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William M. Kenzi

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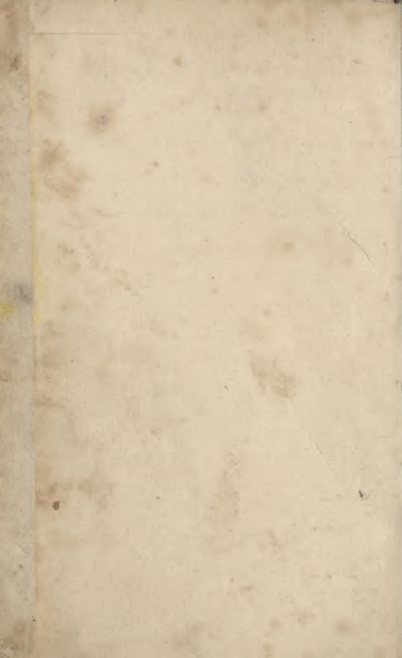
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AN
ALARM TO BRITAIN;
OR,
AN INQUIRY,
INTO THE CAUSES
OF THE
RAPID PROGRESS
OF
INFIDELITY,
IN THE PRESENT AGE.

By JOHN JAMIESON, D. D. F. A. S. S.
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, FORFAR.

A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not; but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth. *Prov.*

PERTH:

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PART II.



INTRODUCTION.

IT must be obvious to every one, who takes any interest in the religious state of society, that for some time past, infidelity has been greatly on the increase. The concussion in the minds of men, with respect to politics, has occasioned a general alarm. But the increase of infidelity must strike the mind of every attentive observer, as affording fully as much ground for apprehension. For at once it threatens our peace, both for time and for eternity. It might seem uncandid to suppose, that none can be good members of civil society, who deny revealed religion. It must be admitted, that we may learn from the light of nature, many of the duties which we owe to one another in a social state. But undoubtedly, revelation sets these in a far clearer light, and points out

others which men had never learned from the light of nature. It also enforces them by motives far more cogent than any that unassisted reason supplies. However, it may be feared that the infidelity, which is most acceptable to many in our time, has nearly as little connexion with natural, as with revealed religion; and that it includes the denial of providence, of a future state, and even of the existence of moral evil. The progress of such horrid doctrine must necessarily relax all the bonds of civil society.

But we are not merely to consider the moral tendency of infidelity. We must also attend to its demerit. Every one who believes revelation must acknowledge, that a nation, which, having made a profession of christianity, should relapse into this refined species of heathenism, would dare the divine vengeance, and deserve the most signal punishment. Justly might the judge of the universe say; "Wherefore I will plead with you, and with your children's children will

will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim and see: and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory, for that which doth not profit.—How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them^u that are no gods.—Shall I not visit thee for these things? and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this*?"

Therefore, whatever be the means that are employed for the preservation of peace, the most threatening symptom of danger is overlooked, if the progress of this evil is not attended to, if the most proper antidotes, within the compass of human power, are not provided. I do not propose, in the following pages, to enter directly into the controversy with deists. My design is, to take notice of some things which seem to operate as causes or occasions of the increase

* Jer. ii. 9—II. v. 7, 9.

of infidelity; and thus to warn those of their danger, who may not be aware of it, and to point out to others their guilt, in laying stumbling-blocks before their brethren, which may occasion a fall to their eternal destruction. It may be necessary previously to observe, that although these are in general denominated *causes*, it is not meant that they necessarily produce the evil referred to, or afford any proper excuse for it. This term is merely used in a lax sense, according to its frequent acceptation; as being so comprehensive as to include a variety of considerations, which could not otherwise so properly come under one denomination. Some of these have a more *remote*, and others a more *immediate* influence. I shall, therefore, view them in this order.

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AN
ALARM TO BRITAIN, &c.

PART I.

OF THE REMOTE CAUSES OF THE RAPID
PROGRESS OF INFIDELITY.

CHAP. I.

The influence of Popery. Its contradiction to reason. Denial of the perfection of scripture. Tends to make men either fools or infidels.—Of Arianism, in exhibiting a creature-god as the object of worship.—Of Socinianism; in its treatment of scripture; doctrine concerning the deity and the eternal state, in curtailing the evidence of revelation; subverting some of the strongest proofs of its necessity; idolizing reason; and denying the truth of inspiration.

