call his own, was more exposed to the fraud of the crafty, and the violence of the oppressor than any other tenure, and even by being little, incapable of the protection of the law against either. At the same time we must consider him as obliged, if he would preserve any dignity and influence to his ministry, to restrain himself from all base, and in a great measure, from all secular methods of enlarging his circumstances. We must consider him as required to live in at least

* In the year 1707, by which it appeared that there are five thousand livings in *England* not exceeding fifty pounds *per Annum*, and two thousand not exceeding ten pound.

as reputable a figure as any other person of the same fortune. Something even out of his little, as it was expected should flow from him in hospitality and charity ; neither would decency permit him to breed the family that depended on him to such mean and servile employments, by which persons of the lowest condition are usually supported ; nor would his abilities reach to qualify them for better : so that when the melancholy day is come, that this their only support is taken from them, it finds them without any provision against the fatal change. Their *poverty comes upon them* (in the image of the royal preacher) *like an armed man*, Prov. vi. 11. seizes them naked and defenceless, unprepared to make the least resistance, and even by their relation to the holy order, excluded from the assistance, and exposed to the contempt and aversion of a numerous party among us ; and in this desolate friendless condition, left to the shame, temptation, and despair of extreme necessity. And if some who appear now among the objects of our charity, have fallen from a condition of greater plenty, their case is rather more deplorable ; the tenderness of their education renders them less able to struggle with difficulties, and the burden lies with an ad-

addition of weight, on those who have never been inured to bear any. Considered in all these circumstances, it is (I think) impossible to conceive *any human sorrow greater than their sorrow*; any objects who have a more immediate title to our relief from these characters, *That they are ready to perish, and have none to help them.*

But these and all other considerations, that recommend the object to a preference in our compassion, are still farther enforced by obligations of nature, affinity, or the nearness of any of those relations which endear us to one another. Thus though we are bound *to be ready, as we have opportunity to do good to all men*, yet a prior regard is due *to the household of faith*, Gal. vi. 10. Though the cry of every one that is *ready to perish*, though the tears of every orphan, and the *sighs* of every widow should move us to pity; yet if we hear the voice of our brother in the same distress; if the children or relict of our friend, or our father's friend, appear before us in the same helpless destitute condition, our compassion should be more intimately affected with their sorrows, and our hand be first reached out in the relief of their misery.

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How agreeable then to justice, and to every reason and inducement of pity must our charity appear when determined to these our brethren, who are not only partakers of the same faith, but allied to us in birth and education, descended from the same holy stock, and nourished with the bread of the same altar. Every good Christian, who has any esteem for the sacred character, will feel some uncommon tenderness rising in his breast, when he sees a family so nearly related to it cast out and perishing in the streets; piety will remind him that something is due to them for their father's sake, for the sake of that holy office in which he ministered; and something also for Christ's sake, whose servant and ambassador he was and to whom these *little ones*, whom he has left, seem by a peculiar title to belong.

But with much stronger influence, should all these arguments prevail with our compassion. For as often as we reflect on the father, we see the friend, the fellow-servant, the brother of our own, honoured with the same commission from Christ, and a joint steward of the mysteries of the gospel. The sentiments of so near an affinity cannot but give us a more immediate interest and concern in
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their fortunes ; incline us to *mourn when they mourn, and rejoice when they rejoice.*

In a great part of us it must raise the tenderest sympathy, to recollect how many years of our life we ourselves held all our hopes by the same tenure that they did, and were equally exposed to these calamities which are fallen on them. Such a review must affect us with a quick and feeling sense of their misery, and convince that we are more a-kin to their afflictions than to other men's !

We should farther reflect, that if by the continuance of that precious life on which we depend, and the advantages of that education which his care has given us, God has blest us with a greater abundance ; this very distinction of our fortunes is originally derived from that sacred store which is the portion of *Levi*, and therefore that whatever part of it we devote to charity belongs by a special right to the relicts of those who waited at the altar.

When the object stands distinguished by so many near and engaging titles to our compassion, we are not at liberty to consider the wants of more remote relations till his are provided for : for every argument, that pleads for the needy in general, concludes with the

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same force for a due precedence to be given to these claims. He who squanders away his abilities in the relief of a stranger while his brother perishes at his hand, if their pretensions are equal in other respects, may with the greatest equity be esteemed to have robbed and murdered his brother. Pity is no longer a virtue than it is governed by reason and justice ; when it flows without any regard to the merits of the object, it is weakness and passion, and even in its happiest applications, but a more pardonable infirmity : but when in neglect of the obligations of nature or friendship, it is diverted to foreign unallied objects, it is injustice and cruelty, and therefore will be without any title to the rewards of charity ; will be unblest and unpraised, will be resented by God, and abhorred by men.

But God and man will approve every prospect and encouragement of virtue, will reward our charity to these our brethren, whom the strongest pleas of right and preference recommend to our justice and the most affecting motives of tenderness, to our compassion.

Great and just is the applause that has attended our charity, so liberally poured forth to every distressed branch of the reformation :
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but all the honour we have acquired to our religion, by these acts of beneficence, will be changed into reproach, if while our hand is open so wide to these distant relations we suffer those who have the nearest interest in our pity, our brethren *both in the Flesh and the Lord*, Philem. 16. *to perish at our doors, That light*, with which we are commanded to *shine before men*, loses its beauty unless it be regularly diffused; unless it acts with the greatest warmth and influence on those objects which God and nature have placed in the nearest dependance on it, and is extended with gradual abatements to those which are farther off. If these proportions are unobserved, our good works will appear darkened with spots and blemishes, be without charity and without praise: but when mercy and justice are met together; when piety to God and affection to his servants, and all the ties of relation and affinity are taken into the account, the example appears bright and luminous throughout, and is raised to the most venerable perfection of human virtue. Reverence and esteem wait on the persons adorned with so lovely a character: the present age *will tell of their wisdom*, and latest posterity *will shew forth their praise*, Eccles. xliv. 15.

There are (blessed be God) in the records of this society, *of those who have left a name behind them, that their praise might be reported; merciful men, whose righteousness must never be forgotten by us, xliv. 8. 10.*

That indulgent prince by whose hand this society was first formed, and enabled to receive the donations of those who mourned for the distresses of *Levi*, will stand always foremost in the sacred annals of this charity.

Nor will the memory of that glorious Queen ever be forgotten, in whose eyes the ministers of the Lord were precious; whose tender heart, though it felt every affliction of her people, yet was more especially grieved for the miseries of those who were related to the altar. And while the pious care of this society was employed in gathering up, and refreshing the dispersed and withering branches, by an unexampled stream of royal bounty, watered and comforted the holy root whence they sprang. A remedy thus wisely applied to the source of the evil, we are bound to acknowledge among the greatest benefactions to this charity; the effects of it will daily appear in lessening our burden, enlarging the extent and proportion of our assistance, and preventing the calamities we here redress. Let her name be ever mentioned
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with reverence and honour ; and while this holy place, so often the witness of her triumphs, reminds us of the glories and successes of her reign : let us especially commemorate that exemplary piety and devotion, that zeal for the worship and compassion to the servants of God, which prevailed with heaven to shower down so eminent a portion of these blessings upon her.

Nor will our gratitude fail of making just returns of our obedience and our prayers, to the munificence of our present gracious sovereign, who hath enlarged and confirmed the favours of his royal predecessors to us. *The blessing of him that is ready to perish will come upon him, and fight for him against his enemies, better than a mighty spear, and a strong shield.*

But acts of munificence that flow from the throne like the blessings of providence, proceed from powers so much superior to our own, and appear in effects so vastly disproportioned to our abilities, that though they fill our hearts with admiration and praise, yet are considered with less influence and instruction, than more private and imitable examples of virtue.

And let us magnify the name of our God, who has raised up among us a * glorious example, one of our brethren, like ourselves, of *the sons of Levi*, who has shown us how the bounty of a prince may be imitated in a private fortune. From his hand has a blessing fallen *on the inheritance of the Lord, and refreshed it when it was weary*, Psal. lxxviii. 9. not in a sudden short effusion, but like the dew of heaven gathered silently and secretly, as in the night, and shed abroad with an equal extensive influence, and appointed to remain a perpetual never-failing supply to all generations. *The ear that bears his name will ever bless it*; but the *eye that hath seen him* is more especially bound to give testimony unto him; to be his witness to the world, with what care and wise frugality he managed the sacred treasure, long set apart and devoted to God, and which for many years he looked

* Dr. Turney, late president of C. C. C. Oxon, who by his will, after some legacies, left the remainder of his estate, amounting to 20,000 l. to this Corporation. This excellent person, (whom I am obliged to mention with particular honour,) made this disposition of his estate, several years before his death; all which time, the whole improvement of his fortune was in effect annually applied to this charity, by which method he had the satisfaction of doing good every day of his life, together with the concealment his modesty desired in doing it.

on as no part of his own, but a talent committed to his trust, for the improvement of which he was strictly accountable to God and the poor.

Marbles and epitaphs may become our gratitude, to so great an ornament of our religion: but the most glorious inscriptions of his praise are written, not on *tables of stone*, but on *the hearts of the fatherless and widow, whom he has caused to sing for joy.*

The only reward he had himself in view, we doubt not he has received from God in his only habitation, whom he imitated in that lovely character, so often assumed by divine mercy, *The father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow.* But though he sought only the *praise of God*, and so industriously declined *that of men*, yet will the justice and piety of all ages make this acknowledgment also to his virtue. *The memorial of his abundant kindness shall be preserved sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at a banquet of wine,* Ecclus. xlix. 1. His name shall for ever stand recorded as the great pattern and encouragement of charity; *a name more to be desired than that of sons and daughters; an everlasting name that shall not be cut off,* Isa. lvi. 5. And

may it ever be effectual to animate others to go *and do likewise*.

For though a noble foundation is laid for this good work ; though the hands of this society are mightily strengthened by many great and generous assistances in this labour of love, yet the vessels prepared for the reception of his charity are not yet full ; nor is the provision already laid in equal, either to the numbers or wants of those it is applied to. And unless these deficiencies are supplied by our farther liberality, many must be *neglected in this ministration*, and few be relieved in proportion to their necessities.

It methinks when the objects are so nearly related to us, we should not content ourselves barely with *giving bread to the famine of their households* ; but we should support them as our brethren, as persons in whose credit our own is concerned ; and whom we are therefore obliged to rescue, not only from the distress, but from the dishonour of poverty. We are not ignorant with what scorn the adversaries of the reformation have upbraided us with the inconveniences of a married clergy : with what triumph they observe to us the miseries of their orphans and widows, and how invidiously the disgrace of these instances is reflected

flected on our religion. Now, though many just replies may be given to this objection; yet better it would be, if the foundation of the reproach were itself removed; if none could be found among the descendants of the holy tribe, whose sorrows might give our enemies this occasion to blaspheme, and revile either our birth or our charity.

Thanks be to God, who moved the heart of our late royal benefactress to restore part of those spoils which popish tyranny had ravished from the altar. So glorious an example will, we hope, encourage others to complete the righteous work, and take away that great and only blemish from our reformation. But till our prayers can obtain this blessing, it will become our piety to draw a veil over this reproach, and cover the nakedness of our mother from the contempt of those that hate her: to assist these brethren with such a measure of our charity, as may restore them to that esteem which is due to their descent and their virtues; and remove not only the secret pressure, but the appearance of misery: that when the enemy shall go about our *Sion*, he may be forced to acknowledge her fair, *without spot or wrinkle*, and his scorn may be changed into reverence and praise.

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I shall only add, that as the house of prayer, in which we now stand, and the holy duties we have here performed, cannot but soften our hearts, and dispose them for the impressions of charity, so let the same just and tender sentiments accompany us to the house of feasting, whither we are going. Let us look upon this as one of those *feasts unto the Lord*, commanded in the Law ; a feast in which *none must appear empty, but where every one is bound to give, according to the blessing of the Lord which he hath given him*, Deut. xvi. 17. That our mirth may be sanctified with charity ; that the poor, the fatherless, and the widow may rejoice with us : that their prayers and benedictions may rest on our heads, and prevail with God to restore what we now lay out, ten thousand fold in the felicities of this life, and the glories of a better.



The Providential Design of God in permitting Heresies in the Church*.

I COR. xi. 19.

For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.



THE word *heresies* in this place has been universally explained as equivalent in sense to the *divisions* and *contentions* reprov'd in the verses before, which related only to some circumstances of public worship, and had not proceeded to an actual separation between the members of the church; for they are said

* Preached before the University of Oxford, on *Asc-Sunday*, July 9th, 1721.

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still to *come together*, and meet in the same assemblies : but in this exposition the particle *καὶ* is redundant and without signification ; whereas the place in which it stands naturally gives it a great force and emphasis in the sentence : for it is not said, *καὶ γὰρ δεῖ αἰρέσεις εἶναι*, but *δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις εἶναι*. As if the Apostle had said, “ I hear there are some divisions among you when you meet together. “ This report I can easily believe, because I “ know, that not only such contentions as “ these, but *heresies*, dissentions of a higher “ nature, which will corrupt the faith or “ divide the communion of the church, will “ by the providence of God be permitted to “ arise in it.” As this sense is what the natural construction of the words require, so it gives them much greater force, clearness, and connexion with what goes before than the other, that we may conclude it to have been intended by the holy writer : and that by *heresies* he meant dissentions of a more dangerous kind than those he had before taken notice of ; such as should arise on questions of greater moment, or be prosecuted with greater obstinacy : and either actually divide, or very much endanger the unity of the church.

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In this sense I take leave to understand the word : though supposing it here used in the greatest latitude, as signifying all manner of divisions, it will however include those of greater danger ; and whatever can be hence inferred, in reproof of any *heresies*, will *a fortiori* be applicable to them.

In this scripture we may observe,

I. The assertion of the Apostle——*There must be heresies* in the church.

II. The providential end for which God permits them——*That they who are approved may be made manifest.*

III. The great advantage the church receives from these *manifestations of those who are approved.* And,

I. The apostle here asserts, that *there must be heresies* in the church, in the same sense in which our Lord tells us, *It must needs be that offences come*, Matth. xviii. 7. Not that he is commendable or excusable who introduces these *heresies*, or occasions these *offences*. They are to be considered as great evils, and *wo unto him by whom they come.* But in the natural course of things such evils will happen, and in
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the scheme of providence be requisite for the promotion of wise and beneficial ends.

Now, could no external cause be assigned for these events, the common frailties and corruptions of human nature may prepare us to expect them in a society composed of men. For Christianity, though it prescribes the best rules for the government of our passions, and has provided the noblest support to our infirmities, yet does not intend to constrain our obedience to its laws, or over-rule our liberty of transgressing them. And whenever the want of humility happens to be the defective part of a man's temper or virtue, a person eminent in other respects for his graces and abilities may occasion this evil to the church. A superior knowledge, unless corrected with a due proportion of modesty, is apt to elate and puff up; to render us less capable of instruction, and less submissive to authority than the peace and order of the church requires. It cannot but be observed, that, of all parts of our knowledge, we are inclined to be fondest of those in which we differ from other men. Obvious and indisputable truths are generally regarded with indifference. It is the singularity and distinction of our knowledge, the discovering something that others have overlooked,

looked, which strikes our vanity, and affects with pleasure. This we labour to support with arguments and adorn with all our eloquence, as an acquisition of our own, and in which we have a sort of property exclusive of the rest of the world. And so long as this ambition is confined to points of mere philosophy, it may deserve not only indulgence but sometimes even praise. But the misfortune is, that the same vanity, attends men in enquiries of religion, where all that is true is old, and has been from the beginning, and consequently no new conclusion can be admitted. But even here too it appears dull and undistinguishing to tread on in the common road, and think and believe as other men do. This will not sufficiently recommend to public notice, and engage the attention of the world. Something new and surprizing must be sought for, something that will argue a deeper penetration than other men's, and entitle us to the venerable character of masters, and which whosoever will learn must acknowledge himself to receive from us, and be listed in the train of our disciples. And if we observe how deeply this passion is rooted in our nature, and how difficult it is even for good men to restrain it within due bounds, and how naturally

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whenever it is indulged in religion it must lead men into heresies, we may from this single consideration conclude that the church of God can never be wholly secured from these evils. And if we take farther into our reflection that envy, resentment, and almost every other passion may accidentally concur in producing them ; that whenever it happens (and often it must be expected to happen) that the powers of the world give encouragement to these *divisions*, avarice and secular ambition must be added to the causes of them : and, lastly, that the malice of all its enemies from without will be always vigilant to cultivate every seed of dissention, to take advantage of every passion, and improve every incident that may distract the church ; we must confess that these evils are, humanly speaking, necessary and unavoidably events to be looked for in the ordinary course of things.

And accordingly we are by frequent predictions of scripture prepared for them, as natural effects of the corrupt passions of mankind. Thus St. *Paul*, taking his final leave of the church at *Ephesus*, uses this as a principal argument for that *vigilance* he recommended, that *among themselves should arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples af-*
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ter them, Acts xx. 30. Their character he more particularly describes to *Timothy*, as *lovers of their own selves, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient, heady, high-minded*, 2 Tim. iii. 2, 4. and, in general, corrupted by the basest passions, though artfully covered, with *a form of Godliness*. The same prophecy, with almost the same description of the persons, is repeated by *St. Peter* and *St. Jude*: that there should be *false teachers, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them*, 2 Pet. ii. 1. In their character we are told they should be *presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities, speaking proud swelling words of vanity, promising men liberty, while themselves were servants of corruption*. And how fully these predictions have been verified we are informed by the annals of past ages of the church, and too sensibly feel in the experience of our own.

From false teachers and seducers then the church must never hope to be perfectly free in this world. Neither shall we be surpris'd at the success of their attempts, when we reflect that there will be hearers too of like passions; light and unstable men with *itching ears*; strongly inclined to hearken after

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new discoveries, and pretensions to direct them more accurately in the way to happiness: especially when these pretensions are recommended under the usual cover of a disinterested zeal for their souls and their liberties. And if it shall happen that either a friendship with the person, or an esteem for the holiness, learning, or character of the heretick, concurs with these motives, the resolution must be great and well founded, that stands unshaken. And accordingly our saviour expresses an uncommon apprehension of a seducer thus qualified for reverence and attention, when he tells us, that, *if it were possible he should deceive even the elect*, Math. xxiv. 24. Our Lord indeed applies this especially to such deceivers, as should come with an appearance of miracles; but since it is the esteem and authority they acquire by these miracles which render them dangerous, whoever is by any other character recommended to esteem, will prove equally capable of seducing men into heresy.

From the whole then we may conclude that *there must be heresies* in the church, that seducers shall in all ages arise, *deceiving and being deceived*, and that *many shall follow their pernicious ways*.

II. The

II. The *second* thing that occurs to us in this scripture is the providential end here assigned for God's permission of these evils—The trial and *manifestation of those who are approved.*

And thus *Moses* tells the *Israelites*, that if there should arise among them a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, who should endeavour by signs and wonders, Deut. xiii. 1. to turn them away from the religion he had taught them, they should remember that the Lord their god proved them by such experiments, to know whether they loved the Lord their God with all their soul. And so when our Lord had cautioned his disciples against the various trials of reproach and persecution, and very particularly against this of *false Christs, and false prophets*, he tells them, *These things shall turn to them for a testimony*, Luke xxi. 13. (i. e.) these trials should prove and evidence the integrity of those who persevered in the true faith and church of Christ. And agreeably the *Apostle* here observes, that these *heresies* should come, that they who are approved might be made manifest. By which expression we are not to apprehend, that the character of the elect is made more manifest to God than it was before. He sees, without any such methods

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of scrutiny, with what steadiness their faith is rooted, and how firmly they are united to his church: and therefore they are here represented as persons approved by him antecedently to such trial. But this manifestation may be understood either

1st, With respect to ourselves; or

2^{dly}, With respect to the rest of the church.