AMONG those that may be viewed as more REMOTE causes of the growth of infidelity, none will more readily present itself to the inquiring mind, than the great progress of error. Revealed truth forms one beautiful chain. If a single link

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be lost, the whole is marred. There is a similar connexion in the various parts of the great system of error. Although one part may be adverse to another, there are certain great lines in which all the different parts agree.

No true protestant will refuse, that the errors and conduct of the *church of Rome*, have presented to those immediately under her dominion, a powerful temptation to infidelity. This temptation has occasionally acquired greater influence since the revival of human learning. God hath wisely ordered, that this revival should be nearly coeval with the reformation; that the former might be subservient to the latter, and particularly that the knowledge of the truth might be more easily diffused. But as the reformation has been hitherto limited, learning has obtained access into various countries, from which the pure light of evangelical truth has been excluded. Thence, in these countries, the handmaid has assumed the place of the mistress. She, who claimed the character of the mistress, has been unable to vindicate her claim. Her meretricious conduct has annulled her authority. Those, who have been refused the use of scripture; who have been taught to believe merely on the testimony of their teachers; who have never seen christianity, but as dressed in the ridiculous pageantry,

pageantry, and profaned by the abominable idolatry of Rome; and who have constantly had their reason outraged by her absurdities; when, from the spread of learning, or of a spirit of inquiry, they begin to think for themselves, must be in great danger of renouncing the whole system of christianity, without farther examination, and of plunging at once into infidelity. We know that the human mind has a strong tendency to fly from one extreme to another. Even the splendour of truth, when suddenly communicated, dazzles the eye of the soul, and renders it for a time incapable of just discrimination. In this state, it scorns the tedious task of scrutiny. By a single glance it discerns the incongruity. But, instead of calmly distinguishing, it rejects the whole as one heterogeneous mass of prejudice and priestcraft. In this manner are we to account for the sudden transition that many have made from popery to deism. It is well known, that, for a considerable number of years past, a great part of the nobility, of the *litterati*, and even of the higher orders of the clergy, in a neighbouring country, have given themselves very little trouble to conceal their infidelity.

Indeed, the religion of Rome is framed, as if it were meant to make men either fools or infidels. If they do not believe every thing, they are in dan-

ger of believing nothing. So artfully are the tares sown in this field, that the enemy, who hath done it, seems determined, that those, whom he can not secure by implicit faith and blind superstition, shall certainly become his prey by infidelity. The imperfection of scripture is one of the first principles of the antichristian system. In order to prove this, popish writers assert that the church might have wanted it entirely; and that it was not written by the express command of God, but merely on the spur of the occasion*. What authority is left to scripture, is derived from the church. The word of God is not allowed to speak for itself. The spirit, who endited it, and who is promised to "lead into all truth," is not to be trusted, in any one instance, as an infallible guide. This honour is reserved for that presumptuous worm, who calls himself *the Vicar of Christ on earth*. Were this usurper to tell the church, that the holy bible was no revelation from God, she would be bound to believe him. And she might as reasonably believe him, as when he tells her that it is not a perfect revelation. This is a religion, that allows men to be infidels at heart, if they make a profession of faith with the mouth. The morality taught by many of the most famous doctors

* Vid. Turret. Theol. Tom. 1. Loc. 2. Qu. 3.

doctors of this church, is the most ingenious system ever devised by man for "making void the commandments of God." That bloody spirit of persecution, which is one of her distinguishing characteristics, can give those, who look only at the outside of things, no favourable impression with respect to christianity.

But while the situation of the unlearned in popish countries, who have no other means of information than the instructions of their ghostly fathers, is truly deplorable, the case is far otherwise with respect to the learned. They are unspeakably more inexcusable, if they disbelieve christianity. "What?" do they say, "do we not perceive much more distinctly than the illiterate, the shocking absurdities and impieties of a great part of the world called christian?" You may, indeed. But flatter not yourselves, that this is an excuse for infidelity. Have you not access to the scriptures? If you look into these, you must be convinced, that, without such a dreadful apostacy as that of the church of Rome, christianity could not possibly be true. You must perceive, that this defection is foretold in all its striking features. You must see, if not determined to shut your eyes, that this, like the unbelief of the Jews, is a permanent evidence of the truth of our holy religion, as convincing as
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that of miracles; because expressly predicted in the plainest manner. You may endeavour to evade the force of the argument by asking, how it can consist with the wisdom or goodness of God to favour mankind with a revelation, and after all to suffer the greatest part of those, who pretend to embrace it, to relapse into the idolatry, wickedness and cruelty of the heathen? In defending christianity, I should be at least on an equal footing with those who deny it, though I could give no other answer than by proposing another question: "As you admit the moral government of the world, how is it consistent with the wisdom and goodness of its Author, to suffer so general a prevalence of evil?" The Divine Being hath reasons for his conduct, of which he gives no account to his creatures. The prediction of this great apostacy is just as certain as the apostacy itself: and though we could form no conjectures with respect to the reasons, we would be bound to adore that God who "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will;" and who can, and certainly does bring the greatest good out of the greatest evil.

But there are various considerations which tend to justify the divine conduct, in this instance, to a candid enquirer. He can admire infinite wisdom, in giving a proof of the truth of christianity, of
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such a nature as to arrest the attention, not of individuals only, but of nations; not merely in one age, but in many successive ages. As this apostasy has been the source of great suffering to true christians, he knows that God hath judged it most proper that in the world they should have tribulation. From the extent and duration of this apostasy, from the vast variety of means employed for burying the truth, he is convinced that the power of God must have been signally exerted in its preservation. The depravity of human nature appears in a striking light. He perceives the inefficacy of all external means, and the absolute necessity of the power of the spirit for subduing it. He sees that God hath permitted this defection, as a punishment to those who would not "receive the love of the truth that they might be saved," and for the more eminent display of his justice in their condemnation; that, as the display of this perfection is necessary with respect to the church, as well as the rest of mankind, it is not surprising that the vials of his indignation should be poured on an apostate church, in so remarkable a manner as to astonish the nations. In a word, he considers this apostasy, together with its awful consequences, as a beacon erected by God, to deter his church, in these last times, from acknowledging any master but

Christ, and from blending herself with the kingdoms of this world.

This evil, however, is not confined to countries which are, or which have recently been under the dominion of Rome. Even among protestants, the progress of the Arian and Socinian heresies has greatly promoted the growth of Deism. I need not say, that the distinguishing character of the **ARIAN** system lies in its making Christ to be a mere creature, although the first and greatest of all the creatures of God. The progress that this doctrine has made in England, for nearly a century past, is as well known as the doctrine itself. Now, it directly tends to sap the very foundation of Christianity. Jesus hath said: "upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*." By the rock here mentioned, protestants have understood, either the doctrine of his proper deity, as confessed by Peter, in the language to which these words immediately refer; or the person of Christ. But according to the Arian system neither of these can be the foundation of the church. Not the former. For its abettors deny the true and supreme deity of the Son of God. Nor the latter. For then the church would be built

* Matt. xvi. 18.

built on a creature;—an absurdity which the true church of Christ hath left to Antichrist. Indeed, if it be a creature-foundation, it would signify little, whether it were Peter or his master. In either case, the foundation would be a rock which might be “removed out of its place;” and there would be no security that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. The Arian creed is loaded with an absurdity unknown to the Popish. It exhibits a mere creature as, not only the basis, but the builder; nay, the proprietor of the church. For Jesus says; “On this rock will I *build* my church.”

Were any intelligent Deist, investigating the evidence of christianity, to form his estimate of its doctrine from the Arian explanation, its glaring absurdity would instantly shock his reason, and would probably prejudice him against any further inquiry. He flatters himself that reason hath taught him the folly of Polytheism. But when he hears an Arian gravely discoursing of a supreme, and of a secondary God; he blesses himself, that he is so much farther removed from Polytheism, than those who lay claim to a divine revelation for such absurdities. “If the christian,” may he say, “can boast no better revelation than this, the God of nature is the only God whom I will serve.”

But this system throws another obstacle in his way. "Reason," may he say, "teaches me in the clearest manner, that God is that supreme Power who gave being to all, and who derived his being from none. Under the direction of this internal monitor, I trace up the diversified streams of created existence to the eternal fountain; I ascend from cause to cause, till I am arrested by one cause, which I must necessarily believe to be the first. But here is a system, pretending to be a revelation from heaven, which tells me of a made God, of a created creator; that is of a *first* cause that owed his being to a *former* cause. If I listen to this doctrine, instead of leading me to truth, it will plunge me into Atheism. For it makes me totally lose sight of a *First cause*, by depriving him of those very characters which give rise to the name."