1st, With respect to himself, it is a comfort unspeakable to a good man, to find his graces of strength to endure this trial: to be able after a conflict to applaud himself with *St. Paul*,—*I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith.* When we observe the number and abilities of those who have, in all ages, been led away by this temptation; when we remember that even angels themselves were seduced into apostacy; and behold in present examples, the *thousands that fall beside us*, even the best of us may find reason to be diffident of our strength, and suspect our resolutions. Unless our constancy has been tried, we know not how far an affection for the person, or an esteem for the virtues and abilities of any man, may prevail on us to desert the faith or communion of the church. If upon experiment we find ourselves equal to the trial, we may then
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hope well of our integrity, and that we shall *hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.* But

2dly, What the apostle seems here principally to attend, is that the rest of the church, upon the evidence of such a proof, may acknowledge us in the character of sincere members and faithful servants of Christ.

Known unto God only are they who are his, by an internal inspection into their hearts, to the church this character can no otherwise appear, than by outward and presumptive evidences: and therefore explicit professions of faith have been alway required, as terms of admission into its society; and from all who are intrusted with any office in the administration of its polity, more full and express declarations are demanded as a test both of their abilities and sincerity. But these, though prudent and necessary cautions, yet are not always sufficient to reach the heart, and discover the sincerity of man. When the church is favoured with civil encouragements, secular motives may induce the hypocrite to associate himself with it: and the honour and distinction annexed to its offices may engage his compliance with the terms of receiving them. Even an enemy may under this disguise, en-

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deavour to recommend himself to a station in the church, by the advantage of which he may more effectually subvert it. And consequently these securities, though in the ordinary course of discipline the best that can be taken, yet cannot always be depended on as a proof of sincerity. But he, who has stood firm in the day of temptation, has given an evidence of his integrity, which cannot be suspected: and if *to his faith he has added knowledge*, appeared able by the *spirit of wisdom to convince gain-sayers*, and defeat the craft and sophistry of *those who lie in wait to deceive*, we must distinguish him in our esteem, not only as a sincere member, but as a light and ornament of the church of God,

Let us then

III. Consider the advantages derived to the church from these *Manifestations*. And

1st, It is a great and general advantage to the church, that it is hereby enabled better to exercise its discipline, to separate the hypocrites from the sincere Christians, the sound from the corrupted members of the body. For if they who are *approved* are hereby made *manifest*,

manifest, they also who are *not approved* must be equally *manifested*.

The qualifications, upon which any one is admitted or continued in the outward society of the church, ought to be equitable and legal presumptions that he is a member of that *invisible* church of the elect, which is approved by Christ. And though human discretion, which can judge only by external appearances, will never be able so effectually to guard against hypocrisy, but many will remain in the *visible* church, who are not members of the *invisible*; yet still the more apparent and *manifest* this distinction it made, the freer may the church be kept from this alloy, and the more effectually will its honour and happiness be secured. And consequently these *manifestations* must be of great service to the church, in promoting the ends of discipline, and thereby preserving the body in health and purity.

It may be observed farther, as no small advantage arising hence to the church, that hereby its enemies are discovered in their proper character. While they can act under the disguise of friends they are far more dangerous, and the weak and unwary more easily imposed on by them: but when, either by a

voluntary departure, or a judicial separation, their character is declared, they appear under marks of disgrace, and men are prepared and fortified against their attempts.

But in this especially is the church advantaged, that, by these *manifestations of those who are approved*, the governors of it are enabled to chuse fit persons to serve in the sacred offices of the ministry. For though the church, as every other society, is not without danger from a mixture of persons disaffected to its constitution, and the principles upon which it is founded, in whatever station they are placed; yet men of this character become infinitely more dangerous, if intrusted with offices of influence and authority in it. If the guides and shepherds are inclined to the paths of error, how shall the flock be preserved from going astray? If watchmen are appointed who are prepared to betray their post, how shall the city be secured? If that authority of doctrine, rule, and discipline, which was given to the church for a light and defence, for edification and protection, be committed to her enemies, the danger is imminent and hardly to be avoided; she will be murdered by her own guards, and undone by her own authority. It is therefore of
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the greatest importance to the church, that they, whom it belongs to call and appoint persons to the several orders of the ministry, may be enabled to distinguish between friends and enemies; to chuse men of approved integrity, men who have been tried and found faithful, and equal to the trust reposed in them.

To these advantages, which are great and obvious, many others may be added arising to the church from those trials. It is *St. Augustin's* reflection—That though the enemy of Christ's church introduces these dissentions into it, with a design to weaken and subvert it; yet the goodness of God defeats his malice, by giving them a quite contrary effect: for by these occasions of enquiry, the doctrines of the church become more attentively considered, more clearly understood, more strongly supported, and more earnestly preached; and by these means, in the event, more firmly established than they were before. And it is observable, that as the first and purest ages of the church were not free from heresies, so to the early and various oppositions they gave to the truth (the wisdom of God so ordering) we owe, not only those valuable treasures of the church, the writings of the primitive

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mitive fathers, but also several parts of the sacred rule delivered to us in the scriptures themselves.

I shall only here add, that by the appearance of these dangers, the pastors of the flock are quickened to a more diligent attendance on the duties of their station, to a more accurate inspection into the state of those committed to their charge, to apply themselves with more assiduity, to instruct, admonish, and reprove, as the exigences of each person appear to require; and at the same time carefully to examine their own lives, and, by a prudent, holy, and unblameable conduct keep up the dignity and influence of their ministry, *that the enemy may have no occasion to blaspheme.*

The time will not permit me to enlarge on these considerations: but from what has been suggested, it may appear; that the providence of God, by which all events are governed and made *to serve together for the good of his elect*, improves even these evils to the honour and advantage of the church.

What has occurred to us in the consideration of this scripture, I beg leave to apply in some few inferences. And

1st, It may hence appear with how little reason our adversaries of *Rome* reproach us with those schisms and heresies which God has permitted to vex our church; and to use them as an argument of our rejection by Christ. It has been observed that *these* are necessary and unavoidable consequences from the common passions of human nature, and what the malice of its enemies may be expected to foment in every society. Nothing therefore can be more unjust, than to conclude any thing in prejudice to our church on account of them. It may as reasonably be objected that it is composed of men, and has enemies. And least of all can this objection become those, who are well known to have been the authors of these evils to us. And when we recollect the frequent predictions of Christ and his apostles, that schisms and heresies should arise in the church which they founded, and observe from history, that the purest ages have been the most remarkably disquieted with these evils; that the account of them begins in the writings of the apostles themselves, and that within less than a century after their death, the catalogue of them is enlarged to a prodigious number, we may rather presume that church, to which the enemy appears most
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solicitous to create this disturbance, to be a true church of Christ, than the contrary. Thus much at least we may with certainty conclude, that an objection which lies equally against the first and purest churches, cannot be a proof of the corruption of any. Did our church own in her doctrines, or encourage by her laws the heresies which have appeared among us, or were they quietly suffered to prevail, they might then with some colour be urged in reproach against us. But we answer with the apostle, *They go out from us, because they are not of us*: And, blessed be God, a just and Christian zeal has not been wanting in opposition to them. And all the schisms, errors, and heresies, which have ever arisen in the Christian world, may with as much justice be objected to the catholick church of Christ, as the crimes of these enemies, to our peace can be imputed to us. Neither,

2dly, Can it be inferred from the divine permission of these evils, that we are deserted by God, or excluded from that care and affection with which he hath promised to watch over and defend his church: for we are assured that he applies them to the promotion of wise and gracious ends: that by them he tries
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and proves his elect; gives them an inward joy and consolation in their own integrity, and renders their character *manifest* to the church. How many and how important advantages the church receives from these *manifestations* has been in some measure observed: and whoever attends to them cannot but adore the wisdom and goodness of God, who can thus over-rule the counsels of his enemies, and derive strength and establishment to his church from devices which intend its destruction.

These are the principal inferences I have had in view from this scripture; but there are some farther corollaries, arising from the doctrine here taught, which very well deserve our attention. And

1st, If, as the apostle affirms, the providential end of these *heresies* is, that they who are *approved by God may be made manifest*, then it follows, that they, who under these trials persists in the faith and communion of the church, are thereby *manifested* to be approved by God. This conclusion, indeed, we cannot extend so far, as to pronounce him, who thus perseveres, to be in all respects approved by God; a presumption we may sometimes have reason to discourage: but this we have
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hence warrant to insist on as one mark and distinction of the elect; and if a man be equally regular in other respects, we are bound to receive and acknowledge him in that character. From hence it must also follow,

2dly, That they who introduce heresies into the church, or follow those who introduce them, are thereby *manifested* to be *disapproved*, or reprobated by God; and therefore that the church may and ought to treat them in its discipline, as sufficiently discovered under that character. Though the error of the person may, by an internal circumstance of it, be excused by God, yet this cannot be discerned by men. Nay, supposing him even in the right, yet if the governors of the church judge otherwise, they must proceed according to their own convictions, and not according to his. To them he must appear *disapproved* by God, upon such an evidence as, in the judgment of an apostle, is a due and legal *manifestation* of it.

Upon the whole, with great joy and comfort may he, who perseveres in the true faith and unity of the church, reflect on the assurance here given, that this is one mark and evidence that he is *approved* by God. And on the contrary, with terror ought he, who divides

divides or departs from any true branch of Christ's church, to observe under what character he is here described.

I am not ignorant, that all sects and heresies assume to themselves the title of the true church of Christ, and are ready to turn the reproof of this scripture upon us; telling us, that they are the *approved*, and we the *disapproved* here described: by what marks or characters the true church of Christ is to be discerned, is a question of too great extent to be considered here. But I would observe in few words, that since every sect assumes to itself this character exclusive of those from whom it separates, and rests on this plea as the defence of its separation, all manifestly agree in this conclusion, that to divide or separate from the true church of Christ is a grievous sin. And if a profession of doctrines derived from the scriptures and continued down through all ages of the gospel, and a polity formed upon the purest model of antiquity, can give a title to this honour, the church of *England* has been proved to have a more indisputable claim to it, than any of her adversaries. To the doctrines in which the *papists* differ from us, the ancient creeds, the writings of the first ages, and the scriptures, as explained

explained by them, are all strangers; and those which we hold in common with them, they themselves acknowledge to have been *from the beginning*. The articles we contend for against the hereticks arisen among us, have been constantly and without interruption maintained in the church from the apostles down to our days; whereas the doctrines which oppose them, though they have some of them prevailed far at certain periods and engaged a great number of followers, yet for large intervals they have been perfectly silenced and unheard of. And as to the frame of our polity, no instance has ever been produced of a Christian church governed by any other, for fifteen hundred years after the apostles. These must at first view be confessed to be strong presumptions at least, in favour of our church against all competitors; and the more accurately we pursue the inquiry, the more fully we shall be convinced, that she is a true branch of that church which Christ and his apostles planted, and consequently that to depart from her faith and communion is to depart from the true church of Christ.

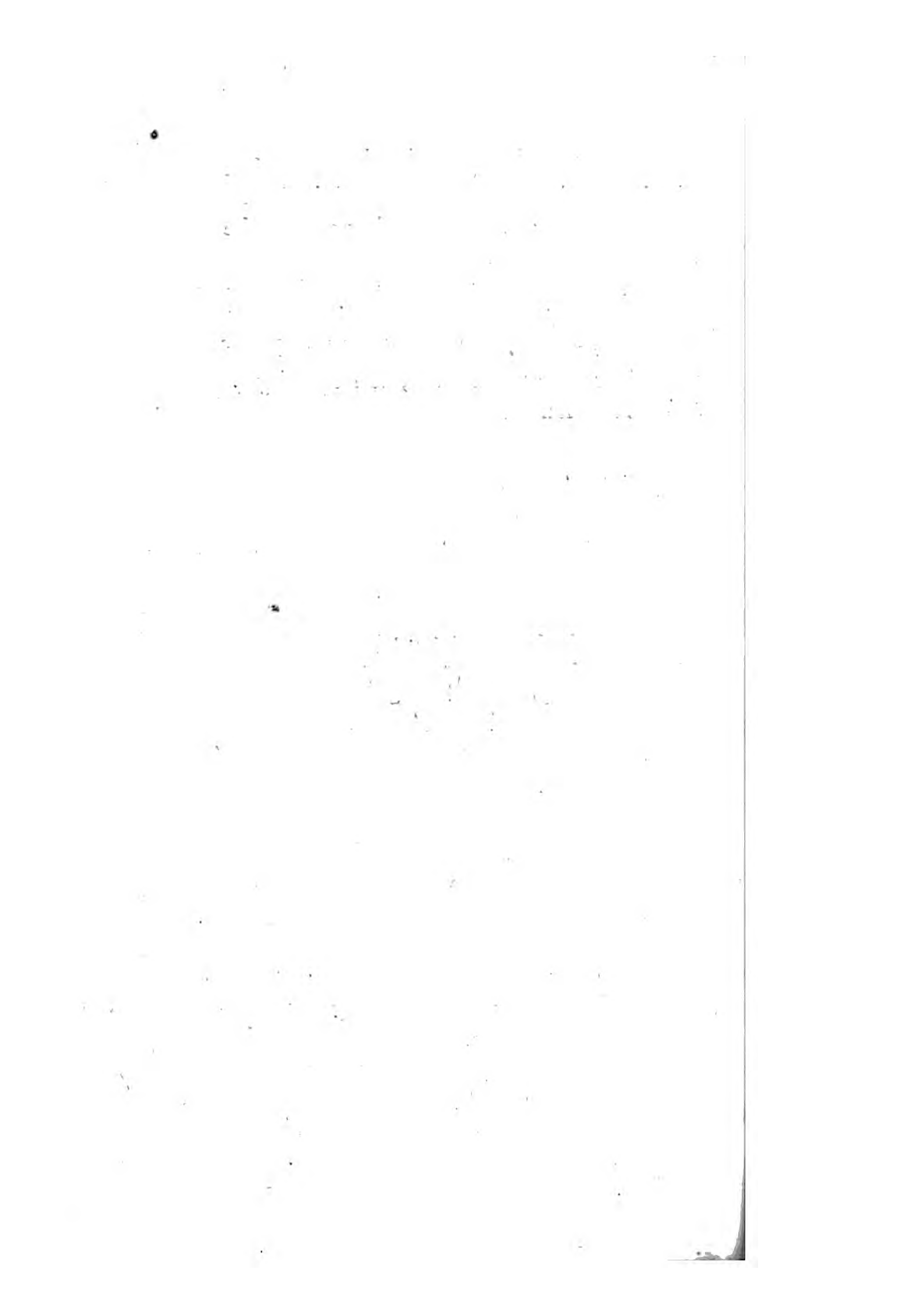
May that God who is able to bring good out of evil, improve all attempts to weaken or divide our *Sion*, to the manifestation of her friends,

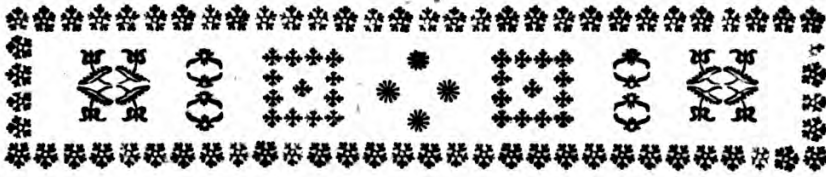
friends, and the disappointment of those who hate her. May he give to her pastors the spirit of wisdom and courage, and to every one of her members such a measure of his grace in the day of trial, that they may not be found *of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who endure unto the end, to the saving of their souls.* Amen.



U

Unanimity






Unanimity among Christians in Faith
and Worship recommended *.

2 COR. xiii. 11.

Finally, brethren, farewell: be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.


 Cannot address you in words more agreeable to the occasion on which I now appear before you, than these chosen by St. *Paul* to close his applications to a people over whom he was *jealous with a godly jealousy*, 2 Cor. ii. 2, and to whom he wrote more than to any other church of his conversion. The duties to

* A farewell sermon, preached at *Christ Church, London*, January 12th, 1723-4.

which he exhorts them are the sum of what he had taught, persuaded, and enjoined through his two epistles ; and will ever deserve the most attentive regard of Christians. A distinct consideration.

I. Of the duties here recommended.

II. Of the motives from which he persuades their observance, — will lead us to a proper application of this scripture.

He first exhorts them to be *perfect* ; which some understand in a general sense, extended to all parts of our religious and moral conduct, and as equivalent to that command of our Lord — *Be ye perfect as your father which is in heaven is perfect*, Matth. v. 8. — But, though the apostle may usefully be understood in this large sense, yet a more restrained and special kind of perfection arising from the re-union of what was broken and divided seems more agreeable to his drift in this epistle, and to the common use of the word here chosen. It is evident, that a principal occasion of his writing was the contentions, emulations and divisions which prevailed among the Corinthians. His frequent reproof of these imperfections, and his exhortations to union
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and charity, which make a part of almost every chapter, shew plainly that this point was never out of his view : nothing therefore could be more proper or natural in this final address, than to exhort them to recollect what he had taught on this important head, and apply it by a firm re-union with each other. And to this sense the ordinary use of the word rather directs us. It is not the same by which the evangelist expresses that command of our Lord, *Be ye perfect*, τέλειοι ἔσεσθε, but καταρτίζεσθε, a word commonly used in other scripture, to signify * mending what was torn, re-uniting what was separated and disjoined.

The perfection then to which the apostle here exhorts the *Corinthians*, I apprehend to be an integral perfection, resulting from that incorporation by which as he else where teaches, they as *many members* composed *one body*, 1 Cor. xii. 20. *A body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth ; which according to the effectual working of every part, maketh the increase of the whole unto the edifying itself in love*, Eph. iv. 16. A compliance

* Matth. iv. 21. Καταρτίζοντες τὰ δίκτυα. *Mending their nets.* Gal. vi. 1. Καταρτίζετε τὴν τοιοῦτον *Restore, re-unite, such an one.*

with the duties of this social relation in the orderly exercise of their several gifts, and a due submission to his authority, he had before largely insisted on, as a condition of union with Christ, and the proper remedy for that strife, variance and irregularity which appeared among them : and now, taking leave of them he recalls their attention to that important subject, and persuades that union which is *the bond of peace, and of all perfection*, and on which their joy, *comfort*, and proficiency in the gospel depended. As the proper and necessary means to preserve and perfect this union, he exhorts them to *be of one mind*; or, as he had before more fully expressed it, *Be ye perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment*, 1 Cor. i. 10.

That union, social union and church-fellowship, is a duty of strict obligations on Christians, is not, I think, in the general proposition, denied by any. That heresies, schisms, and divisions, may, notwithstanding this general acknowledgment, prevail, the past and present experience of the church affords us too much proof. If we trace this evil to its source, we shall find it wholly owing to the want of that *unanimity* here prescribed. If men were *of one mind, and one judgment*, they could

could have no pretence to separate from each other ; but till we can prevail for the acknowledgement and observance of this duty, all schemes and projects of union will be impracticable. I shall therefore confine my present thoughts to this branch of the apostle's exhortation, and endeavour to apply a remedy to the root of the evil by explaining and asserting this duty of unanimity. And,

First, The apostle cannot be imagined so ignorant of human nature, as to suppose it possible for the members of any church exactly to agree in judgment concerning all points of doctrine, or rules of polity. It could not therefore be his meaning, to enjoin as a necessary duty, what the nature of the thing, and common experience, declare to be impracticable. The general question then is, how far does this command of *unity in mind and judgment oblige* ? And the general resolution to it is, *So far as it is possible, and it lies in us*, Rom. xii. 8. and precisely so far as the nature of that social union, which he prescribes, requires. Now every society, as such, supposes an agreement of men in some common rules, to the observance of which every member according to his station, is obliged, as a condition of union with that society.

Every Christian church, as such, is a combination of men agreeing to profess the Christian faith, and stipulating with each other to live according to the rules of the gospel. These are the distinctive terms of union by which a Christian church, as such, is differenced from other societies. The measure of agreement on these terms must be such as the nature of society in general requires: because otherwise, the members of a church will not be united on these terms as a society. Now it is evident, that the terms of union in an outward society, must be the performance of the same outward and visible actions, as prescribed by the rules of the society; and consequently, the faith and duties of the gospel being supposed the primary rule of every Christian church, the terms of union between the members of it must be a stipulation to profess the same faith, and perform the same outward actions, as enjoined and directed by the rules of that society. For if we suppose any number of men professing different and opposite creeds, and acting in contradiction to each other, however they may all pretend the laws and doctrines of the gospel to be their rule, it will be impossible to conceive them united as a
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society in the observance of it. It is therefore necessary that the laws and doctrines of the gospel, so far as by the rules of any society they are made the term of union between the members of it, should be received in the same sense; *i. e.* as requiring the same faith to be professed, and the same actions to be performed, and consequently, that the members should be thus far *of the same mind and judgment, speaking and doing the same things.*

To how many doctrines of the gospel any church should, by express stipulation, require the consent of its members, as terms of union with it, it is not perhaps possible by any common rule exactly to determine: in some the agreement of men may be presumed; in others it may be necessary to insist on explicit declarations. And again, the reason of the thing directs, that an express stipulation should be required from some stations and offices, in many more points than it is either necessary or expedient to insist on, as general terms of communion.