But the Socinian scheme hath contributed still more liberally to infidelity. The revival of this ancient heresy was nearly of the same date with the Reformation, and seems to have been one great device of Satan, for marring the success of the Gospel to those who renounced the yoke of Rome.

To a Deist, it seems hardly credible that a Socinian can be sincere in his profession of Christianity. He perceives that what has been improperly called

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the *Unitarian* system, in a great variety of instances flatly contradicts the Scriptures. It is vain for a Socinian to tell him, that he must not understand their language according to the literal and obvious meaning; that it is replete with allegories and hyperboles; and that a profound knowledge of the original languages, of the customs of ancient nations, and of their peculiar idioms, is requisite for preventing those mistakes into which a careless or illiterate reader will necessarily fall. "This pretended revelation," will the Deist reply, "carries its own confutation on the very face of it. If we can suppose God to reveal himself to his creatures, he must certainly intend to make known his will in the clearest manner, to all who are disposed to understand it. Unless he give a new revelation in every age, and to every distinct nation; he must reveal himself so as to be understood in the successive generations of men, and by those of different nations, if his language be justly translated,—to be understood by the illiterate, as well as by the learned; else the end of this revelation is lost to by far the greatest part of mankind. That, then, cannot be a revelation from God, which is destitute of simplicity and perspicuity. This book informs me; that Jesus is a Saviour, a Redeemer; that the very name Jesus is given him, because he saves his people

ple from their sins; that he was cut off, but not for himself; that God laid on him the iniquities of us all; that he bare our sins; that he suffered, the just for the unjust; that he was made a curse for us, &c. All these expressions, and others without number, point out, in the plainest terms, the substitution of one person in the place of others, of an innocent person instead of the guilty. Yet you assure me, that nothing of the kind is meant. If *you* interpret justly, there certainly never was a book that so directly tended to mislead mankind, to mislead them in matters of the last importance, to mislead them under the pretence of being the only book that can point out the right way."

The Bible, as explained by Socinians, does not answer one of the principal *ends* of a divine revelation: for it does not properly distinguish God from his creatures. Giving that glory to the creature, which is due to the Creator only, was the source of Polytheism. If God reveal himself to man, we may naturally suppose that he will employ the most proper means for preventing so dreadful a mistake. But Socinians assert that created angels have been permitted to personate the Divine Being, to assume his names, even those which are reckoned most distinctive, and to clothe themselves with his glorious attributes, at the very time that they

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Have been employed as his messengers in communicating this revelation to men. According to this system, these beings have received that worship, which was meant by the mistaken devotees for their creator, who, as they fondly imagined, immediately addressed them. These philosophical Christians tell us, that a mere man may, in some cases, be the object of prayer; that a mere man may be called JEHOVAH, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, &c.; and their predecessors fairly acknowledged that Jesus, although still a mere man, was "a true, and not an imaginary God."

But this revelation, although its author were more easily distinguishable from his creatures, as it is explained by Socinians, derogates greatly from his dignity. "I can form no idea of a Supreme Being," may the Deist say, "but as every where present. But you inform me that, although his power extends universally, he is limited as to his essence;—an absurdity totally repugnant to reason. For, whence proceeds the universality of his influence, but from the immensity of his being? I am convinced that I cannot by searching find out God; and in this confession I have the concurrence of the greatest sages of antiquity. But you assure me that, upon your plan, this is a very easy matter. I have not gone so far as to deny the immutability
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of virtue. Time and place cannot alter the nature of what is morally right or wrong. But if I take your authority for it, the moral law has undergone a considerable change already, and the probability of its being subjected to a future change is with me no great inducement to obedience. Though I cannot yet perceive sufficient evidence of a divine revelation, it seems most consonant to reason, that the First Cause should be infinitely remote from matter. But some of your Rabbies have ascribed bodily parts to the Deity. Others believe that angels are his organs or instruments, occasionally emitted from his essence; and afterwards absorbed by it. Is he not then, according to you, a being capable of expansion and dilation; and therefore, in the strictest sense of the term, material? I have no occasion for such a revelation as you recommend, for giving me just notions of Deity. The light of nature is a superior guide."

This scheme releases men from one of the strongest *motives* to respect for a divine revelation. This is fear of punishment. It asserts the annihilation of the wicked. Now, to the unthinking part of mankind, this will scarcely seem to deserve the name of punishment. Nay, perhaps it is what the generality of wicked men would wish, in preference to the risk of a future state. Could they
once

once believe this doctrine, how would they apply it? Just in the old atheistical way; "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." The same instructors earnestly assure them that the Devil, whom they have been taught to dread as the instrument in punishing, has never had any existence, but in the reveries of fools, or in the knavery of priests. But methinks I see the Deist smile, I hear him say; "Gentlemen, you carry the jest a little too far. If this doctrine be true, what use can there be for men of your character? According to the Scriptures, those, whom you claim as your predecessors, received their commission for the very purpose of opposing this *enemy*, and of bringing destruction on his kingdom. *Diana* and her *craftsmen* ought certainly to go in company."

Indeed, the doctrine of *annihilation* greatly enfeebles that of a future state in any sense. While Scripture gives no more certain evidence of eternal blessedness than of eternal misery; all nations have connected the ideas of reward and punishment as inseparable. It will therefore be found that you cannot withdraw the one, without relaxing the force of the other. Socinianism, in this respect, may lead one who has made a profession of Christianity to Deism of the worst kind, to what has been called *mortal* Deism: but it will never pre-
dice

dice a Deist in favour of Christianity. He will certainly give the preference, either to that system of heathenism which asserts a future state of both happiness and misery; or to that which leaves both equally in doubt.

Socinianism greatly curtails the *evidence* of revelation. The church of Christ hath still appealed to *miracles*, as one great external proof of the truth of Christianity. Socinians themselves admit that this is a powerful argument. But they, at the same time, do all in their power to render it doubtful. Nothing is more evident from Scripture, than that the birth of the Messiah is foretold as the fruit of a miracle; that the manner of his conception is predicted as “a new thing in the earth.” Yet the generality of modern Socinians seem to deny this miraculous attestation of the very dawn of the Christian æra: and some of them have presumed to say, that the history of our Saviour’s conception, as recorded in the Gospels, “has all the air of an ill-digested story.” The power exercised by Jesus, and communicated by him to his servants, in casting out devils, has been generally accounted by Christians one of the most illustrious proofs of the truth of his religion, and one of the most convincing signs of his victory over Satan, and of his infinite superiority to those very spirits whom the heathen

heathen worshipped. But Socinians tell us, that those "called Demoniacs were merely lunatics." * According to this hypothesis, it must be supposed that the disease of *lunacy* was transferred to the swine of the Gadarenes. However, in order to prevent this objection, we are informed that "there may be some *mistake* in the narrative about Legion." †

The accomplishment of *prophecy* has still been urged, in reasoning with Deists, as another incontestable proof of the divine authority of Scripture. But there can be no force in this argument, save on the supposition of the *certainty* of divine prescience. What sort of argument can this be in the hand of a Socinian, who limits the foreknowledge of God, and asserts that he predicts future contingencies only in the way of conjecture as to what is most probable? This limitation destroys the whole force of the argument. The Deist may fairly reply: "By your own confession, your God foreknows only some future events. But do not many Christians admit that some things foretold by heathen deities, or by their priests, have actually taken place? Do they not acknowledge that a departed spirit, or that the devil in the likeness of Samuel, foretold the defeat and death of Saul? If only some future events

* Priestley's Institutes, vol. ii. p. 438.

† Ibid.

events are certainly foreknown to the God of Christians, in what does his knowledge surpass that of the heathen deities, or of created spirits? Admit that many things, said to be predicted in Scripture, have come to pass, what evidence can this be of its claim to the character of a divine revelation, in preference to that of many others which you scornfully reject? Such things may have been foretold merely in consequence of sagacious conjecture. But can this prove the divine origin of the predictions? In vain do you tell me, that, although all future events are not certainly foreseen and foretold, some are. I can never acknowledge him as *the only wise God*, who is partially ignorant. Almost every human event depends so much on contingency, that, according to your theory, it will be hard for you to select one which can be called absolutely certain."