The morality of the gospel prescribing only those virtues which natural reason has at all times approved and recommended, it may well be presumed, that men are agreed, and of one mind as to these precepts; and therefore a
general

general engagement to *renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful servants*, has appeared a sufficient bond of church-union, with respect to these duties. But many doctrines of faith taught in the gospel, being such as could only be known by revelation, such as natural reason could not have discovered, and when proposed, cannot comprehend, or solve all the difficulties that will occur to it in a curious examination of them ; it was easy to foresee, and in experience soon found, that men, who gave a loose to their enquiries, would be led to different and contradictory apprehensions about them : and from a fondness to their own conceits and hypothesis, or the ambition of appearing to see farther than others, would raise disputes, which could not as in questions of morality, be reconciled by an appeal to natural reason ; that hereby parties would be formed, the *one faith*, Eph. iv. 5. subverted, and the peace and unity of the church destroyed. It was therefore necessary to insist on more explicit stipulations on this head than the former. And in these provisions, the different circumstances of churches, the different enemies, corruptions, and

and disputes they may be obliged to guard against, may require some variety.

But as no man can be a Christian without believing some articles of Christian faith ; so no society of men can be a Christian church, unless they agree in the profession of some articles of that faith. What by universal consent, in the first and purest ages of the church, was agreed on as a common standard of catholic faith, is doubtless a rule, from which no church ought lightly to depart. And in the present state of all churches, when almost all persons are admitted in infancy, there can be no reason to require any other profession of faith as a general condition of communion. But the reasons are obvious, which render a farther caution necessary with regard to the public offices and ministry of the church. For if they who are to guide and instruct others have *every one a doctrine, every one an interpretation*, 1 Cor. xiv. 26. how shall the flock be preserved in unity ? Error or heresy in a private person, when unanimously opposed by the public teachers, cannot extend its influence very far ; but when it is taught to whole assemblies by those *lips* which are supposed to *preserve knowledge*, and from whence men are directed to *seek the law*, their words cat like

a canker, 2 Tim. ii. 17. and the contagion spreads with the swiftness of a pestilence. It is therefore of the greatest importance to the peace and purity of any church, that in all points either fundamental to the Christian system of faith, or on which the different sentiments of men have formed stated schisms, dissensions, and public teachers should be under some common restraint, be obliged to *walk by the same rule, and speak the same things*, Phil. iii. 16. 1 Cor. i. 10. It is certainly an unhappiness to any church to be obliged to multiply provisions of this kind; and some obvious inconveniences will attend it. But as one church may be exposed to dangers and enemies from which another is under no apprehension, it may be necessary for one church to demand an express acknowledgement of some verities or doctrines of the gospel, which another may not have the same reasons to require. And how many or how few, beyond articles simply necessary, or catholicly established, any church should insist on, must, in the nature of the thing, be left to the result of public deliberations, *i. e.* to the governors and authority of the society, upon whatever scheme of polity we suppose such church to be formed.

But besides these provisions for unity in faith and doctrine in a Christian church, it is necessary that the public ordinances and administrations of religion should be under such rules as may provide for those great ends *decency, order,* and the *edification* of the members. The nature of the thing and the command of an apostle, *1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.* require that these ends should be provided for, and it is evident that no provision can be made for them in a society, but by some rules directing and obliging public practice. Now in rules of this kind the matter is, in its nature only of prudential consideration, concerning which men ever did, and ever will, differ in judgment, some approving one observance, some another, as most orderly, most decent, and most edifying. How then shall the apostle's command *to be of one mind* be complied with in these things? Surely there is but one way possible; which is, that every private member submit his own opinion to the public judgment and resolution of the society, and then observe what is thus agreed on *without murmuring or disputing*, *Philip. ii. 14.*

Upon the whole, as every society is one body, so the union and coherence of the members depend on their acknowledging the same
authority

authority and the same laws, the soul and life of that body, under whose common direction they act as one, as having one will and one understanding, *perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment*; which can only be effected by each submitting his private sentiments to the laws, the public judgment of the society.

But it is then the strict duty of every Christian intirely, and in all things, to give up his own persuasions to the public determinations of the church he belongs to? No, certainly: but *so far only as it is possible, and it lies in him*. To every single Christian the laws of Christ are of prior and greater obligation, than any social laws of outward union: for the fundamental principle upon which Christians are united in these societies, is, that they may jointly observe the laws of Christ. This is the primary condition and stipulation of their union, and all the obedience they owe to the rules, and all the submission they promise to the authority of such society, is under the reserve of this condition, *That it consists with obedience to Christ*. If therefore the laws of the church prescribe to any member in his station, such observances as are forbidden by the laws of Christ, *It is not possible, it lies not in him to comply*

comply with them : he is under a superior engagement, and must *obey God rather than man*. In this case the precept for unanimity ceases to oblige ; he cannot be of one mind with those who contradict Christ.

But then in cases doubtful, where he is not, and cannot be determined by his own convictions one way or other, whether the action required from him be lawful or not, his proper recourse for satisfaction is to his appointed guides, the superiors of the church ; and it is certainly his duty to be determined by their judgment. And in questions purely of expediency or inexpediency, relating to the outward order and regimen of the church, the nature of all society requires, that the judgment of every private member should be concluded by public resolutions. This is the only way possible for men to be *of one mind* in questions of this kind ; and therefore this the apostle must be understood to command. And if as he advises, we *live in peace*, or be studious of peace ; if we have that *charity*, which is *not puffed up, vaunteth not it self, doth not behave it self unseemly*, 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5. we shall find no difficulty in complying with this duty. *If we do nothing through strife and vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind each esteem*

esteem others better than themselves, Philip. ii. 3. we shall cheerfully *submit our selves to those who rule over us*, Heb. xiii. 17. preserving the *unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*, Eph. iv. 3.

The motives from which the apostle recommends to us this *unanimity*, and the *perfection* arising from it, are summed up in this comprehensive promise, *That the God of love and peace shall be with us.* Which we are,

Secondly, to consider.

The expression here, and frequently used in scripture, of *God's being with us*, imports a distinguished measure of his favour, direction and blessing. When he is described in the promise under any particular character, it implies, that his favour will particularly appear to us, in such blessings as have a special relation to that character. So when the apostle here styles him the *God of peace*, his meaning is, that if our own endeavours are not wanting, if we *seek peace, and ensue it* in the methods he has advised, God, who is the author of peace, and lover of concord, will both render these endeavours successful in the promotion of it, and immediately reward us with the good fruits and effects of peace. In both these

these views, the promise may be considered, as offering motives of great encouragement to the duty recommended.

Without the concurrence of God, our endeavours after peace would be fruitless and unsuccessful: for it is his grace alone, his love shed abroad in our hearts, that enables us to correct the ferment of our passions, and disposes us to that meekness and humility, that patience and forbearance which make for peace. But the necessity of the divine concurrence to this work yet farther appears, if we consider, that how well soever we may perform our part, yet peace and union cannot follow, unless others also have the like dispositions. Now it is God alone *who makes men to be of one mind.* It is he only who can govern the unruly wills and affections of men, can soften their aversions, and pacify their resentments, and *make even our enemies to be at peace with us*; Prov. xvi. 7. It is therefore a great encouragement to us to be studious of peace; to be assured that if we are so, the *God of peace will be with us*; will remove all obstructions, and, by his co-operation and assistance, enable us to perfect the good work.

More encouraging yet is this promise, when we consider it as assuring to us the happy

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fruits and effects of peace. If we comply with the duties here recommended, God will immediately reward our obedience with the blessings of peace: blessings so many and so obvious, that it may seem as unnecessary to suggest any of them, as it is impossible to recount them all. But when the duty to which they are promised, is under a manifest neglect; when disputing every thing, and agreeing in nothing, are contended for as the fundamental privileges, the inherent right of every private Christian, we may be permitted to remind you of the many blessings and advantages you must forfeit, and the great evils that must attend you, pursuing so fatal a mistake.

It is by this *unity of mind and judgment* as I have before explained and asserted the duty, that we are rendered capable of a social incorporation, that great comprehensive blessing by which we are cemented together in love, defended against the enemy, and edified in grace and truth. While we *thus walk together in the house of God as friends*, partaking of the same ordinances, all guided by *the same rule, minding the same things*, we appear as servants of the same master, children of the same
father

father which is in heaven. With what cheerfulness and vigour do we *run the race that is set before us*, comforting, exhorting, and assisting each other? Our only strife will be a holy emulation to excel in virtue, and go before one another in the works of regeneration; while our united prayers ascend with a double force to the throne of grace, and derive the blessings of heaven upon us. Happy are the people that are in such a case, protected from without, and adorned with the beauty of holiness within; the delight of God, and the praise of men!

On the contrary, *where strife and division is, there is confusion and every evil Work*, James iii. 16. Diversity of judgment, as I observed, there ever will be among men; but so long as they act under the same public rule, no great evil can follow from it. It is also acknowledged, that in one case, when the public rule either does, or in our convictions appears to, contradict a law of God, it is our duty to act according to such convictions; but if this liberty be extended beyond these bounds, if every private man may take upon him to oppose his own wisdom to the conclusions of authority, and comply with nothing but what exactly

agrees with his own judgment, the first principle of social union among men is subverted, and they are left in the same state they were in, before any society was formed among them. Consider any number of men divided from each other in doctrine, worship, and rules of life, and all claiming a liberty to act according to their different persuasions, and try whether you can combine them in the idea of a Christian church. A multitude no better connected than this, are but a heap of sand, which every blast of air, every *wind of doctrine*, Eph. iv. 14. will dissipate and disperse; and can never appear to us in the image of *a building fitly framed together*, Eph. ii. 21.

There never was nor never can be, a constitution so framed, as to be perfectly free from objection. No rules can ever be devised, but what some or other will dislike, and think they might be altered for the better.

Now every man has as much a right to act according to his own judgment as another; and consequently, upon this scheme, no rule will have any obligation, or lay the least restraint upon the members, but every one will be left to teach what he pleases, and do what he pleases: but in the mean
time,

time, is not the church, the society, manifestly dissolved and lost in anarchy? This is the natural tendency of this principle; and whenever it is pressed home, utter *confusion* must be the result of it; and the apostle might very well add, that it will be attended with *every evil work*.

The passion to which it applies, and by which alone it succeeds is spiritual pride, an over weaning conceit of our own sufficiency that we are *wiser than the aged, and have more understanding than our teachers*: and the immediate effects of it are, contempt of our superiors, hatred and disaffection towards one another, calumny and detraction, partiality and hypocrisy. The encouragement of favour and esteem no longer attend virtue and holiness, but are confined to the distinctions of contending factions; and the powers of discipline will be under the same misapplications, and made the instrument of party-resentments. If, indeed, the principle contended for be true; if our private judgments are in nothing to be concluded by the judgment of public authority, and we are not subject to any rules, but what we ourselves are pleased to approve, all public discipline is impracticable: for, in consequence

of this principle, the offender need only profess that he acts according to his own judgment and convictions, and authority has no more to do with him. It is to no purpose to tell us, that discipline may be exerted against immoralities; for what right has the church to judge for me in questions of morality, more than in questions of doctrine or expediency? The plain result of this scheme is, that every one must be left to do what is right in his own eyes, unconfin'd by any rules but what he thinks fit to set to himself, and without any restraint from authority. And what a deluge of ungodliness, and *every evil work* must prevail, when the ignorance and passions of men are thus let loose, need only be suggested.

From what has been offered in the foregoing reflections, I presume it may appear, that the *unity of mind and judgment*, so often and so earnestly recommended by the apostle, is no other way practicable, than by a submission of private judgment to public resolutions; and consequently, when he enjoins such unity, he must be understood to enjoin such submission; and if one be a duty, the other must be so too. The reserves under which this duty obliges, have been considered and allowed;

ed ; but unless within these limits, the duty be acknowledged and complied with, all union of men as a Christian church is impracticable. To a compliance with this duty, we are encouraged by a prospect of all those advantages which naturally arise from social union, and to which the blessing of the God of love and peace, and his special presence with us, will assuredly render it effectual. The evils which attend a departure from this unity, are in their nature and tendency the most formidable ; and the libertine principles which have been alledged in defence of it, are such as open a door to all licentiousness ; are subversive of all rule, order, or discipline ; and if pursued to their consequences, are inconsistent with all ecclesiastical agreement, in faith, worship, or even morality itself.

It is with great concern I observe to you, how particularly our own circumstances call upon us to attend the apostolical exhortation before us ; with what assiduity the seeds of division have been sown and cultivated among us, both by the enemies of Christianity in general, and of our own church in particular. The civil establishment indeed of our church, and the incorporation of its laws and interests with those of the state, have, in

some measure, restrained the evil effects of those principles, and prevented that final distraction they tend to introduce. Of this obstruction to the success of these principles, they who have advanced them are well aware; and therefore while some have been labouring to dissolve all bonds of ecclesiastical union, others have taught us, that no prince or state ought to favour one profession of religion more than another, but are obliged to give equal encouragement to all. Blessed be God, the fundamental laws of our constitution, the justice of our government, the promises, and I will presume to say, the interests of the throne, assure to us the continuance of this protection, and I trust our returns of fidelity and obedience will always deserve it: but we are to remember, that this is, in its nature, only an accidental advantage to a Christian church, and may be withdrawn from it; and if God, in punishment of our sins, should permit it to be so, the sad effects of this wild scheme of liberty would soon appear among all who should entertain it. The experiment was tried to the utmost in the days of our fathers, when all the various contenders for it were left to their full swing: and what was the result? Such a scene of discord and confusion, atheism, hypocrisy,

pocrisy, and religious distraction, as is not to be parallelléd in any age or nation of the world: (for the *God of peace* was departed from them, and had *sent evil angels among them*) until at length they, who had been the first authors of the mischief, grew sick and weary with being tossed to and fro in the storm which themselves had raised; and were glad to return to those who had persevered in the true principles of Christian unity, and assist them in repairing what their own madness and folly had before pulled down. We have reason indeed to hope, that these doctrines of confusion cannot so easily succeed in their effects, as they did in the preceeding age: but still they have the same tendency, and will ever require our care and vigilance to guard against them. And when they are openly taught and contended for, under the insinuating pretence of asserting public liberties, we cannot too earnestly remind you of their consequences; and persuade you to adhere with steadfastness to that well-tempered frame of polity, those just measures of authority in their superiors, and submission in the inferiors, upon which this protestant church is built. A constitution happily balanced between tyranny and anarchy, in which all the liberty is allowed
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that can consist with order and government; and yet that authority preserved which is necessary to it, the former will effectually preserve us from the bondage of popery, and the latter from the distractions of enthusiasm.

Brethren the favourable acceptance my labours have found among you, and that excellent spirit of love and benevolence I have observed in you, and which has flowed in so eminent a measure towards all who in any station have ministered to you in the gospel, demand my utmost returns of gratitude and esteem. The relation in which I have here served you will cease, but the affection arising from it will ever remain. And my unfeigned concern for your welfare I cannot better express, than by persuading you to continue firm in that unanimity, I have now preached and recommended to you; a duty on which depend the honour and stability of your church, and your improvement in every grace of religion. Something perhaps it may quicken your regard to what you have heard, to consider it as the advice of a parting friend; but remember, that the duty to which you have been exhorted is the command of an apostle of Christ; and that he only persuades you to be what his blessed master so ardently prayed

prayed that you, and *all who should believe in him*, might be—that ye may be made perfect in one, John xvii. In the powerful name of this our redeemer it is that the apostle beseeches his *Corinthians* that they would speak the same things, have no divisions among them, but be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment, 1 Cor. 1. 10.

In the same most holy name, and in the words of this chosen vessel of his ministry, let me also with all humility intreat you——

If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any bowels and mercies;—
Be ye like-minded having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, Phil. ii. 1, 2. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you are called in one body, Col. iii. 15. And the very God of peace dwell with you, and sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. 1 Thess. v. 23.



The due Improvement of our Talents
an indispensable Duty *.

M A T T H. XXV. 19.

*After a long time cometh the Lord of
those servants, and reckoneth with
them.*

IN the parable, whence these words
are taken, we have an instance of
that inimitable eloquence, which
spake as never man spake. We have
here the measures of our duty to God, and
the motives that enforce it, set before us in
an allusion so plain and simple, and yet so ex-
tensive in its views, and so affecting in its ad-

* A Farewel-sermon, preached at St. Clements-Danes,
March 26, 1727.

dress,

dress, that while it instructs the meanest capacity, it engages reverence and attention from the greatest, and strikes with irresistible impression on the most improved understanding. We are here every one led to consider God as our common lord and master, the author and giver of every good gift, ourselves as his servants or stewards, who, in various measures, have received from his goodness such blessings or abilities, as may fit us for the several stations or offices of life, to which his providence appoints us. We are called upon, to observe that these are committed to us as a trust or loan, for whose due management we are accountable to the donor, if we faithfully acquit ourselves of this probationary charge, we shall receive far greater instances of our Lord's confidence and favour: but if we are remiss and negligent in it, we must expect to feel his resentment and displeasure. We are assured, that there will be a time, when the Lord will come and reckon with every one distinctly, and demand a particular account of every talent committed to him. This day of enquiry, indeed, is here represented as at a distance. This life is allotted us wholly for probation, nor will our account be called for, until the scene of action is closed. And many

centuries may be yet to come before that great and final audit may begin. But though the time be thus long according to the measures of human computations, yet it is fixed and appointed in the counsels of God, *in whose sight a thousand years are as one day*, 2 Pet. iii. 8. It will assuredly come, and our eternal happiness or misery depend on the event of it: and therefore it concerns us to keep the prospect of it always in our view, and conduct ourselves under a constant sense and expectation of it.

These are the principal conclusions to which the representation of the parable calls our attention. But the divine author has also adapted every incident of the relation to convey to us some spiritual instruction. Agreeably we learn hence, that it is the appointment of infinite wisdom, that the talents of men should be various, adjusted, both in their kind and proportion, to the diversity of offices which human life requires to be supplied. But though the gifts of men be, for these wise and necessary reasons, unequal in themselves, yet none can with justice repine at the donor, since be it more or less that is bestowed on him, it is all pure, unmerited favour. Each ought therefore to be thankful, and satisfied

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fied with his portion, and instead of envying the more liberal allotments of another, apply himself to the improvement of his own. And this he will be induced to do, when he considers, what he is here farther taught, that the difficulty of the task riseth in proportion to the number of talents committed to each. He, who had received the *five*, was required to gain other *five*: and he, who had received *ten*, was called upon to account for other *ten*. It is therefore an argument rather for gratitude than complaint, that our master has laid on us a lighter burden, appointed us a more easy and less extended service, than he has required from other men. Especially when we observe, that our interest in the favour and approbation of God does not depend on the number of our talents, but our diligence and application in the management of them. He who had received but two talents, for his fidelity in those *few things*, was admitted *into the joy of his Lord*: and he who came last was reprov'd, not for having fewer talents, but less assiduity than the rest, and not improving what was committed to him, in the same proportion that others had done.