As the Socinian scheme weakens the evidence of the reality of revelation, it also subverts some of the strongest proofs of its *necessity*. The insufficiency of the light of nature to discover the origin of moral evil, has still been urged as a striking proof of its imperfection as a guide to happiness. I need scarcely take time to shew, that the knowledge of the origin of sin is of the greatest importance in regard to salvation. How can we otherwise make any proper estimate of its evil? How can we know

where we are to lay the blame of it? Must we not be absolutely bewildered in our apprehensions with respect to the divine perfections; particularly his wisdom, holiness, justice and goodness; while we find it impossible to account for the existence of sin? What plan can we pursue for subduing our corruptions, while at a loss to know whether the body or the soul be their proper fountain; or, whether they belong to the essence of the latter or not? * The absurd and contradictory opinions of the heathen on this subject are well known. Some of them ascribed the origin of moral evil to matter, accounting it eternal, and beyond the reach of divine power. Others supposed the existence of two first principles, the one good and the other evil, acting in perpetual opposition to each other. Not to mention a variety of other opinions; the mythological story of all evil originating from Pandora's box, was just as rational as either of these. Nor are deists more at unison on this subject. Some have ascribed the origin of sin to the imperfection of reason; others, to the will being formed in a

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state

* See Haliburton's *Natural Religion Insufficient*, p. 67. —a book, not surpassed, if equalled by any of the numerous *anti-deistical* writings that have appeared since the time of its publication; and which has this special excellency, that it carries the war into the camp of the adversary.

state of absolute indifference to good or evil; and not a few, to a fatal necessity.

But in vain would Socinians, according to their view of revelation, attempt to recommend it to Heathens or to Deists, as giving a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. For while they endeavour to set aside the history of the fall as a mere allegory, they affirm that man was originally created with a bias of passion tending to lead him astray from duty. What is this, but to assert that the seeds of sin were implanted in his constitution? No Deist, who has not gone the length of blind fatality, will reckon that a revelation from God, which gives such a shocking account of the origin of moral evil. "My reason," may he say, "has rejected other systems, because they seemed to derogate from divine perfection: and shall I at length embrace one which is chargeable with such impiety as to make God the author of sin?"

But Socinianism, in another respect, greatly obscures the evidence of the necessity of revelation. Almost every heathen nation has found it impossible to give a satisfactory answer to that question, which an awakened conscience has so often proposed; "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, or bow myself before the most high God?" The history of the most enlightened heathens clearly
shows

shews that, although they might rest satisfied with their usual rites in ordinary cases, they were sensible, on any great emergency, of a defect in their worship, which all their ingenuity could not supply. Neither their sorrow, nor their sacrifices could set their consciences at rest. They would never have thought of "giving their first-born for their transgression, or the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul," had they not been convinced that offended justice required some satisfaction, the true nature and extent of which they had never hitherto discovered: Socrates advised Alcibiades to abstain from worship, till some one should teach him the proper way. Upon being asked who this might be, he replied; "He will do it, who exercises a true care about you." Jamblicus, the Platonic philosopher, expresses the same sentiment. "It is not easy," he says, "to know what God will be pleased with, unless we be either immediately instructed by God ourselves, or taught by some person whom God hath conversed with, or attain the knowledge of it by some divine means or other *." Even Lucretius says,

—At mens sibi conscia facti
Præmetuens adhibet stimulos, terretque flagellis,
Nec videt interea, qui terminus esse malorum

Possit, nec qui sit pœnarum denique finis,
 Atque eadem metuit magis hæc ne in morte gra-
 vescant.

LIB. III.

Now, Socinians deny the necessity of any other *atonement* for sins than what is supposed to lie in the repentance of the sinner. But this is the very doctrine which Deists have all along maintained, in arguing against the necessity of a divine revelation. They have also urged, with equal obstinacy, that the light of nature teaches them the necessity of such an atonement. But Deists may justly reply; "You can have no other reason for denying this, than to retain some shadow of a pretence for the necessity of a revelation. It is certain, however, that you christians are not agreed among yourselves as to this point. Some of your most intelligent writers have ascribed all this extent to the religion of nature. The learned Locke, who has generally been considered as an abettor of the Socinian system, has candidly acknowledged, that the God of patience and consolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail offspring, if they acknowledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned to be just and right: and that this way of reconciliation,

reconciliation, this hope of atonement, *the Light of nature revealed to them* *."