The moral argument then, and summary drift of the parable is, to engage our utmost
attention

attention to the improvement of such talents as God has bestowed on us, whether they be great or small, many or few, under a constant apprehension of the account we must give for them, when our *Lord shall come and reckon with us*. To this general application we are led, by a great variety of important reflections here suggested to us: but I think, they will all come into our consideration, if we distinctly observe,

I. What we are to understand by these talents, or what will be imputed to us under that character.

II. The duty of improving them here enjoined.

III. The account God will take of our management.

Now by these talents are first and principally meant, the communications and graces of the holy spirit, which he bestows in various kinds and measures, *dividing to every man, severally, as he will*, 1 Cor. xii. 11. And in a subordination to these, all the means, opportunities, motives, and abilities to exercise or improve these graces; all the powers of our nature; all advantages of station, fortune, educa-

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education, or instruction ; in sum, whatever may enable us to be, or to do good. For all whatever we have, and whatever we are, we receive from God, under an obligation to promote the wise ends for which he bestows his favours on us. In a more particular view we may observe, that God has distinguished our nature by faculties but little lower than those of his angels. He has given us reason and understanding, by an attentive application of which, we may discern good from evil, enquire into the causes, relations, and consequences of things, and collect the proper rules of judgment and action. The corruption indeed of our nature by the fall has very much obscured the light and weakened the authority of this faculty ; but still it remains an universal gift of God to mankind : and though it is indulged to some in greater degrees of perfection, and with greater advantages of culture, than to others : yet it is given to all men, in such a measure, and with such opportunities of improvement, as may render it sufficient for their direction. In the one point necessary, the knowledge of duty, and the pursuit of happiness, God has by the revelation of the gospel so graciously supplied the defects of reason, that the meanest understanding may thence
learn

learn all he is concerned to know in order to be happy. He may be wise in all that deserves the name of wisdom, even wise unto salvation. Nay, the gospel has not only enlightened the darkness, but provided means to restore also the authority of reason. Such assistances of divine grace attend every Christian upon the easy condition of applying for it, as may enable him to direct his will, and govern his affections, and subdue every reluctance of his corruption. These talents of nature are in some measure common to all men; and in these improvements of grace every Christian has some share, accommodated to the part assigned him to act; and, if his own diligence and application are not wanting, sufficient to conduct him through the several stages of it. We must take also farther into the account all the means afforded us for cultivating these gifts of nature or grace, all opportunities of instruction, and especially of attending the ministry and ordinances of religion; the care bestowed on us in our education; the reproofs and example of good men; the occasions offered, and the abilities given us for the exercise of any virtue, and the motives that persuade us to comply with them. All these we are to look upon as *talents*, gifts of God deposited

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with us, for the diligent use and application of which we are accountable to his justice. And when we observe the infinite number and variety of these gifts, how large a portion even the least furnished has received from his master, we must acknowledge, that our Lord has, in this parable, represented our charge much lower than it is in fact and reality. For who is there that has received so little as one talent, nay, as ten, or even ten times ten, from the bounty of God? When we consider ourselves in comparison with our fellow-servants, we are apt enough to multiply the number, and enhance the value of our several endowments and advantages. Few are inclined in this estimate of themselves to drop any article of ornament to their character, and which may represent them as useful and significant in life. Let us then compute with the same exactness when we consider ourselves with relation to God, as debtors to his goodness, and stewards of his manifold gifts; remembering that every one, *which is noted in his book* will be imputed in our charge, and required with improvement at our hands. It imports us therefore,

II. To

II. To observe the duty of improvement here enjoined, and to enquire what conduct will acquit us of it.

It is supposed here, that these talents are improveable; for if they were of no use, they would be of no value, nor would any obligation of debt arise from them. That we are bound to improve them, we need no other arguent than the command of God: and our concern to do it, appears from the penalties he has threatened to the neglect of it. But we may also observe farther, with respect to the gifts both of nature and grace, that they cannot continue long at one stay; but unless they are improved, they will be lost; unless we go forward, we shall unavoidably go backward, and lose ground. We see in frequent instances, the finest parts and capacities of mind, without proper culture, and a continual proficiency dwindle away into a very mean and contemptible figure. And our acquisitions of skill and knowledge cannot be preserved without use and exercise. The same may be observed of moral accomplishments. It requires much care and attention to form a virtuous habit, and much greater to preserve it in vigour. If we do not improve our strength, it will daily be diminished and impaired. If

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we remit our guard, *sin lies at the door*, and our corruption is always ready to give it admittance. And the nature of grace is such, that unless we co-operate with its motions, and cultivate it by use and applications, its impressions will gradually wear out, and be lost. *The spirit of God will not always strive with man.* He gives us a stock to manage equal to the services he expects from us; but if we are slothful and negligent, if we will not exert ourselves, and apply it to the purposes for which it was given, he will recall the useless gift. *Take from him (says he) the talent, and give it to him that hath ten talents.* Mat. xxv. 28. It is therefore of the utmost importance to us to attend diligently to the improvement of every talent committed to us; not only because this will be an article of strict enquiry in the day of our account, but because if they are not improved, they will immediately be taken from us; our powers will be weakened, and we shall forfeit those assistances which should enable us to retrieve our miscarriage. What this improvement implies, and by what conduct we may acquit ourselves of this duty, is therefore an enquiry of the nearest concern to us.

Now

Now the proper improvement of all God's gifts to us, is employing them to the promotion of his glory. This is the end the Almighty proposed in our creation, in all the powers with which he has endued us, and all the aids of grace he has vouchsafed to us. This therefore must be regarded as the primary obligation of our nature, the trust and condition on which every gift is committed to us. Whatever other improvements we may make of them, will profit us nothing, nor be admitted as any proof of our fidelity, in the day of reckoning. We may cultivate our understanding by learning and study, and extend our knowledge through all the subjects of human enquiry: but if our end be only to gratify our curiosity or our vanity, this is not serving God, but ourselves. So likewise we may increase our portion of God's outward gifts; but if we apply them only to the enlargement of our own conveniences, this is not the improvement our master expects, neither will it be placed to his account, but our own. And how much soever we may have gained to ourselves, we shall be pronounced unprofitable servants to him. We are indeed allowed to take pleasure in the accessions of knowledge and fortune we acquire, to rejoice in them as

our portion and instruments of present satisfaction and convenience to us ; but still we are to remember, that, in our reckoning with God, all these improvements of our capacities and abilities will be added to our receipts. The application of them to our temporal interests in such a measure as exceeds not the bounds of justice and innocence will indeed be indulged us ; but not allowed as any part of our discharge. The only use that God will permit us to set in balance of our debt to him, is employing them as means of encreasing and multiplying our graces, or as instruments of exercising them in works of piety and virtue. Every gift of God is capable of these applications. By the advantages of learning and knowledge we are enabled to excel in spiritual understanding ; to defend the faith, explain and enforce the doctrines of the gospel ; to instruct the ignorance, and correct the errors of our brethren. By riches and authority we are enabled to support and promote the service of God ; to assist and reward those who labour in it ; to procure to ourselves and others the comfort of his ordinances, and the means of instruction ; to relieve the indigence of the poor ; to be a terror to evil-doers, and give protection and encouragement to them that do well.

well. When we thus apply these gifts of God, as means and instruments by which we bring into exercise and action the graces of his spirit, the zeal, the justice and charity he infuses into our hearts, these are improvements which God will own. He will immediately bless our fidelity, and render it fruitful in greater gifts, and more abundant measures of grace; and, in the day of account, will acknowledge it to us in proportionable allotments of reward and glory. But the rule and measure by which our Lord will proceed in reckoning with us, is our

III^d. Enquiry.

And this is either expressly taught us in this parable, or may by just inference be collected from it.

1st, We are here expressly taught, that the divine justice, in this scrutiny, will estimate and reward every one's fidelity, according to a compound proportion, comparing the receipts with the returns they have made.

2^{dly}, That an account will be demanded of every talent; from him who has received *five*, of the whole *five*, and from him who has received *ten*, of the whole *ten*; and consequently it will not be admitted as a sufficient

cient plea of diligence, that we have made some improvement, unless the improvement be answerable to the number and value of our gifts. Should he, who had received *five* talents, have gained only *one*, when he might, as he was bound, have gained *five*, his account must have been defective; by the rules of procedure here observed, he must have been censured as a slothful servant, and even more criminally so, than he who had been unprofitable in *one*. For each of his *five* talents were given with the same trust and intention, and were as capable of improvement as the other's *one*. And the guilt and neglect of misapplying *four*, is certainly greater than misapplying *one*. And by parity of reason we may conclude, that if he who has received but *two* talents, shall gain *five*, his approbation and reward from his master will be greater, than his who makes only the same improvement of *five*; because his improvement, in proportion to his receipts, is more than double to the other's. This indeed we only collect by parity of argument from the place before us; but is directly taught in the sixth of St. *Luke*, where the same subject is treated, though in a different view. The stock committed to each servant is there supposed

posed equal, but increased in various measures; by one *five-fold*, by another *ten-fold*; and agreeably their reward is proportioned to the improvement made by each; the one is made *ruler over five cities*, the other *over ten*.

3dly, We learn also farther, from the sentence here passed on the unprofitable servant, with what severity our unfaithfulness in this trust will be resented by God. The plea of that servant may seem to offer something which might intitle him to excuse, though not commendation—*Lo there thou hast what is thine*, Matth. xxv. 25.—But the weakness of this plea appears, when we consider, that the increase was as much due to his lord as the original stock; and consequently, the suggestion was false; he did not render to his master what was his, but only one moiety of what he owed him; and was therefore justly condemned to *utter darkness*. But if this will be his portion, who, though he makes no improvement, yet preserves his talent entire and undiminished; what sentence must they expect who squander away the principal itself in trifles and vanity, or which is still worse in actions of affront and dishonour to God, and in the service of his enemy? Our blessed Lord, unwilling

willing to suppose such ingratitude, has descended no lower in the criminal character, than a negative guilt, in not using the talent at all: but, alas! how many are there who abuse the gifts of God to sin, and make the abilities his goodness has bestowed on them, the instruments of offending him? How frequently do we see great endowments of mind or fortune devoted wholly to the service of men's lusts? And if the idle and unfruitful servant, who only sat still when he ought to have been active, shall be cast into *utter darkness*, how heavy, must we conclude, will be their sentence, who have been active in evil? Who have deserted to the adversaries of God, and employed the very arms they received from heaven in rebellion against it? The judge of all the earth will assuredly do right, and proportion his resentment to the aggravations of the crime.

In application of this parable I have before observed its general view and intention, to excite men to live and act under a serious, habitual regard to the event of that day, when *our Lord shall come and reckon with us*. We have seen upon what articles his enquiry will be formed, the good or ill management of those talents he has committed to us. That
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we may judge of our charge therefore, let us, *1st*, attentively reflect on the nature and number of God's gifts to us, and what improvement each is capable of. It concerns then, *2^{dly}*, to examine ourselves upon each article; how we have acquitted ourselves of the duties it requires from us, whether we have acted up to the abilities and opportunities God has given us of promoting his glory, whether we have duly cultivated the seeds of grace, and with an honest and open heart received and obeyed its suggestions; whether we have diligently attended to the means afforded to us of growing wiser and better, frequented the holy ordinances, and hearkened to the teachers of religion. Or if we have, what fruit these excellent means of improvement have brought forth in us. Do we find ourselves advanced in spiritual knowledge and understanding, in piety and holiness of life, in purity, meekness, and charity, in a measure proportionable to the calls and assistances, the invitation and instruction we have had? With respect to those outward talents God has intrusted with us, have we faithfully employed them to the promotion of his honour, in the exercise of Christian graces, in such works of devotion, justice, or mercy, as his word commands, and his
spirit

spirit persuades us to? If, upon a sincere examination of ourselves on these heads, our conscience can acquit us as diligent and faithful, we may then with joy expect the coming of our master. But still we must remember, that whatever improvements we have made, it is our Duty to go on to farther proficiencies, *to press forward to the high mark of our calling; increasing with the increase of God*, Philip. iii. 14. Col. ii. 19. For every progress in grace, though our own endeavours co-operate in making it, is yet the gift of God; and when received, is an accession to our talents; it enlarges our abilities, and consequently adds to our duty. God is able to the uttermost to repay those who serve him; and since he has declared, that our reward shall be equal to the measures of our improvement, though we could even double the proportion of increase here represented, we may be sure of an answerable recompence from him.

But what inferences must he collect from this scripture, who has hitherto been idle, and from the talents deposited with him produced nothing to the interest of his master? He may here read his fate, if his Lord comes and finds him thus unfruitful. And how should the terrible prospect awaken him from his slumber;

ber; quicken him to an immediate and more vigorous application to duty? That by a double improvement of the time which yet remains, he may redeem what he has lost.

But worse still, and more hardly to be retrieved, in his case, who has squandered away the stock itself; suffered his gifts to wither and perish for want of use; or, by abusing them to the service of sin, has provoked God to withdraw them from him. What shall the prodigal do, to recal the fortune he has spent, and appease the anger of his judge? The terrors of the Lord may justly stand in array before him, but must not extinguish his endeavours in despair. He has lost indeed many excellent talents; but he who gave, can also restore. If nothing else remains to him, yet if his heart be humbled with a true sincere repentance, this is a gift of God; a gift through Christ, capable of great improvements: which will either prevail with the divine mercy to revive his strength for farther services, or be accepted as an equivalent for them. Let him then labour earnestly to cultivate this last stake, that what is wanting in his services, may be supplied by a pardon.

This alas! is more or less, the condition of every mortal. *If we say that we have no sin,*
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we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Which of us has improved every gift of God to all the fruits it was capable of producing? Or if he has been faithful in some talents, has not neglected others? The most circumspect piety will, in the day of account, have much to be forgiven; and must expect his reward rather from the mercy of his judge, than the merit of his service. Let us then all labour to atone for our failings by a sincere contrition, and shew forth *fruits meet for repentance*, by an attentive application of every hour remaining to us, remembering that the *judge standeth at the door*.

The time, indeed, may be long before the final reckoning may commence, but the time allotted us to prepare for it is bounded by the short space of a human life. The night of death comes when no man can work; and though many ages may pass between that event and the resurrection to judgment, yet when we leave this world, the days of probation expire, the account is then sealed up, neither is it in our power, by any application, to alter one article of it. *To-day therefore, while it is called to day*, let us address ourselves to the work of our Lord; to correct our errors, and finish what is yet imperfect, that we may obtain

tain his approbation, and make our calling and election sure.

Brethren, I have observed to you the general reflections suggested by this scripture. And being now to finish the course of my labours among you, I am willing to hope, that a subject so comprehensive, which extends to every duty of the Christian life, reminds every man of his proportion of service, and sets before him the most powerful motives to the discharge of it, will, in some measure, recal and apply every sermon I have preached to you. But the circumstances, in which I now appear, call upon us more particularly to recollect what articles will arise to our charge from the relation which has been between us. We are now parting from each other, perhaps to meet no more, till the day when our Lord shall come to *reckon with us*. In that day an account will be demanded from me of the doctrine I have taught; and from you, of your attention and improvements under my ministry. If, according to my mean abilities, I have endeavoured your edification in the gospel; if I have laboured to establish you in the true faith and church of Christ; if I have warned you of the danger of sin, opened to you the paths of duty, and set before you the ob-

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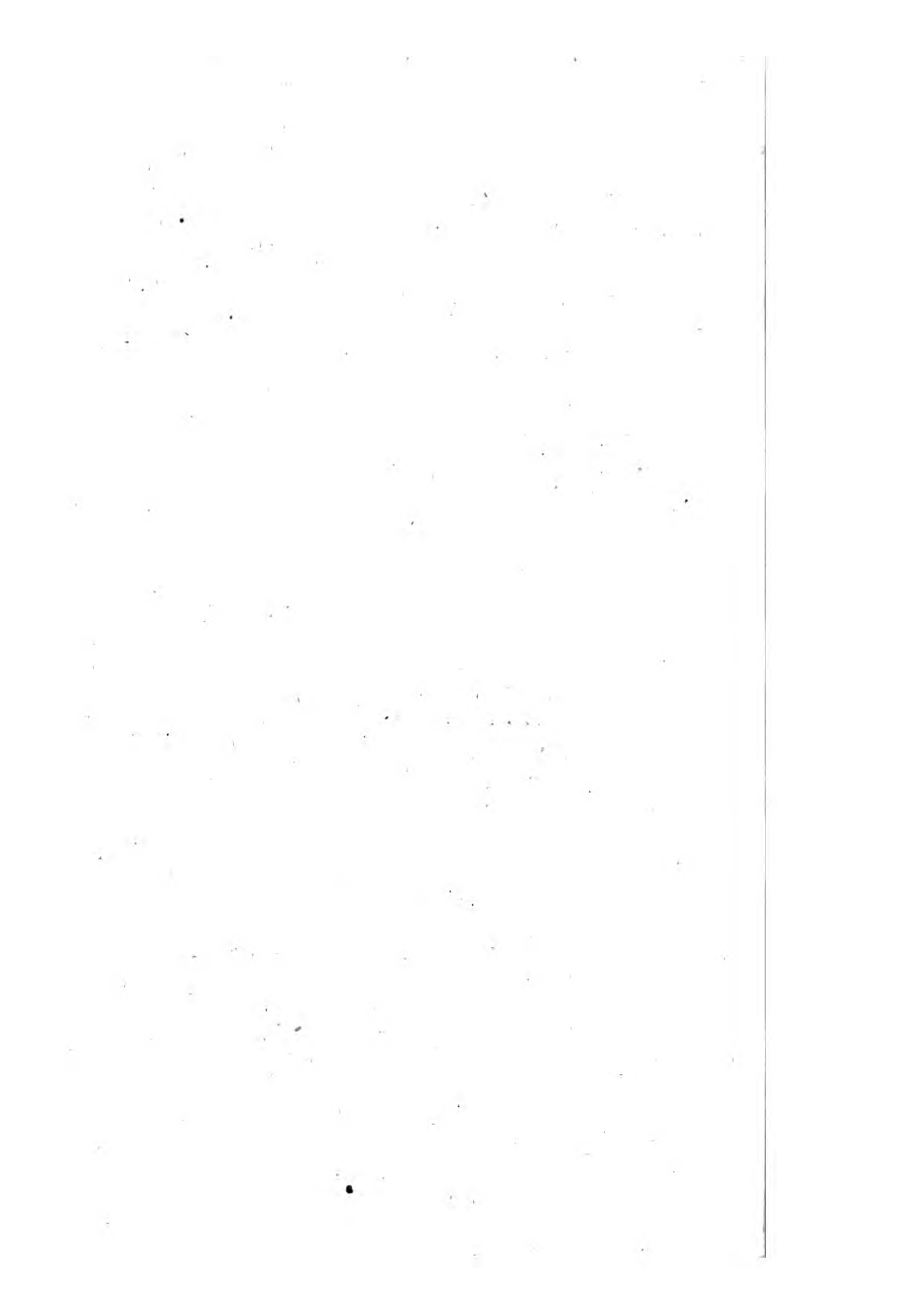
ligations

ligations that require, and the motives that persuade you to walk in them, I may then look back with pleasure, on the years in which I have served you. And if *the power of the gospel has been manifested through my weakness*, and the word sown has brought forth its proper fruit, the glory will belong to God, the reward to your own souls, but to me also will arise a joy greater than the *Triumphs of those who divide the spoil*. And I trust, that through the mercy of God to our manifold infirmities, when we shall appear before him, both you and I may be able to reflect with some comfort, on the office I have sustained in this holy place. In the mean time, permit me to hope, that in our affections we may still be present to each other. No distance can remove us beyond the effect of our mutual prayers. Though they ascend from different stations, yet they will meet in the presence of the same God, and transmit his blessings to the remotest corner of the earth. The many obligations I have received, will ever demand this return from me. Your happiness, spiritual and temporal, will be a constant object of my requests to God; but more especially, that he would sanctify to you every means of grace, and give full effect to the labours of that worthy person,

son, to whose instructions I have the pleasure of leaving you : and I trust the charity of your prayers will not be wanting to me.

May that infinite omnipresent being whom we worship, favourably regard our supplications for each other : may his blessing attend, and his spirit conduct us through the several stages of our pilgrimage, till we finally meet in the land of everlasting rest, when all our labours shall cease, and our prayers shall be changed into eternal hallelujahs. Amen.







The proper Supports and Encouragements to Perseverance in Well-doing *.

G A L. vi. 9.

Let us not be weary in well-doing.



IN these words it may be thought, the holy writer had a special regard to those distresses to which the early profession of the gospel was exposed, and of which he himself had born so eminent a share. The insults of enemies, the desertion and reproaches of friends, the scorn and aversion of a prejudiced

* Preached at *St. Sepulchres, London*, on *Thursday in Easter-Week*, April 10. 1729, at the Anniversary meeting of the charity children.

world where discouragements, whose impression must have been very sensibly felt in every part of their duty. These circumstances were doubtless in the apostles view, but not so particularly, as to confine it to them. A little reflection will convince us, that the reasons and use of this exhortation will never cease, but it will always find a proper application, and deserve our attention in all ages and circumstances of the church. For,

I. We must ever expect various discouragements to arise to us in a course of well-doing; and therefore it concerns us to keep the proper supports of duty always in our view. Let me then,

*II*dly, Observe to you, that every good work is attended with supports sufficient to preserve us from being weary in it. I shall,

*III*dly, Apply what occurs in these reflections to that excellent work of charity, for whose promotion we are here assembled.

The first and most general discouragement of good actions, is what they may expect from the opposition of wicked men. The publick approbation of the world is a point, which vice has always laboured to gain from virtue. It is with regret the libertine sees re-
spect

spect and applause wait on a virtuous conduct. As his sentiments are described in the book of *Wisdom*, chap. ii. *It is grievous to his eyes to behold; it upbraids him with his offending the law: and objects to his infamy the transgressions of his education.* He cannot stand so degrading a comparison, or endure a light which equally adorns a character he hates, and shews the deformity of his own. This passion will engage the utmost efforts of malice, and all the acts of detraction, to lessen the disparity, to hinder the effects, and discredit the example of a reputable action.

Nor are these discouragements to be feared only from the enemies to all religion and virtue; but wherever men are divided into parties, whatever are the views and principles under which they are distinguished, we see in daily observation, with what spite and partiality they represent each other's conduct. If one party be in power, their administration is sure to be opposed and obstructed by the other: the wisest counsels will be vilified, the most beneficial actions disparaged, the least mistake or failing will be exposed, the least suspicion improved into a charge, and the greatest virtues either overlooked or traduced. And as religious divisions equally attach

men to the interests of a sect, the same irregular passions are apt to attend them, which embitter other contentions. The honour and esteem which accompany virtuous actions, are an advantage men unwillingly allow to a profession they disapprove. It seems an impeachment of their judgment, and a reflection on their choice, to have opposed or departed from a religion, adorned with such excellent fruit. It would indeed be a happy effect of these emulations, if they produced only a contention to excel in laudable actions: but the passions of mankind will very rarely permit us to hope for this event. To some few generous spirits, such competitions may be a spur and incentive in the race of virtue; but the far greater number will content themselves with the easier labour of obscuring and depressing an adversary's praise. If the fact itself, and its good tendencies, cannot be denied, yet some circumstances or other will afford objection, in abatement of the merit of it. Either the motives or principles it proceeds from will be censured, or some present or future inconveniencies will be offered in balance, to the advantages which appear to recommend it. From suggestions of this kind the best actions cannot be secured. For all moral actions, examined

amined in a prudential consideration of their tendencies, are capable of different views. their effects and consequences depend on a concurrence of accidents, which no wisdom can ascertain against a possibility of failure. And then as to the intentions of the heart, the ends we propose, and the motives that govern us, these are invisible to men, and leave the detractor large room to suggest hypocrisy or superstition, some private interest, some corrupt or factious design, in disparagement of the virtue.

With these effects of party zeal, private envy, and personal aversions, will often fall in, and help to aggravate the charge; while few will be found generous enough to refute the aspersion, or regret the diminution of another's praise.

Nay farther, it will sometimes happen, that a defect in the scheme, an oversight in the execution, some or other of those imperfections which human infirmity is apt to mingle with our best actions, may provoke the censure and opposition even of good men. And,

Lastly, The best advised design will often fail of the success we propose from it: not only these oppositions to it, but the misconduct

duct of the instruments we employ, or the indisposition of the subject, may defeat our intentions of the benefice, and render our pains fruitless and ineffectual. These are all of them events, which a good man must frequently expect in a course of well-doing; and it must be confessed, they are great discomforts to him in this progress; such as may cool the fervour, and abate the activity of a very sincere and honest disposition to virtue. But let me exhort you,

Idly, Not to be weary or faint in well-doing; for our supports are more than equal to these discouragements.

I may remind you, *first*, of that inward applause and complacency, which springs up in the heart of a good man, when he beholds the fruits of his virtue, the happiness and pleasure he diffuses through human society. He partakes in every satisfaction he gives; and relieves himself when he prevents or removes the miseries of others. And to this we may add, the obligations of gratitude he lays on every object of his charity, the returns he engages of their service and prayers, and the honour and respect which generally attend a beneficent character. These are present
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encouragements in well-doing, to which neither reason nor religion forbids our regard; *whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise, we are not only permitted, but commanded to mind such things, Phil. iv. 8.*

But then, as I have observed, we must expect frequent disappointments, in these prospects of our virtue: that *our good* will sometimes *be evil spoken of*, and be made even an article of reproof and accusation against us. That our greatest obligations will often find ungrateful returns. That our most beneficial designs will be opposed, and by a variety of obstructions rendered ineffectual.

But still there remains an encouragement in well doing, which is able alone to support our perseverance. When we attend to the views and motives of religion, when we consider ourselves as obeying God, acquiring an interest in his favour, and assuring our hopes of that inestimable reward he has annexed to his service, *evil report and good Report*, the praise of reproach of men will be equally trifling and contemptible to us. We are prepared, not only to bear with patience the oppositions of envy, malice and irreligion; but to look on them with satisfaction, as proofs
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of the integrity and firmness of our virtue. While authority, popular applause, or any other present encouragements attend us, the motives of action are so blended together, that we can but imperfectly discern, whether reverence for the command, and zeal for the honour of God, have their proper influence on us: but when all other inducements are withdrawn, we are assured, that these are the principles we act on. Such a trial will shew us the uprightness of our intentions, and the strength of our resolutions; and both confirm and enlarge our expectations from God. In this view we may find motives, even to *rejoice, and be exceeding glad, when men revile us, and speak all manner of evil of us*, Matth. v. 12. for a steady adherence to duty, in confidence of *a greater reward in heaven*.

Should our endeavours to do good be defeated, and rendered fruitless; yet still religion will exhort us to persist without weariness or dejection. It will remind us, that the present effects of virtue are but a secondary and intermediate end; the ultimate and more important prospect, is the recompence which attends it from the promises of God. When we have used the proper means to promote his honour and service, and the hap-
piness

piners of our fellow-creatures, we have done all that these duties require from us ; and must leave the event to his providence. Whatever return we may find here, we are sure to succeed in the point of far the greatest concern, and that the integrity of the design, and the obedience of the action, will recommend it to his approbation. From him *we shall receive, if we faint not* ; receive even the more for our present disappointments. Our patience will be added to the account of our virtue, and every difficulty that has attended the service, be acknowledged in the reward of it.

Let me then,

*III*dly, Apply these reflections to that excellent work of charity, for whose encouragement we are here assembled. A work, so guarded from *every appearance of evil*, so beneficial in all its views, equally promotive of the private and social, the present and future interests of mankind, might hope to have escaped the censure of malice itself. But when our holy religion, the faith that infuses and operates by this spirit of love, has been openly blasphemed, insulted and ridiculed, so beautiful a fruit and ornament of it must expect a share
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in the same treatment. We have accordingly seen this labour of mercy aspersed in weekly libels, as a scheme of priestcraft and faction; All the wit that could be raised for the service, has been applied to colour and aggravate these suggestions, and expose it to the public scorn or jealousy. Designs have been formed, and attempts made, to obstruct and entangle the execution of it; to check the zeal, divide counsels, and weaken the hands employed in it. How little the effect of these attempts has been answerable to the malice of them, we behold with pleasure, in that lovely prospect which now adorns this holy place. The work has not only kept its ground, but the providence of God has brought good out of the evil intended against it, and it has grown and prospered under the opposition. The zeal of those engaged in it has been rendered more active; a general concern has been awakened for the promotion of it; the management has been carefully revised, and every appearance or suspicion of defect removed from it.

I can offer no motive to the worthy persons, by whose wisdom and piety this excellent work has been conducted, but what appears already to act on them in its full light and impression. But it may call others to their assistance,

ance, and excite every generous disposition, to give himself a share in their praise, to observe by how many characters of virtue this charity is distinguished ; what present encouragements support our perseverance in it ; and how glorious a prospect it opens to the hopes of the Christian.

In the objects before us every circumstance concurs, which can recommend to a preference in our compassion. They are *souls destitute of help*, no way necessary to their misfortunes, and unable by their own applications to remove them. I cannot without regret observe, how often we are imposed on, how much is extorted from us by those idle vagrants, whose numbers and importunity are the burden of our streets, and the reproach of our laws. Among these wretches, indeed, sometimes may be found proper objects of an occasional charity : but when we consider, how difficultly these exceptions are distinguished, how seldom we are secure from fiction and pretence, how often the miseries that appear to us are an excuse or consequence of idleness and vice, and a contempt of the legal provisions made for poverty ; these circumstances cannot but abate the cheerfulness of our compassion, and may justly determine our prior regard, to
cases

cases where we are less exposed to mistake and imposture.

Now the charity here promoted, we are sure is applied to real undissembled misery ; and for which our laws have made either none, or very unequal provision. The whole man, body and soul, stands before us, and with all the charms of artless innocence solicits our pity, to the greatest distresses that can attend our nature. Poor children exposed to the wants and temptations of the world, and the snares of the devil, intreat us, as men and Christians, to *put on bowels of mercy* ; to furnish them with honest means of support against the one, and such principles as may defend them from the other. And to these moving characters of the object our attention is enforced, by the regards we owe to the welfare of our country, the honour of our religion, the commands and promises of God.

Can we want persuasion to a charity, which so tenderly addresses our affections, and is recommended by so many important views both of interest and duty ? Can any sensual entertainments, any use of our fortunes give us a pleasure, equal to what a good man feels, in reflection on such an act of beneficence ? With what delight does he behold the seeds
of

of grace and virtue, here carefully sown, thrive under culture, and grow up into fruit? With joy the patriot here sees children, whose wickedness, idleness, and blasphemies would probably have been the terror of our nights, and the offence of our days, a public burthen and dishonour, prepared, by a pious and useful education, to be ornaments of our religion, and add strength and riches to our country: by their prayers to engage the blessings of God to us, and by their zeal and example to restrain those *over-flowings of ungodliness which make us afraid*. With joy the soldier of Christ here triumphs over his and his Redeemer's enemy, in the prospect of so many souls delivered from his tyranny, rescued as a prey out of his teeth, and made an accession to the *armies of the living God*.

A work so destructive to the interests of vice and irreligion may expect all the powers of darkness to be armed against it; to be opposed and reviled, loaded with every invidious suggestion which may discredit the design, or hinder the effects of it. But, blessed be God, *the righteous are not so failed from the earth*, but those that are with us are far more than those who are against us. We are assured of the encouragement and protection of a wise

and gracious prince, who sees the happiness of his people, and the interest of his throne, equally promoted by this charity. He knows what reverence for his sacred person, what submission to his authority, what zeal for his honour, the principles of our religion teach and infuse. That the good Christian and the good subject are inseparable characters: that whatever education engages the affections and esteem of men to our excellent constitution, equally secures their adherence to that happy settlement of the crown, which alone, under God, can continue that blessing to us. And in the breast of his royal consort this labour of mercy is ever sure to find an advocate and patron; whose tender heart is open to every impression, and her hand to every call of charity.

With humble gratitude to God, we acknowledge our happiness in such examples and supports of virtue: but the Christian acts upon principles, and is encouraged by motives far superior to any temporal considerations. In every page of the sacred oracles of his religion he hears love and benevolence enjoined on his conscience. He is called upon to follow the example of his Redeemer, *who went about doing good*. To imitate the beneficence of the divine

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vine nature, to be *merciful as his father which is in heaven is merciful*. His gratitude is addressed, in a recollection of the numberless favours vouchsafed him in the gospel; and his patience supported under all that can be difficult or burdensome in the duty, by a scene of glory opened to his hopes, great as obeyed God can give, and his spiritualized nature receive. By all these sacred and endearing motives the Christian is adjured, and by these animating prospects he is encouraged to be *kind and tender hearted*; and in all these views, the charity here proposed to him is recommended to his especial regard.

Would he follow the example of his blessed master? He finds him in the gospel *commanding young children to be brought to him, declaring his good-will towards them, embracing them in the arms of his mercy, and asserting their title to the Kingdom of heaven, Mark x.* Would he imitate the goodness and beneficence of the Deity? he may here resemble it in that lovely character so often assumed by the divine compassion—*The father of the fatherless.*

Those whom God has blessed with children, and who have seen what care and attention is necessary to supply the numberless wants of

that helpless age, the condition of these infants must affect with the most moving sentiments of pity : and the charity they here bestow must appear but a due return to God, for the provision he has enabled them to make for their own off-spring. And the childless may here adopt a family by their compassion ; *The barren may be a joyful mother, and purchase a name in heaven better than that of sons and daughters, Isa. lvi. 5.* To every Christian these children must appear distinguished, as *the little ones which belong to Christ.* And if he who, in regard to that relation, *gives them a cup of cold water, shall not lose his reward, Matth. x. 42.* what returns may he expect from the bounty of his Redeemer, who here opens to them the *well of life*, adorns them with the graces of our holy religion, and fits them for the service of their divine Master?

The whole host of heaven looks down with joy, on so many souls prepared for the regions of bliss, to be companions in their service, and joint inheritors of their glory. God from his holy habitation beholds with delight such *good-will among men.* He sees, approves, and records our labours of love ; every farthing we bestow is *noted in his book* ; will derive on us the favours of his grace and his providence
here,

here, and be produced to our comfort hereafter. When the profusions of our luxury or our vanity will rise up in reproach against us; when the expence of our most innocent satisfactions will be but a pardonable article in our account; when all the pleasure we have taken in our buildings, our gardens, our figure and retinue, will vanish as a dream or phantom; the little we have bestowed in charity will be found a valuable treasure; a refuge and consolation laid up against the day of nature's great distress. *Blessed, in that day, shall the merciful be, for they shall obtain mercy, Matt. v. 7.* Blessed, for ever blessed, shall those faithful stewards of providence be whom the Judge of the world shall call forth from the general amazement—*Come, ye chosen of my Father, ye that fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was naked, receive now the reward of your labours, and enter into the joy of your Lord; for, forasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my servants, you did it unto me, Matt. xxv.* The joys of heaven itself will be improved to us, when we enter them attended with the converts of our charity, and behold around us the souls we have saved from death. Their praises and gratitude will accompany us to the throne of God, and recommend us to that crown of
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glory prepared for *those who turn many to righteousness*, Dan. xii. 3.

If we *faint* when such a prospect stands before us, *our strength is small*; if any temporal discouragements can make us weary in a duty so distinguished by the commands and promises of our religion, *the love of God is not in us*, 1 Joh. iii. 17. If our hearts are truly influenced by that holy principle, none of his *commands will be grievous to us*, 1 Joh. v. 3, 11. No interest will be too valuable to be parted with, no service too difficult to be performed. The greater the conflict is, the greater we are assured will be our reward. And the more *iniquity abounds*, the more active and resolute should we appear in opposing the rising torrent; the more *stedfast and immoveable in every work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

F I N I S.



R E A S O N S


A G A I N S T

C O N V E R S I O N

T O T H E

C H U R C H of R O M E,

In a L E T T E R to a late Convert to that
C H U R C H.

 OTHING could give me more favourable impressions towards the church of *Rome*, than the conversion of a person to it, whose judgment I have so much esteemed, and to whose care and friendship I have so many obligations. I recollect as you desire me, that though it is now three years since you changed your religion, yet you never offered any thing to me on this subject, until you had discharged the trust reposed in you by my father, and I were no longer under the awe of a subjection

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to you. I acknowledge it to your honour and justice, that you have suffered me to finish my studies at the university, which may be presumed to have enabled me to judge for myself, and make as free a choice as you have done. You tell me, you now address me as a friend and an equal; and I assure you, I believe and value the kindness and concern you express for me; and receive this application as an instance of it. I have complied with you as far as my reason and conscience will permit me. I have heard with patience, and, I think, without prejudice, all that the gentleman you recommended to me has offered; and with the assistance of a divine, whose friendship I have reason to value, have considered his arguments with due attention; and I presume now to give you the result of my judgment upon the enquiry.

The substance of what he offered (which you had before suggested) was, *That there must be an infallible church, and that that church could no other than the church of Rome.* In debating the former of these assertions, though the argument was carried into some topics beyond my reach, yet upon comparing what your friend and mine offered on each side of
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the question, I collect this——That there appears not from the reason of the thing any necessity that the Christian church should be more infallible than the *Jewish* church was: that the promises of God's presence, assistance, and direction to the *Jewish* church, are as full, as the promises of Christ to the Christian church; and the commands of submission to the doctrines and decisions of the superiors of the *Jewish* church are more full and explicit than the commands of such submission to the superiors of the Christian church; and therefore if the former did not prove the infallibility of the *Jewish* church, the latter will not prove the infallibility of the Christian. And as to the testimony of fathers, &c. allowing them all the weight that is due to them, my two guides could come to no agreement about their allegations or inferences from them, and left me at last to this conclusion upon the whole——That there shall be a Christian church, professing the Christian faith to the end of the world: but that there shall be any Christian church, professing this faith without any mixture or superstructure of error, I see no manner of reason to conclude.

But as to the second assertion,——That the church of *Rome* is such an infallible church,

church, (on which the question between you and me immediately depends) I have, I think, the evidence of demonstration to the contrary. And therefore supposing, not granting such an infallible church, I must look somewhere else for it ; and may more reasonably expect to find it in the church of *England*, where I am already, than in the church of *Rome*, to which you invite me.

My way of reasoning is this——It is impossible for any arguments to convince me or any reasonable man, that the man, or church, who affirms a manifest falsehood, is infallible: the church of *Rome* affirms a manifest falsehood; and therefore I cannot believe that church is infallible.

My principle I prove thus.—No man, or church of men, are in their nature infallible: that the spirit of God may be communicated to them in such a measure as may render them infallible, I grant ; and what any person so inspired affirms, I acknowledge God to affirm : but then I say, it is impossible for any man or church, who affirms a manifest falsehood, to convince me, that they have such a communication of the spirit of God, because it is impossible for me to be convinced, that what is manifestly false can be affirmed by
God.

God. The only proofs that can be given of such a communication of God's spirit to any church or person, are the attestations of God to them, which can only appear either by a power attending them of working miracles, *i. e.* doing such supernatural works as none but God could enable any man to do, or by the testimony of a revelation, proved by such miracles, affirming such a communication of God's spirit to them : but neither of these evidences can convince me, that a man or church, who affirms a manifest falshood, has such a communication of God's spirit. Not miracles, because I cannot be so certainly assured, that any miracles really are what they appear, actions performed by the supernatural power of God, and not impostures of men, or delusions of the devil, as I am, that what is manifestly false is not true, or that God cannot affirm a manifest falshood. Had our Saviour Christ affirmed, that two and two make eight, or that the rays of the same circle are not equal : not all the miracles he wrought, nor ten thousand more, if he had wrought them, could have convinced any reasonable man, that he spake from the spirit of God ; because it had been much more reasonable for him to have believed, he might be imposed

posed on by counterfeit miracles, than to believe the spirit of God could assert such evident untruths. And whether he could account for the imposture in such miracles or not, he would stand fixed in this conclusion——you affirm a manifest falshood, and therefore cannot be infallible, cannot speak from God; and might justly reply to all miraculous appearances, that it was possible for him to be deceived by such appearances; but impossible to believe that God could affirm a manifest falshood. Neither could the testimony of revelation, though never so well confirmed by miracles, convince me that a person who affirms a manifest falshood, is infallibly inspired by God; for if miracles cannot support a revelation whose matter is evidently false, neither can the authority of any revelation convince me, that a man affirming such a falshood is infallibly inspired: for in that case the revelation itself must appear to affirm a falshood. Suppose it was promised in any revelation that there should be in all ages a person infallibly inspired: a man comes to me, and says——
“ You admit this revelation, and in it, it is
“ promised, that there shall be in all ages a
“ person infallibly inspired. I am that person,
“ and to me agree all the characters under
“ which

“ which he is described. I affirm that two
“ and two make eight; and in virtue of
“ these proofs of my infallibility, I require
“ you to believe me.” If I acknowledge the
revelation, and that there is such a promise
in it, I must necessarily conclude that this is
not the person meant; because I am sure, that
he who affirms so manifest a falsity, cannot be
infallible. And it is much more reasonable
for me to believe there is a mistake in the ap-
plication of those characters, how probable so-
ever it may seem, than to believe, that he
who tells me a lie, is infallible. But if he
convinces me, that he is the very person in-
tended, I must then unavoidably conclude,
that the supposed revelation is itself an impos-
ture; because I am sure, God cannot require
me to believe, that he who affirms a manifest
untruth is infallible. I need not, I presume,
offer any thing more in support of my princi-
ple.

• In proof of my assumption, that the church
of *Rome* affirms a manifest falshood, I instance
in the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. That the
church of *Rome* affirms this doctrine is confes-
sed. That this doctrine is a manifest falshood,
is what I am to prove. And,

1st, It is necessary to state the doctrine, and resolve this hard word into the plain express proposition affirmed in it; and for this I refer you to the abjuration of *Berengarius* as the most explicit in terms, and as prescribed by a pope and synod, and consequently authorized as the proper express doctrine of that Church.

* *Ego Berengarius, indignus Sancti Mauricii Andegavenfis ecclesie diaconus, cognoscens veram, catholicam, & apostolicam fidem, anathematizo omnem hæresim, præcipue eam de qua hætenus infamatus sum; quæ astruere conatur, panem & vinum quæ in altari ponuntur, post consecrationem solummodo sacramentum, & non verum corpus & sanguinem Domini nostri Jesu Christi esse: nec possea sensualiter, nisi in solo sacramento, manibus sacerdotum tractari, vel frangi, aut fidelium dentibus atteri. Consentio autem sanctæ Romanæ, & apostolicæ sedi, & corde profiteor, de sacramentis Dominicæ mensæ eandem fidem me tenere, quam Dominus & venerabilis papa Nicolaus, & hec sancta synodus, autoritate evangelicâ & apostolicâ tenendam tradidit, mibique firmavit: scilicet, panem & vinum quæ in altari ponuntur, post consecratio-*

* Gratian. Decr. par. 3. Dist. 2. cap. 42.

nem,

nem, non solum sacramentum, sed etiam verum corpus & sanguinem Jesu Christi esse, & sensualiter, non solum in sacramento, sed in veritate, manibus sacerdotum tractari, frangi, & fidelium dentibus atteri: jurans per sanctam, &c.

I give it you more fully in the *Latin*, but shall translate only the part I refer to.

I Berengarius &c. consent to the holy Roman and apostolic see, and profess with my heart, that I hold the same faith concerning the sacraments of the Lord's table, which Nicolas the Lord and venerable Pope, and this holy synod, with evangelical and apostolical authority, hath delivered, and confirmed to me to be held, viz. That the bread and wine which are put upon the altar, after the consecration, are not only the sacrament, but the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and are sensually, not only in a sacrament (or sacramentally) but in verity handled, and broken by the hands of the priest, and grinded by the teeth of the faithful.

This, Sir, I insist on as the proper explicit doctrine of the church of *Rome*, though they have chosen since to express the article more indefinitely. If they deny this to be their present doctrine, they must confess, that a

pope and *synod* acting by *apostolical* and *evangelical* authority were fallible; and if they confess this, they will not, I hope, attempt to prove their successors infallible. Now if there be any meaning in words, it is affirmed in these, that the real bodies of bread and wine become after consecration really and even *sensually* the flesh and blood of Christ. Some, it seems, and among others, bishop * *Parker*, have endeavoured to refine this doctrine, by observing, that the change here affirmed, is merely a change of substance; and that substance, in the abstract, is an undeterminate idea, of which we neither have, nor can have any clear distinct conception; and therefore cannot affirm, or deny what changes it is capable of. But if they mean substance abstracted from corporeity or incorporeity, this idea is a mere fiction of the understanding, and has no existence but in the mind of the abstractor. In this idea of substance, divested of all distinctive attributes, all substances are the same; but if we speak of substances as they really exist, a spiritual substance is spirit, and a corporeal substance is body, and the change of one corporeal sub-

* Reasons for abrogating the test.

stance

stance into another is a change of one body into another. And all this philosophical talk about the stript, naked, abstracted idea of substance is mere chicane and amusement; intended only to throw a mist about an absurdity, which will not endure being looked into. The doctrine, which the *Pope and his holy Synod, with evangelical and apostolical authority* (as they pretended) *delivered and confirmed to be held*, will not admit this refinement. Substance in the abstract, divested of corporeity, is neither bread, nor wine, nor flesh, nor blood, cannot be *sensual and really handled and broken by the hands of the priest, nor grinded by the teeth of the faithful*. I must desire you, Sir, to observe, that this infallible authority has here affirmed, that the true body and blood of Christ are *sensually* not only sacramentally; but in reality handled, &c. Your friend was much puzzled to account for this term *sensually*. He was so ingenuous as to confess, that accidents only being the objects of sense, and there being in the eucharist (according to his doctrine) only the accidents of bread and wine, there could be nothing *sensually* present but bread and wine. And though he rejected the solution that was offered him, *viz.* That the body

and blood of Christ might be said to be *sensually* present, handled, broken, and ground by the teeth, with regard to the sensible representation of them in the consecrated symbols; yet I think he will hardly assign a better. In the mean time I take leave to conclude from these expressions, that the doctrine of the church of *Rome* is, that the change here affirmed, is not *substantial* merely in that abstract notion of substance, as some have pretended; but in the determinate nation of *corporeal substance*, i. e. that the bodies of bread and wine are, after consecration, no longer those bodies, but really, nay sensually, other bodies, real flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of Christ. And this proposition I affirm to be as manifest a falshood as these;—*This stone is a fish, this brass is a serpent.*

If two bodies, which by all the marks and characters by which it is possible for me to distinguish one body from another, and by the most attentive use of my faculties in examining them, I perceive to be the one a stone, and the other bread, may nevertheless not be those bodies; but the one a real living fish, and the other real human flesh, I must conclude it impossible for me to distinguish one body from another; that I am capable of no certainty in any perception; that all my
ideas

Ideas are nothing but dream and illusion, and that God has created me with such faculties, whose reports I cannot in any thing depend on; for it is impossible for me to have greater evidence in any perception than I have in these. If I can be sure of nothing, it is to no purpose for me to enquire after truth, I can neither believe nor disbelieve any thing. And if I can be sure of any thing, I must be sure that a body, which by the utmost trial I am able to make, I perceive to be a stone, is a stone and not a fish; and a body which by the same evidence I perceive to be bread, is bread and not human flesh. No truths can stand before me with greater light and evidence than these; and with the same evidence with which I perceive these propositions to be true, I must perceive those which contradict them to be false: and he who affirms, that what I thus perceive to be a stone, is not a stone, but a fish; and what I thus perceive to be bread, is not bread, but flesh, must appear to affirm as manifest a falsehood as can be put in words. This manifest falsehood the church of *Rome* affirms, and therefore I infer, that church cannot be infallible.

It will perhaps be said, that what is incredible, as to our perceptions, may be credible, when affirmed by God. That God can

change one body into another; and if he affirms he has changed it, his authority is infallible, and must be believed. That what the church of *Rome* teaches in this doctrine, is that God has affirmed it in the gospel; the credibility of the articles she deduces from the affirmation of God, what she requires her subjects to believe upon her authority, is that God has affirmed it; and this she requires to be believed, because God has promised, that she shall be infallible in her exposition of the gospel. But to this I answer in short, that no authority in the world can convince me, that God has affirmed a manifest falsehood, or that any church or person is infallible, who teaches, that God has affirmed what I evidently perceive to be false.

That God may affirm what I cannot perceive to be true, I readily admit; because that may be true, which I cannot perceive to be so: and if God who certainly knows whether it be true or not, affirms it, I have no longer any doubt of the truth of it. And if any person affirming such a proposition gives me sufficient external proofs, that he is sent by God, and speaks with his authority, I can raise no internal objection from the matter of such proposition, in disproof of the revelation. I
ought

ought to believe him to speak from God, and what he affirms to be true, because affirmed by God. For the same reason, if in ascertaining the meaning of any words which I acknowledge to be a divine revelation, a proposition be assigned as the sense of them, which is merely incomprehensible, such as I cannot perceive whether it be true or false, I have no internal objection against this sense. The proposition may be true, for any thing I can determine to the contrary; and if it may be true, it may be in a divine revelation. And if those who by the rules of that revelation are appointed to guide and instruct me, affirm this to be the sense of those words, and the construction will bear it, I may very reasonably, even upon their authority, admit it to be so. But I can never admit that God can affirm what I manifestly perceive to be false; or believe upon any authority, that a manifestly false proposition can be the intended sense of a divine revelation. Neither can any external proofs convince me, that a person affirming such a proposition, or such an exposition, is inspired by God, and speaks from him; because I cannot be so certain, that I am not deceived in any, even the best external proofs that such a revelation or inspiration is capable of;

as I am, that what I manifestly perceive to be false, is not true, or that God cannot affirm a manifest falshood.

The doctrine of transubstantiation, as affirmed by the church of *Rome*, appears to me, and, if there be any truth in human perceptions; must appear to every one who attends to it, a manifest falshood. If they convince me that this doctrine is really affirmed in the gospel, they oblige me to conclude, that the gospel is not a divine revelation. And I defy them to disprove the revelation of the alcoran by any stronger objections from the matter of it, than will lie against the gospel, supposing this doctrine to be affirmed in it. How then am I to be induced to believe upon the authority of the church of *Rome*, that this doctrine is affirmed in the gospel? Why, this church, it seems, has the promise of the gospel that she shall be infallible, and therefore I am to believe upon her authority, that this doctrine is a part of it: but if this doctrine be really a part of the gospel, I can no longer believe the gospel to be a divine revelation; and what then becomes of the infallible authority of this expositor? If I admit the gospel revelation, and that it is promised in it, that there shall be a church infallible in its expositions of this
gospel,

gospel, (which I deny) the church of *Rome* is the last church in the world I can allow to be meant in that promise ; because she gives me an exposition, which subverts the authority of that revelation, and teaches me to believe, that God has affirmed in it, what I manifestly perceive to be false. If I admit that there is in the gospel a plain explicit promise that the church of *Rome* shall be infallible, this I must consider as an external evidence of the gospel, a prophecy by the completion of which the truth of the gospel is to be tried ; and if the church of *Rome* affirms a manifest falsehood, this is a demonstration that that prophecy is not fulfilled, that promise was not made by God ; and consequently the book in which that promise is found is not a divine revelation. I must then either disbelieve the revelation, or reject this exposition. If I admit this doctrine to be the intended sense of the words alledged, and that these words are a part of the gospel scriptures, I cannot believe those scriptures to be a divine revelation ; and if I believe these scriptures to be a divine revelation, I must either reject these words as no part of them, or reject this sense as not intended in them ; and consequently, with the same certainty that I believe

the gospel revelation, I must disbelieve the infallibility of the church of *Rome* in this exposition of it.

This, Sir, is the result of the most attentive inquiry I am able to make. I cannot extricate myself from this dilemma, nor avoid the conclusion to which it leads me. I have examined the argument with all the caution and distrust you could desire me. I put it into several views, and traced it down by different lines of deduction, and proceeded with the utmost care in every step, but still found myself brought at last to the same conclusion. As this experiment was a great confirmation to me, I hope the desire I have to give you all the satisfaction in my power, will excuse my offering it to you. Take it then thus :

If I am utterly incapable of discerning truth from falsehood in any subject, it is in vain for me to enquire after any church, or any religion, I must sit down in absolute scepticism. If I can be certain of any thing, I must be certain, that where upon the fullest and best examination in the power of my faculties, I perceive the compleat idea of bread, and no ingredient of the idea of flesh, there is bread and not flesh : and he, who asserts it is not bread but flesh, must appear to assert a
most

most evident falshood. If I cannot be sure that this is false, I cannot be sure that any thing is true ; and if I am sure that this is false, I am sure it cannot be affirmed by God, neither is a divine revelation capable of any external proofs which can over-rule the evidence of this conclusion.

Suppose, Sir, you and I had been present when our Saviour took bread, and brake it, and spake these words, *This is my body, &c.* and yet he had then declared, he meant them in the same sense, in which the church of *Rome* has expounded them. We might doubtless, with reason enough, have asked—How can this thing be? Suppose then he had answered us,——“ What God affirms is infallibly true ; I speak this in the name, and
“ with the authority of God ; and to convince you that I do so, I will here work a
“ miracle very apposite to the present subject,
“ which will plainly attest the power of God
“ to be with me. This cup of water which
“ you perceive to be real water, I by the
“ power of God turn into wine.—Taste
“ now, see, examine it by what trials you
“ please,——you perceive it to be real wine.”
—We confess it, we do so.—But still we might say,——“ We have the same evi-
“ dences

“ dences, that the bread in your hand is bread,
“ and not your flesh, as that the liquor you
“ give us, is wine, and not water. We
“ have the same testimony of the same senses
“ for one conclusion, that we have for the
“ other. We have just as much reason to
“ believe that the bread, which by these
“ evidences we perceive to be bread, and
“ not your flesh, is bread, and not your flesh,
“ as that the liquor we thus perceive to be
“ wine, is wine and not water. And we
“ may as reasonably believe this wine to be
“ still water, as this bread to be your flesh.”

In my judgment, Sir, the evidences in this case would be exactly balanced; and so far as we argued from these appearances, we should have just as much reason to conclude against our Lord's mission and infallibility, as for it. But when we considered that though we had as much evidence, that the wine which we tasted, &c. was wine, and not water, as that the bread was bread and not his flesh; yet we had not the same evidence of the conversion of the water into wine, as of the bread's remaining bread: that we had known one body imperceptibly taken away, and another substituted in the place of it by mere slight of hand, and had read of rods turned into serpents, by the
illusion

illusion of the devil, &c. we must confess a possibility that we might be deceived, one of these ways, in this apparent conversion. But the evidences from which we concluded the bread to be bread, and not flesh, are according to the constant and ordinary appearances of nature. If we could be deceived in these perceptions, we could be assured of none at all; we could not be sure that any man stood before us, that that man was *Jesus Christ*, that he spake those words we thought we heard, or performed those actions we thought we saw: the whole present scene, and for the same reason, all appearances in this world might be dream and illusion, without any reality. Here then lies the case; in our perceptions that the bread was bread and not flesh, we should have had the utmost assurance of truth that a being with our faculties could receive from any perceptions; and must necessarily conclude, that if we could be deceived in these, we could depend on none: but in the appearances of the conversion of the water into wine there are several possible suppositions, which oblige us to confess we might be deceived. Now the proof of our Lord's infallibility, in this appeal, would depend wholly on our perception of the conversion, in which there

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is a possibility of our being deceived ; at the same time we must be obliged by perceptions in which we could not admit it possible for us to be deceived, and to conclude him fallible. And could we submit to a less evidence in contradiction to a greater ? Could we believe a person infallible, upon a proof in which it is possible for us to be mistaken ; when we had the most certain proof in the world, that he was fallible ?

I hope, Sir, from these reflections you will perceive a clear answer to arise, to what I remember you suggested, and which the gentleman you sent to me very much insisted on, *viz.* That our senses, and the conclusions of our reason from their reports, are to be trusted in the search after an infallible guide ; but when by their conduct we have found such a guide, we are to renounce their informations, and believe this guide even in contradiction to them. For the best proofs that our senses and reason can give us of any person's infallibility, must necessarily be overthrown by a single contradiction to our senses and reason, and consequently our senses and reason can never lead us to acknowledge any person to be an infallible guide, who affirms such a contradiction to them. We have considered this argument

gument under such a supposition that we had before us as apparent a miracle as can be imagined in proof of our Lord's infallibility, and at the same time an evident contradiction to our senses and reason in disproof of it; and, I presume, it must appear, that in such a case, the evidence against his infallibility must outweigh the evidence for it; and that if we would act rationally, we must conclude him fallible.

But if you think it will be any advantage to your argument, we will consider it under a supposition that we had been witnesses of all our Lord's preceding miracles, and had already acknowledged him infallible in consequence of them. We had then been in the very circumstances you desire. Our senses and reason would have led us to the acknowledgement of an infallible guide. But when he came to tell us, that the bread which he held in his hand, was not bread, but his very natural flesh, yea, his whole entire body, in one member of which he held this bread, so manifest a contradiction to our senses and reason must immediately have taken off all our former conviction. For we must confess at least the same possibility of our having been deceived by the slight or confederacy of men,
or

or the illusions of the devil in those former miracles, as of being so deceived in a present miracle. And if such a contradiction to our senses and reason would prevent our conviction from a present miracle, it would for the same reasons, oblige us to retract the conviction that had been wrought in us by any former miracles. And consequently, though we had been actually led by our senses and reason to the acknowledgment of an infallible guide, yet we could not continue to believe him to be so, in contradiction to our senses and reason ; because such contradiction would invalidate all the evidences on which our acknowledgement had been founded, and obliged us to recede from it, and consider him even as less credible than another man. And you must permit me to observe, that we have at this day the same evidence of the contradiction of this doctrine of transubstantiation to our senses and reason, that they had who were present, when our Lord brake the bread, and spake the words whence it is inferred ; but we have less evidence of the reality of his miracles, than they had who saw them performed. And if this contradiction was, in a fair and impartial consideration of its force, sufficient to
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over-rule the evidence they had of the reality of his miracles who saw them performed, much more must it over-rule all the evidence we can have from the most credible report of them. If the affirmation of such a doctrine obliged them to conclude him fallible, it will much more oblige us to the same conclusion.

What I have offered in this argument, will not, I hope, appear to disparage the evidences we have of our Lord's infallibility. I assure you, Sir, I believe it as firmly as you do, and think I am arguing for it, while I disclaim the imputation of a doctrine to him, which must by necessary consequence, overthrow it. You will perhaps infer from my way of reasoning, that I do not pretend to have infallible grounds for my belief of our Lord's infallibility. I confess I do not ; and if your friend, to whom you recommend me, speaks the sense of his church, they do not pretend to it neither : for he tells me, that we must depend on our senses and reason for the finding out an infallible guide. If these faculties are not infallible, his grounds are no more infallible than mine ; and whatever infallibility these faculties are capable of, I have as much pretence as he has. But I own, I think it sufficient, that I have rational grounds for my belief, though not absolutely
infallible,

infallible. If the report of our Lord's miracles is conveyed down to me with all the evidence that the nature of the thing is capable of; if I have as good proofs that they were really performed as reported, as I could expect to have, supposing them to have been performed, I have evidence sufficient to convince any reasonable man, and I must act absurdly, and against reason, if I disbelieve them. And if I allow the facts to have been performed, they oblige me to conclude that the person who performed them was sent by God, spake by his authority, and consequently was infallible. Though the evidences upon which I acknowledge his infallibility are in their nature but probable; yet when I am rationally convinced by them, I thenceforward assent to what he says with divine faith; and therefore have infallible grounds for the belief of what he affirms to me. But he who shews me, that this person has in his doctrine affirmed a manifest falshood, sets aside all these external proofs at once, and reverses my conclusion of his infallibility.

Suppose, Sir, you were arguing with a *Mahometan*, and he should tell you, he has firmly believed the miracles ascribed to *Mahomet*, as you do those ascribed to Christ; and

and therefore had the same reason to believe the infallibility of the Alcoran, as you have to believe the infallibility of the gospel. If you shewed him in the Alcoran any plain contradiction to any manifest truth, do you think you need offer any other proof that the Alcoran is not infallible, and that the miracles said to be wrought in confirmation of it were impostures? Might you not justly observe to him, that it was possible he might be deceived in the credit he gave to those miracles, but impossible in the nature of the thing, that God should affirm a falsehood; and therefore if he acknowledged this false proposition to be the sense of the words, he ought with the greatest certainty to conclude, that the Alcoran was not a divine revelation, and consequently that the miracles he supposed to confirm it were impostures?

Were the doctrine of transubstantiation really affirmed in the Gospel, this reasoning would be as conclusive against the divine revelation of the Gospel, as it is against that of the Alcoran. The report of Christ's miracles indeed is, on many accounts, far more credible than the report of *Mahomet's*: but though the evidences of the former are probable in so high a degree as must oblige every rational

tional man's assent ; yet still they are in their nature but probable, and we must confess a *possibility* of mistake or deception. And though the evidences of *Mabomet's* miracles are highly improbable, yet still there is a *possibility* of their being true. But if both the Gospel and Alcoran affirmed, what it is impossible God should affirm, this internal objection would overthrow both the greater probability of the one, and the less probability of the other, and oblige to conclude of both, that they cannot be divine revelations.

But the divine revelation of the Gospel I firmly believe, upon rational, though in their nature but probable evidences ; because these evidences are not barred by any internal objection from the matter of it. And having thus received it, I assent to what it affirms, as affirmed by God. I can believe, without the least scruple, ten thousand incomprehensible propositions, upon the authority of a revelation so proved to me ; but I cannot believe one manifest falshood ; because these evidences are all superseded, and I must retract my belief of its divine authority, as soon as any such objection is proved against it.

The same way of reasoning also holds with respect to the interpretation of what we ad-

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mit as a divine revelation. If I consult a man of learning upon any difficulty in scripture, I may rationally, upon his authority, admit his exposition as the sense of it ; and though my evidence of the sense I thus receive, is but probable, the authority of a fallible man ; yet what upon this probable evidence I receive as the sense of scripture, I then believe as infallibly true ; not upon his authority, but the authority of scripture. And though the proposition be incomprehensible, this does not take away either the authority of the scripture affirming it, or the authority of my guide so expounding it. But if he gives me a manifest falshood as the sense of scripture, I must either give up the authority of my guide, or the authority of the scripture.

If the church of *Rome* taught nothing in her expositions of scripture manifestly false, nothing contradictory to sense and reason, I could allow it *possible*, that she might be an infallible expositor of scripture. If she produced any probable proofs from scripture, that she should be infallible ; this might incline me, in proportion to the force of those proofs, to believe her to be so. And, whether I believed her infallible or not, if I were a member of that church, I could admit, even upon her

authority, an incomprehensible proposition to be the sense of any scripture, whose words would bear that construction. But when she comes and affirms a manifest falshood as the sense of scripture, I have no farther occasion to consider any direct proofs of infallibility. So insuperable a disproof as this determines me at once in the negative, and obliges me to conclude her not only fallible, but less credible than any other guide.

The words, *This is my body*, I confess are in scripture; and if the proposition, which they affirm in their literal force, had not been a manifest falshood, I should readily assent to them in that sense; neither should I want an infallible interpreter to construe them to me. But while I acknowledge the divine authority of this scripture, I cannot, upon any pretence of infallibility, admit a sense of it subversive of that authority; and consequently, if I will believe this scripture to be a divine revelation, I must find some other sense of it than what the church of *Rome* gives me. And if another expositor assigns an easy natural sense to these words of Christ, agreeable to an usual way of speaking, and to all the purposes of that religion he came to establish, and which acquits the scripture from all objection on account of these words, I must,

must, if I will act rationally, prefer this expositor, how fallible soever, to one, who under pretence of infallibility, requires me to understand them, in a sense inconsistent with their being a divine revelation.

Suppose a man, holding a stone in his hand, should affirm, *This stone is a fish*. If I understood him in the literal sense, he must appear to affirm a manifest falsehood; and if an angel from heaven should come down to attest his assertion, I could not, for reasons before given, believe it. But if that stone was carved into the figure of a fish, his words would be true in a plain obvious sense, and I should without difficulty understand and assent to them. And if I were not present, but received the report of his speech and action from two persons, one of which told me he infallibly knew the mind of the speaker, and was sure it was his intention to affirm, that the stone in his hand was a real living fish; the other only satisfied me, that the stone was carved into the figure of a fish, if I were convinced of the veracity of the man who held the stone, and spake the words, I should certainly conclude that his meaning was only figurative, how positive soever my

infallible interpreter might be of the contrary.

When our Saviour tells *Nicodemus, a man must be born again*, if we understand the words literally, as he did, that a man must enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born, this must appear incredible, impossible; and take away all authority from the person affirming it. But as soon as we understand the words figuratively, as signifying a spiritual regeneration, all difficulty vanishes, and the expression becomes easy and intelligible; and the matter affirmed very consistent with the character of a teacher sent from God.

So when our Lord says—— *Take, eat, this is my body*; and of this cup—— *Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for you*—— *Do this in remembrance of me*. If we understand him in these words and actions, as instituting an ordinance to be perpetually observed in his church in commemoration of that sacrifice he was about to offer on the cross; and teaching us by them, that as they who eat of the sacrifices under the law, in which his was prefigured, communicated in the benefits and propitiation of them; so they who should

eat

eat this bread, and drink this wine, consecrated according to his appointment, should as effectually partake of the benefits of his sacrifice, as if they had materially eaten and drank that body and blood he was going to offer; that in this spiritual and sacramental sense, they should be verily and indeed his body and blood, no longer to be considered as common ordinary bread and wine; but revered as holy symbols of his body and blood which the co-operation of his spirit should render most efficacious means of grace to the worthy receiver. In this view the sense of the words is easy, natural, free from all difficulty or absurdity, and most consistent with the scheme and intention of the Christian religion; and therefore we may safely admit this sense, whether the expositor that gives it us be infallible or not. But whether this be the full precise import of these words or not; with the same certainty that we believe the divine inspiration of the speaker, we are assured, that so manifest a falsehood as the doctrine of transubstantiation, so gross, so palpable a contradiction to sense and reason, as that *the bread and wine are really and sensually the flesh and blood of Christ—* broken by the hands of the priest, and ground
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by the teeth of the faithful, cannot be the sense of them; and consequently, that the church of *Rome*, who affirms this doctrine to be the sense of them, cannot be an infallible expositor of scripture.

I have given you, Sir, my reasons why I cannot be reconciled to the church of *Rome*; I hope with tolerable clearness, which is all I aimed at. I have spared to aggravate the furdity of this doctrine, by observing those consequences from it, which oblige us to reverse the most indisputable conclusions of our reason, such as —*the same natural body cannot be in two places at once*——*Part of such a body cannot be equal to the whole, &c.* The contradiction of the position itself to our most evident perceptions is enough to prove it false, without any assistance from these consequences. If, (as I have said) we cannot be assured of truth in these perceptions, we cannot be assured of any truth: and if we are assured of truth in these perceptions, we are assured this doctrine is false; and if we are assured this doctrine is false, we are assured the church of *Rome* is not infallible.

I acknowledge myself obliged to you, for giving me this occasion of examining the grounds of my religion. I have done it with
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all the attention in my power ; and for the remainder of my life shall hold fast the conclusion I have thus proved. I think it the duty of every man to give himself the best satisfaction he can in the religion he professes ; and it is an honour to the church of *England*, that she restrains none of her members from making this enquiry. But the enquiry must be kept within bounds, and not carried on through a man's whole life. If we would thus *prove all things*, we could *hold fast nothing*. Divinity is a study sufficient to employ any one life ; and if we consider it in its utmost extent, as including all the questions into which the divisions among Christians have branched it out, too diffused for any one man's accurate search ; and therefore common sense will tell us, that in religion, as well as in other subjects, we ought to take the assistance, and must in many things depend on the judgement and report of those, who by particular profession have devoted themselves to the study of it. And since Christ has appointed in his church a certain order of men, to guide and instruct others, their commission, as well as profession, directs our recourse to them as the proper means of our information, and gives their sentiments an authority in preference

ference to any other persons ; and the highest degree of this authority is in their united and synodical conclusions. And when we consider, in how many questions men of inferior parts and education cannot perceive the proper lights, or follow the deductions whence their determinations arise ; and how many persons even of more capacity and improvement, must be diverted from the enquiry by a necessary attention to their proper labours and employment of life ; and that, in such cases, the authority of the appointed guides and superiors of the church is a rational, a prescribed, and therefore a safe rule of private judgment, this authority of the church must appear a rule of great extent in the application. But to assert this authority without any limits, is as absurd as wholly to reject it. Where we clearly and manifestly perceive truth, no authority can over-rule our conviction, because no authority can be of equal weight with the plain evidence of the thing. But where our own perceptions are doubtful and uncertain, it is rational to submit them to authority ; and it is our duty to prefer the authority of our proper appointed guides to any other.

Now

Now whatever submission we owe to the church, is most immediately due to that church of which, by situation, we are, or ought to be members; and in that question which the divisions of the Christian world offer first to every thoughtful man's consideration—What society of Christians he should join himself to? The church in which we are educated, has the claim of possession; and so far as the enquiry or any incident of it is to be resolved by authority, a prior regard is due to her authority. If, under this submission, this church appears, upon the best examination in our power, to require any thing from us as a condition of her communion, which the law of God forbids, we are justified in departing from it: but if no such objection appears against it, a private Christian is not obliged to make any farther search, but may and ought to rest with a full satisfaction where he is, and not trouble himself with an endless examination of all other pretensions. For my own part, I bless God that I am educated in a church to whose terms of communion I can make no objection. But if I found reasons to depart from this, the church of *Rome* would be my last choice. For I could as soon be prevailed on to renounce my Christianity,

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as join myself to a church which requires my assent to a doctrine, which, if I can be sure of any thing, I am sure God could never affirm. I could suggest many other objections, indeed almost innumerable, against the doctrine, worship, and polity of that church: but I am fully determined by this one, and therefore need not examine any more.

If my understanding be like other people's, I cannot but hope that the reasons, which have satisfied me, may have the same effect on others; and therefore I desire your leave to make them public. I have taken the best care to be under your conditions, and that neither your name nor mine might be known. I am sensible of the inconveniences it might bring on you; and as to myself, the study of my profession is a sufficient engagement of my time; and as I am perfectly satisfied in my religion, desire never to dispute any more about it.

*I am Sir, your most affectionate,
most obliged humble servant,*

A. B.



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P E R S U A S I V E

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C O N F O R M I T Y,

Addressed to the D I S S E N T E R S.

B R E T H R E N,

Think it my duty, not only to offer my daily prayers to God for your salvation, but also, according to my abilities, to direct you in the paths that lead to it. I look upon you as a part of Christ's flock committed to my charge, and for whom I must render an account to my great master ; and I pray God, I may be able to do it with joy both to myself and you. They who have attended the public worship

worship in my parish-church, have not, I hope, wanted any proper means of instruction; but you having withdrawn yourselves from that assembly, I make choice of this way of addressing you, and beg leave to set before you, with all meekness, some considerations which I think very nearly concern your souls.

That concord and union among Christians is a gospel-duty, no one can doubt, who is in the least degree conversant in the holy writings. Whether you have complied with this duty or not will best appear to you, by considering what union the scriptures require from us, and by what methods we are obliged to promote it. And,

1st, It is agreed, that the precepts of the Gospel require an union of love and charity among its disciples, a tenderness of affection, a readiness to perform all offices of humanity and benevolence towards each other. In short, to be studious of the peace and interests of our brethren, and do all in our power to promote them. But

II. A more special union is enjoined us as Christians, that we have *one faith, one baptism,*

tism, Eph. vi. 5, 6. acknowledge and worship *one God and father of all*, and *one mediator, Jesus Christ*. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Brethren, I hope that in these points there is no difference between us; that you worship the same God, trust in the same redeemer, acknowledge the same sacraments, and profess the same creed or articles of faith that we do. But

III. There is still a farther union required from us, a communication with each other in the outward offices and ordinances of the Christian religion. As this is the point in which it is our unhappiness to be divided, I beg leave to offer it more particularly to your attention.

Now your obligation to this union might appear to you, considered only as the most effectual means to cultivate that love and charity which the gospel in general requires among Christians; and I may add the peace and happiness of the civil society to which we belong, for the promotion of these is also an unquestionable duty of our religion. How fatal a tendency divisions in religion have to alienate men's hearts from each other, how naturally they produce strife and variance, how
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much they put it in the power of ambitious men to divide us into secular factions and parties, how destructive they are of public peace and private charity, needs no other proof than our own and our fathers experience. And consequently being united in religious communion is in the same proportion, and effectual means to prevent and cure these evils, and to promote that love and charity, that peace and happiness which they destroy. If then it be our duty by all lawful means to promote these good ends, it is our duty, so far as lawfully we may, to be united in religious communion, as a means the most conducive to them. This argument therefore will infer our obligation to be joined in religious communion, *if it be possible, and as far as lies in us;* and doubtless the divine wisdom had these happy effects in view, when he commanded it; but the duty obliges not only as a means to produce these good effects, but also in virtue of the special command.

In what acts this religious communion consists, we may collect from scripture. Of the first converts to the Christian church we read that——*they continued stedfast in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer,* Acts ii. 42. i. e. They continued
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nitied firm and undivided in the belief and profession of that doctrine which the Apostles taught, united in one *fellowship, society, or church* over which they presided, and testified this union by communicating with them and each other in *prayer*, and receiving together the sacrament of the Lord's supper; that great symbol of Christian fellowship, by which as the apostle tells us, *we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread*, 1 Cor. x. 17. What was the duty of those first Christians remains a duty to all Christians unto the end of the world. All Christians are as much obliged as they were to be united in the same fellowship or society, under persons succeeding to the apostles in the ministry and oversight of the church, and to communicate in worship and other public ordinances of religion. For all after-conversions made but an accession to that first society of Christians, which continued still one *Catholic Apostolick church*, one body, though enlarged and extended over the whole earth. But the ends of worship and government made it necessary, that this Catholic society, so extended should be subdivided into many lesser societies or particular churches.

Now setting aside all questions relating to the primary divisions and sub-divisions of the Catholic church, the subordination of the parts, and the laws and terms of Catholic union between them, as points which do not appear to concern your case, I presume it will not be denied.

That it is the duty of all Christians to be united in church-fellowship ; and the nature of the thing points out to us, as the most practicable method of complying with this duty, that so many Christians, as by the vicinity of their habitation may conveniently meet together in the same assembly, should be joined in one congregation or church, and communicate with each other in *breaking of bread and in prayer, hearing the word, &c.* That several of these congregations may be combined together, so as to make one larger society or church, appears from those scriptures where we read of the church of *Jerusalem, of Corinth, of Ephesus, of Antioch, Pergamos, Thyatira, &c.* For it is not to be conceived that the whole multitude of believers in those cities could meet together in one assembly ; especially in that age when they had no public temples or places capable of receiving any great numbers ; and when they were forced

ced to meet as it were by stealth for fear of the persecutor.

Many of these cities were very populous; and we have an account of large conversions made in some of them, and several pastors placed over those conversions, which would have been unnecessary if they had made but one single congregation. From hence then we may conclude, that there were in these cities several congregations, and yet they are spoken of together as *one church*. From this primitive pattern we derive our present constitution of parochial and diocesan churches, and by a combination of all diocesan churches, within the same region or civil dominion, is formed what we call a national church.

Now, whatever may be objected to the largeness of some of our dioceses, or whatever other inconveniencies of this kind may appear to you in our constitution, I think myself at present concerned only to shew, that such associations or combinations of churches are lawful. Suppose then that the first churches in any city and adjacent parts were distinct congregations, separate and wholly independent on each other; the wit of man cannot devise a more effectual means to preserve amity and concord among congregations, which must

have a frequent intercourse with each other, than for them to agree together in one common association and confederacy: and so far as they thus agree together and are confederated, they become one society. So that if no example of scripture had justified such associations of churches, the nature of the thing and the obligation of those general duties of union and concord among Christian churches, had rendered them lawful, as the most effectual means to these ends; and whatever lawful terms of union or confederacy such congregations had agreed in, every member of each had been bound to observe.

But besides this argument from the reason of the thing, we have, as I observed, the example and authority of primitive institution; and since the particular boundaries of such associations are not any where defined and limited in scripture, it must be left to the discretion of the churches concerned to assign them such limits, as may best promote those great ends of union and concord, so far as external circumstances will permit. And doubtless an association of all churches within the same civil dominion has a most apparent tendency to promote those good ends; and was therefore practised, so far as the circumstances of the
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church would admit, before any civil state became Christian ; and as soon as the nations of the world received Christianity, the boundaries of their several districts were professedly made the rule of such ecclesiastical associations, as the most effectual provision for both Christian and civil peace and order. Such national combinations of churches must therefore appear so far necessary, as the most effectual means for obtaining an end, confessed to be necessary, are themselves necessary : but it is sufficient to my present purpose if they are lawful ; and such they must be acknowledged, unless it can be shewn either that they are in *general* forbidden by some law of God ; or, in *particular*, that the association, we are required to join in, exacts from us some conditions of union which cannot consist with our obedience to God. In general, I presume, you will not deny the lawfulness of them, or refuse to speak of the church of *Scotland* or the church of *Geneva* as one church, though consisting of many united congregations. And if to our particular constitution any unlawful terms of union are objected, whenever they are produced they will require a distinct consideration. But supposed inconveniences cannot be a good reason against submission to it,

because that cannot be a good reason against any one constitution, which if allowed, would be a good reason against all. Now there never was, nor ever will be, any such association entered into, or any constitution formed upon it, wholly free from objections of this kind. It can never be expected, that men should universally agree in judgment, concerning the conveniencies or inconveniencies, of some parts at least, in any public constitution : and common reason directs, that in things of prudential consideration, such as these are, the minor part in every society should be concluded by the judgment of the major, or, which is all one, by that authority which is intrusted to act for the whole, in whatever hands that authority is placed. A submission in questions of this kind the nature of the thing implies in the stipulations every member of every society, *as such*; and it is as necessary to the subsistence of the church of *Geneva*, as a society, as to the subsistence of the church of *England*.

And since no society great or small can subsist, or even be conceived, without a distinction of some persons from others by order and office, and must be composed of governors and governed ; all churches or combinations
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of churches being confessedly societies, this distinction must be admitted in them. Accordingly we read that St. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every City, Acts xiv. 23. where they had made conversions, and committed to them the oversight of the flock. Tit. i. 5. Titus is instructed to do the same in Crete, and Timothy in Ephesus, 1 Tim. v. 22, compared with iii. 2. Of these superiors in the church some are said to rule well, and to be therefore worthy of double honour, 1 Tim. v. 17. and to these rulers in general their inferiors are commanded to submit themselves, and be obedient, as to persons who watched for their souls, and must give an account to God, Heb. xiii. 17. Indeed without a submission to their authority within its proper limits, their appointment would be to no manner of purpose, nor in the least degree promote that order and union it was intended to preserve.

Under what distinction of orders, or in what special officers, or in what subordination of one to another this authority should be placed, and the administrations of it adjusted, in any churches or associations of churches, whether the supreme direction should be left to all presbyters in common, or whether to them subordinately, and under the superin-

tendence and oversight of one person within certain districts, I think you not concerned to enquire, any farther, than whether one or the other form of polity be unlawful. For my own part I am verily persuaded that the plea of original institution is decisive for episcopacy ; but I will suppose, for the present, this plea to be equal on both sides, and contend only that the episcopal form is *lawful*. And I hope a form of polity, under which all Christian churches throughout the world subsisted for almost 1500 years, will not be condemned as in itself *unlawful*. As to our own episcopacy, it has had the approbation of all foreign churches of the reformation, and even of *Geneva* itself. If then the episcopal form be acknowledged *lawful*, all that can remain in question about it is, whether it be more *convenient* or *inconvenient* than the other. But questions of this kind as I have observed) must in the nature of the thing, be decided by public resolutions. If therefore the major part of the churches associating resolve on episcopacy, as the most convenient form, the minor and dissentient part must submit to it, or else the association is at an end ; neither is it possible for any union to be formed, either
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upon the scheme of episcopacy or presbytery, without admitting these principles. I observe only farther, that by such agreement of the whole, not only each church, but every member of each church so associated, is concluded; and whoever is afterwards admitted into any of those churches, is admitted under the terms of such association, and as a member of that church is obliged to conform to them in the duties of his station.

From what has been said we may pretty well collect the sum of that religious and social union, that *Communion of Saints* which the precepts of the gospel enjoin, and the constitution of every Christian church, as a society, requires between the members of it.

1. All combinations of churches, whether diocesan or national, are bound as members of the same body to observe some common laws of Christian confederacy; to profess the same rule of faith, acknowledge each other's administrations, be disposed mutually to communicate in worship, and, in order to that, agree in the same general terms of communion, and submit to such rules of peace and order as are established by the joint consent and authority of the whole body.

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2. This communion of saints implies, that all the members of each particular church or congregation should therein communicate with each other in worship, and other ordinances of Christian religion, under the rules agreed on by the general association in which they are incorporated; and, according to their stations, pay all due submission to the authority of those who, in the established subordinations of power, preside over it: for without this it is impossible that any social union should be preserved.

Now, if such union as has been described, be, to Christians in such circumstances, a duty founded on plain precepts of the gospel, a breach of this union, where it can be preserved, must be a sin; which sin has obtained the name of *schism*, or *division*. If two or more particular churches set up different and opposite rules of faith, refuse to communicate with each other in worship, in *breaking of bread* and in *prayer*, and renounce each other's administrations, there is doubtless a schism, a breach of Christian union between them. And this breach is much aggravated, if these churches were under the tie of a mutual contract and association to preserve communion with each other in these instances. In like manner

manner if any members of a particular church renounce its worship and assemblies, refuse to communicate with it in the ordinances of Christian religion, withdraw all obedience from the guides and pastors of it, and set up distinct assemblies in opposition to it, there is evidently a schism between the members of that church : a breach of that spiritual union and *bond of peace* which the Christian religion prescribes. The only question is, who in these cases are the schismatics, or on whom the guilt of such separation lies.

Now it is acknowledged, that to every particular church, and to every single Christian, the laws of Christ are of prior and greater obligation than any other social laws of outward union and concord. For the fundamental principle upon which Christians are united in those societies, is, that they may jointly observe the laws of Christ. This is the primary condition and stipulation of their union ; and all the obedience they owe to the rules, and all the submission they promise to the authority of such society, is under the reserve of this condition—That it consists with obedience to Christ. If therefore any church or churches shall depart from, or corrupt the common faith, mix idolatry or superstition
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in their worship, and require an approbation and concurrence in these corruptions as terms of communion, they have broken the original stipulations; and it is not only lawful for other churches, but their duty to separate from them, and renounce their communion. And in this case the churches, which thus corrupt themselves, and render it unlawful for others to communicate with them, are guilty of the schism, and not those which depart from them. And for the same reasons, every single member of such a corrupt church is justified in withdrawing himself from its society and communion; neither will he be guilty of schism in so doing, but the church which requires those unlawful terms of communion will be guilty of the schism.

Nay, I will acknowledge to you farther, that though the terms of communion with any church be in themselves lawful, yet if any person is persuaded in his mind that they are unlawful, he cannot, while such persuasion continues, comply with them without sin: for to him who thinks them sin, to him they are sin; and he who can do what he is persuaded is a sin, his will is equally criminal, and he would as certainly have done it if it had been really one. But I must here observe to him
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who acts under such a mistaken persuasion, that his excuse before God will depend on the care and diligence he has used in informing himself. If he has taken up this persuasion from passion and prejudice, hastily and without due examination, and neglected the proper means of his information, his error itself will be one sin, and his separation in consequence of it another: for God will not allow us to plead one sin in excuse of another.

And now, brethren, let me intreat you to apply to your own case what has been suggested. There is manifestly between us a breach of that communion of saints, that union and spiritual society which the gospel requires among Christians. The congregations to which you are joined, and the national, diocesan, and parish-church from which you separate, hold no communion, but stand in opposition to each other. The teachers which you have chosen, and to whose guidance you have committed yourselves, own no relation to our society, but renounce all subjection to its rules, orders, and authority. In the language of the primitive church, here is altar set up against altar, worship against worship, pastor against pastor. If ever there was a schism, in any age or part of the Christian church,

church, here is one between us. And if the apostle so severely reprov'd the *contentions* arisen in the church of *Corinth*, while one said *I am of Paul*, another *I am of Apollos*, another *I am of Cephas*, 1 Cor. i. 12. and declares them to be *carnal*, 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4. though the persons by a preference of whose ministry they distinguish themselves, were in perfect communion with each other, and joint ministers of the same church; how much more carnal must be our *contentions*, who are listed under teachers who hold no communion with each other, but profess themselves members of opposite societies? If he blames *divisions* among them, though they were such as did not rise to an actual separation, but notwithstanding them they still *came together in the Church*, 1 Cor. xi. 18. how much more blameable are our *divisions*, who *forsake the assembling ourselves together*, Heb. x. 25. and renounce each other's congregations? Here is doubtless a sinful separation between us; and on whom the guilt of it lies, it concerns us on both sides to enquire.

That this separation has been made by your departure from us, and not by our departure from you is a matter of fact which cannot be denied. For though perhaps you may (at least
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some of you) plead—— That you were never members of our church, but bred up from your childhood in congregations opposite to it; yet if the separation to which you adhere was first made by a departure of your predecessors from us, it is evident that you continue the separation upon the same foot on which it was first made; and if they sinned in separating themselves from our church, you must also be *partakers of their sin* in continuing and adhering to that separation. You must therefore in this question be considered as the persons departing; and it lies upon you, to shew that the reasons of your departure are such as will justify it.

Now, if our church requires, from you, as a condition of communion, any thing unlawful, if you cannot join in our worship and offices, without doing something which the laws of Christ have forbidden, then are we the schismatics, and you are justified in departing from us. But on the contrary, if our church requires nothing from you, as a condition of her communion, which is unlawful, if you may join in our worship and offices, and observe all rules prescribed to you in your station, without doing any thing which the laws of Christ have forbidden,
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then are we guiltless, and the sin of this separation must lie upon you: This is the proper rule by which we must guide ourselves in this enquiry. When God and man command different things, there is no question but *God is to be obeyed rather than man*, Acts iv. 19. But when our lawful and proper superiors enjoin nothing that any law of God has forbidden, then it is evident that we may obey man without disobeying God: and since God has in general commanded us, to *obey and submit ourselves to those who rule over us*, and *watch for our souls*, Heb. xiii. 17. he who, within the proper limits of their authority, pays this submission to them, performs a Christian duty, and in obeying men obeys God.

It is indeed implied in my former concession, that if any person among you is persuaded in his mind, that the terms of communion, which our church requires from him, are sinful, he cannot, while that persuasion continues, innocently act against it: but then, you must remember, how much it concerns you carefully to examine the grounds of this persuasion, to apply yourselves to all reasonable means of instruction, and especially to those to whom the ministry of the word is
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committed, whose office was instituted for this very end, that you *should no more be carried to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, but be edified in truth and love, Eph. iv. 14, 15.* In this inquiry you must divest yourselves of all passions and prejudice, and hear with equal attention what may be said on each side of the question before you. If, upon the result of such inquiry, your persuasion continues, you will then be excused in acting according to it; but if without such examination you fall into error, your error will be sinful, and by no means excused what you shall act in consequence of it.

No church, I believe, in the Christian world requires fewer terms of communion, from persons in your station, than the church of *England*. An explicit approbation of our rules and articles, and the greatest part of our social constitution, is indeed required from those who are admitted into the offices of our ministry; and to all who intend that holy calling among us, the attentive consideration of those things they are required to subscribe to is of concern: but the scruples that may withhold their subscription, cannot in the least affect you, from whom no such

subscription is demanded. These subscriptions are not terms of communion with our church, but only terms of being admitted into its offices: and if nothing unlawful be imposed on you in your station, you have no occasion to look farther, or concern yourselves with what is required from another in his station, for the duties of which you are not accountable. A communication in our public worship and administration of sacraments is all that is insisted on, from persons in your station, as the ordinary standing terms of communion with us; and therefore all the scruples that can withhold you from such communion, must relate to these offices. What particular objections are in view to each of you, I know not; I presume they are various, according to the different prejudices and apprehensions of men: but what ever they are let me intreat you in the *Bowels of Christ Jesus*, and as you tender your own salvation, faithfully to examine the grounds of them; to lay aside all prepossessions, to put on a true Christian meekness, not being too wise in your own conceits, nor leaning too much to your own understanding, but taking with you all proper assistances, and advising with those from whom you may reasonably expect light and direction. I, for

my part, shall, according to mine office, be ready to assist you, and, according to my abilities, to guide you to truth in this inquiry. The things in consideration are of equal concern to you and me. And though I am verily persuaded that no unlawful condition of communion is required by our church, either from you in your station, or from me in mine; yet, if I should be otherwise convinced, I trust that, through the grace of God strengthening me, no worldly regards should prevail on me to comply with it.

You will not expect, that in this address I should enter into all the particulars objected to our church by those who dissent from us. When you reflect on the great importance of being well assured in the principles and motives of your separation, I hope you will each of you give me more private opportunities of debating particulars with you; but whatever assistance you make choice of, this I beg leave to inculcate to you, that you confine your inquiry to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the thing you scruple; for in this inquiry only is your *conscience* concerned. If you confess the things which offend you to be in their nature indifferent, that is, neither commanded nor forbidden by God, they cannot be a just reason in *conscience* of your departure from

us. For, consider, I pray you, what you mean, when you say you cannot in *conscience* join with us: is it not, that by so joining you should offend God? Nothing can be a rule of *conscience* but some law of God; if then you acknowledge the things you are required to comply with, not to be forbidden by God, it is evident that you cannot offend God by complying with them; for where there is no law, there is no transgression, and consequently you cannot plead *conscience*, as restraining your compliance in these cases.

If you say, you do not condemn our worship, or the ceremonies prescribed in it, as unlawful, but you like another way of worship better; you think our ceremonies improper, inexpedient, &c. and that these are sufficient reasons for your departure from us: let me observe to you,

1st, That these are at most but considerations of *prudence*, perhaps only of *humour*, but certainly not of *conscience*.

2^{dly}, Let me intreat you to consider, that all union of men in public worship is impossible, unless things of mere prudential consideration are submitted to some public determination. The nature of the thing, and an apostolical precept, require that *decency and order*, 1. Cor. xiv. 40. should be preserved
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in public worship; but without the observation of some common rules, these ends cannot be provided for in any assembly: and since the special rules by which these ends should be provided for are not, and perhaps could not be, prescribed in scripture for all ages, it follows, that the special determination of them must be left a matter of prudence and discretion. Now concerning matters of prudence and discretion, men ever did, and ever will, differ in opinion. That will appear indecent and improper to one man, which to another appears decent and proper. What possible way then remains for a society of men to be united in the observation of any rules providing for these ends, but the submission of the minor part to the judgment of the major; or, which in the event will prove just the same thing, leaving the determination to some common authority? The force of this argument may perhaps appear more plainly to you, when applied in some proper instances. The times of assembling, the order in which prayers, thanksgivings, instructions, &c. should succeed one another, and the outward bodily behaviour of the persons assembled, both minister and people, are circumstances which *order* and *decency* require to be under some regu-

lation; because it is evident, that in these circumstances, disorder, indecency, and confusion may happen. And I presume your own meetings are not without some regular usages in these things. How then did you come to an agreement in them? Did you all exactly concur in judgment concerning them? This, if it were so, must be acknowledged pure accident. But suppose it should happen otherwise, as it very well may do in matters of mere prudential consideration, and that some few should dissent from the rest, and dislike your rules or usages in any of these particulars; would you allow this a good reason for them to divide themselves from you, and set up another meeting in opposition to yours? I presume you would not. Consider then whether you do not the same thing with regard to us, if upon a dislike to some prudential rules for outward behaviour in our worship, you separate yourselves from us. If you leave it to the discretion of your teacher (as most probably you do) to determine in these things for himself and you, to observe what order he pleases in prayers, instructions, &c. and to use what gestures he thinks fit in his several administrations; if you acquiesce in his choice for himself, and submit your own behaviour to his advice or direction,
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what more than this is required from you by the church from which you separate? What else but to acquiesce in the minister's using such order and gestures in the several parts of worship as he approves, and submitting your own behaviour to the direction of your pastors?

The matter indeed of the prayers we join in, is a subject of much higher consideration than the former. We are first and chiefly concerned to be satisfied that it is lawful. But in the present argument I suppose it acknowledged, that our liturgy contains in it no matter unlawful. But there are some things in it which you disapprove, which you think might be left out, or altered for the better. I confess indeed that the matter of our public prayers to God ought not only to be lawful, but also decent and proper; but to whom must it be left to provide for these circumstances? To consult every single person who is to use or join in them, is impracticable? To adjust a liturgy to every one's fancy, to accommodate it to all the various inconsistent objections that either are, or hereafter may be, made to any part of it, is impossible: the only practicable expedient is, to trust the composition to some persons of whose wisdom, piety and abilities we may reasonably presume; and I hope our ecclesiastical superiors will not,

even on these accounts, be an improper choice. It is not indeed to be imagined, that the compositions which, after the most deliberate revivals they shall agree on, will be free from all objections, that no one will dislike any part of it, or fancy could alter it for the better. But I see no other possible way, by which a publick liturgy can be framed, and received into common use.

In the way of worship which you chuse, the propriety of the matter, and the decency of the expression in the prayers you join in, are left wholly to the discretion of your minister. In whatever prayers he offers, you are bound implicitly to follow him. I would not reflect on the parts and abilities of your teachers; much less impute to all the offensive indecencies which some may have been guilty of: but I beg you to consider, whether any one among them for himself, or whether you, in his behalf, can with modesty presume, that a single person's hasty (and as it is pretended) *extempore* composition can be more free from reasonable exceptions, than a liturgy which was the result of the most deliberate consultation of so many grave, learned and pious men, as were the compilers of that received by our church. Men whose venerable names stand recorded in our
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Histories, as the chief authors and glory of our reformation, and who were all of them either martyrs or confessors for it. Were the prayers used in any one of your meetings, even within the compass of one month, submitted to examination, I doubt not, but more reasonable objections might be made to the matter or composure of them, than the peevish scrutiny of so many ages has been able to suggest against our liturgy. But to form a true judgment in this question, whether the way of worship chosen by those of the separation be, upon the whole, preferable to our liturgy, as a public provision for a society, either for matter or composure, the comparison ought to be extended much farther, and take in all the performances of this kind in all your meetings.

If your objecting against communicating with us in this liturgy be only that it is a form; consider, that this objection divides you from the foreign churches of the reformation, as well as from us; who have all of them, even *Geneva* itself, a publick liturgy. And permit me to observe, that you yourselves are as much confined to a form in your prayers as we are, though not always to the same form; for you are confined to pray in the words of your minister,

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and no other. This, whatever it may be to him, is as much a form to you, as ours is to us; neither does it alter the case, as to you, whether he delivers himself *extempore*, or previously composes his prayers, or repeats, or even reads them out of a book. But this great difference there is between our forms and his, that whereas it is in your power to consider our's before-hand, acquaint yourselves with the meaning and be satisfied in the lawfulness of every petition; in his you are obliged immediately to join without any previous examination. And though nothing unlawful or improper should be delivered by him, of which you cannot but confess there may be sometimes danger; yet this at least must often happen, that through the obscurity of the expression, and the quick succession of one sentence to another, many things must, upon so short a consideration as is allowed, remain unintelligible, and so you must say *Amen* to what you do not understand. It were easy for me to enlarge on this argument; but the comparative expediency, or in expediency, the advantages or disadvantages of stated forms, or only general directories for public worship, must, as all other questions of prudential consideration, be submitted to public decisions: because this is the only way
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by which we can be united upon either scheme. And consequently he who refuses to submit to such decision, must be guilty of sedition, and opposing authority within the proper limits of power belonging to it.

I presume you would be glad, that such way of worship, and such scheme of church-fellowship as you most approve, should be generally received and established. This has been the professed desire of all persons of any character among your teachers from the beginning of the separation. And the unhappy covenant which your predecessors entered into, in its first article, declares this to be its intention—*To bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, and directory for worship, and catechising : that they and their posterity after them might as brethren live in faith and love*—In which profession it is very truly supposed that it is the duty of all Christians to live together as brethren in faith and love; and that the most effectual means to this end is a conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, &c. But such a conjunction and uniformity is impossible, either upon your scheme or ours, without such a submission of some to the judgment

ment of others as we contend for. In all cases of this nature, the bounds of private consideration must be the lawfulness or unlawfulness of what is established. I cannot indeed help judging that to be inexpedient, which to me appears to be so: and as I acknowledge for myself, so I presume I may for the greater part of my brethren, that we judge our present constitution might in many respects be altered for the better; some of us imagine we see defects in one part, and some in another: but we all know, that in questions of expediency it is our bounden duty, and what the nature of all society requires, that we should submit our several private judgments to the judgment of publick authority; and that no uniformity of men or churches in confession of faith, form of government or worship can be established, and consequently no brotherly union in faith and love be preserved, upon any scheme imaginable without admitting these principles.

Upon the whole, I beseech you to consider with a serious and impartial attention what has been offered to you. Remember at the same time how earnestly our blessed Lord prayed to his father, *that all who should believe on him might be one*, John xvii. 20. 21. How passionately his Apostle exhorts the disciples

ciples of the gospel, *by the name of our Lord Jesus, that they all spake the same things ; that there be no divisions among them ; that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and the same judgment, 1 Cor. i. 10.* And in another place—*If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, be ye like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves, Philip. ii. 1, 2, 3.* And a little after—*Do all things without murmuring or disputing, Philip. ii. 14.* The only possible way of complying with these intreaties and commands has, I am persuaded, been suggested to you in the preceding reflections ; the sum of which is this :

Where the lawfulness or unlawfulness of an action is in question, the law of God in the books of Holy Scripture is doubtless the rule and measure of every Christian duty, so far as the direction of that law reaches : and though in enquiring into the sense of that law we are bound to use all proper methods of information ; and among these, as one of the most proper, to consult and advise with persons of whose superior knowledge
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we may reasonably presume, and especially those *who are over us in the Lord*, and to defer as much to their authority, as it is fit and reasonable for us to do in an inquiry into the meaning of any other ancient book ; yet, if in the result of such application we cannot be satisfied but that the action required from us is forbidden by God's law, we cannot in compliance with any authority perform it. If we thus *please men*, we cannot also be the *servants of Christ*, Gal. i. 10. But where the question is only concerning expediency or inexpediency, &c. there the command of the Apostle must take place—*That we speak the same things, be of one accord, joined together in the same mind, &c.* But how must this be brought to pass! By all exactly concurring in judgment? No surely ; this in prudential considerations is not to be expected. But this is his direction——*To lay aside all strife and vain glory, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming other better than themselves ; and, as he elsewhere requires, submitting one to another:* how then shall this be practicable? by every one giving up his opinion to another? This will be but changing sides, and the division will remain as before. Shall we then allow every one to practise according to his own judgment? But where then will be the union,

union, the *accord, the perfect joining together, the speaking the same things* which the Apostle prescribes? Suppose, in the instance above considered, that one party be for stated forms in publick worship, the other against them; and each be allowed to practise according to their different opinions: must not this practice necessarily divide them from each other in publick worship? When we have tried and considered all schemes imaginable of being thus united as the Apostle commands, this only will be found practicable in society, that in all questions of expediency the one part submit to the judgment of the other; the lesser to the greater; or which, as I observed, will be the same thing in result; the whole submit to the judgment of publick authority: and consequently this the Apostle must be understood to command. For if such submission be in the nature of the thing necessary to such union as he enjoins, when he enjoins the union, he must enjoin the submission; and if one be a duty, the other must be so too.

Between different churches indeed different rules and usages in matters of expediency may very well consist with a brotherly correspondence; though the greater their uniformity is in these things, the more perfectly
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will concord and amity be preserved between them: but between the members of the same church, unless rules of this kind be submitted by the inferiors to the wisdom of the superiors, all social union is impracticable.

Brethren, I have offered you my judgment upon your separation from us, and I hope, not without some reasons in support of it. It would be matter of the greatest joy to me, if but one single person should be hereby recalled to unity of Christ's flock; *but whether you will bear, or whether you will forbear,* Ezek. ii. 5. I shall reflect with satisfaction, that I have discharged my conscience towards you. And I trust, that, when I shall appear before the great shepherd, no article will lie against me on your account. In the mean time I shall not cease to pray for you that God would enlighten your minds, take from you all ignorance, prejudice, and hardness of heart, and dispose you, with a true Christian humility, to *mind the things which belong to your peace.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

F I N I S.