The Socinian doctrine makes *Reason* the test of all divine truth, and the supreme judge in all controversies in religion. The true friends of revelation have still maintained that, although it contains nothing really contradictory to reason, it demands our assent to many things far above its level. Those Deists, who have given themselves the trouble to look into the holy Scriptures, must be convinced that the latter is true. That subjection of understanding, which the oracles of truth require, is undoubtedly one great source of their prejudice against them. To the "wise in this world," the gospel of Christ hath still appeared foolishness. They perceive that they must become fools, before they can be initiated in this wisdom. Therefore, when Socinians tell them that reason is capable of judging of every doctrine of revelation, it must appear that they really contradict those very writings which they profess to recommend as divine. Were they convinced that reason were as much enfeebled and depraved as many christians assert, they could not refuse the necessity of revelation. But Socinians supply them with wea-

* Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 255, 256.

pons to be turned against themselves. "You tell us," may they say, "that every man is born in the same state in which Adam was created; that reason is capable to judge of every thing revealed. Where, then, is the necessity for a revelation? It must be supposed that God would reveal the knowledge of his nature and perfections, only in consequence of man being so weak, or so depraved, as to be incapable of himself to discover these things. But if reason be able fully to comprehend every doctrine which is supposed to be revealed, every such doctrine must have been discoverable by reason. If I have a right to reject what seems, according to the plain meaning of language, to be taught in scripture, merely because it transcends my comprehension, revelation can teach me nothing, which, if I did not actually know, I might not have known before."

According to this scheme, the obligation to receive the doctrines of revealed religion must be in exact proportion to the various degrees of reason in different men. There can be no certain system of truth; no "common faith." One receives one doctrine, because he understands it, although rejected by another as a gross absurdity: while this other receives another doctrine which appears equally absurd to the former. Yet all this diversifi-

ty, nay, contradiction necessarily flows from that test of divine truth supposed to be established by God himself; and must therefore be well pleasing to him. Thus, while popery grants too little to reason, to make men stedfast friends to revelation, because it requires a firm assent to palpable contradictions; the doctrine of Socinus errs as far on the other extreme, by granting too much.

Nothing less can be implied in the idea of a revelation from God, if committed to writing, than that those who wrote it were under a divine *inspiration*. It may be supposed, that God might act very differently on the minds of the sacred penmen, according to the diversity of subjects. But the least that the idea of inspiration can imply, is that of their being absolutely preserved from every error and mistake. Socinians, however, deny a *plenary* and *proper* inspiration to many parts of scripture. They suppose that, in the historical parts, the writers were inspired in narrating great and important facts, but left to themselves in matters of less moment. Thence they admit, not merely apparent, but real contradictions in the word of God. They pretend that the sacred writers were infallibly directed with respect to the great doctrines of christianity; but that their reasonings on these were merely the fruit of their own reflections; and therefore, that they
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are often inconclusive. Indeed, it seems highly doubtful, whether they believe any kind of inspiration. Let us hear one of their most distinguished writers. When replying to the Deistical objection to the truth of revelation; from its pretended inconsistencies, he says: "The contents of these books may be true *in the main*, notwithstanding such inconsistencies and mistakes." And again; "Let us read the canonical books, without expecting to find them perfectly unexceptionable in all the *minutiae* of things. Let us consider them as the productions of honest and faithful men, well informed of all the great things of which they wrote, but not equally informed with respect to every punctilio they mention. Let us consider the great doctrines they deliver as from God to be divine, and worthy of our highest regard; but when they argue and reason either from facts or from revealed doctrines, advancing opinions which are plainly their own, and for which they do not pretend to have the authority of revelation, let us consider them as the reasonings and opinions of men in their situation, and with their means of information, which were in general very ample and sufficient, but still left them *fallible*, and treat them accordingly *."

O infatuated

* Priestley's Institutes, vol. ii. p. 48, 49.

O infatuated men ! “ who hath bewitched you ? ” Is it not enough that you deny the great doctrines of christianity ; that you do every thing in your power to subvert the most cogent arguments for the *necessity* of revelation. Must you give it a fatal wound ; by also denying its *reality* ? In pretending to defend revelation, you betray it to its adversaries. You admit that there are *inconsistencies* and *mistakes* in the *canon* of scripture. How, then, can it deserve the name ? How can it be a *rule* of faith, or of manners ? If the penmen of scripture were not *equally informed* as to facts of less importance which it concerned the church to know, their information must have been entirely human. They did not enjoy the influences of that spirit, who, according to their own accounts, was promised them by Jesus. For he was to *guide them into all truth* *. Are our own understandings to be judges of the *treatment* we are to give to the *reasonings* and *opinions* of these writers ? What tie, then, can their doctrine have on conscience ? Every man must have a right to believe or disbelieve, to obey or disobey, as he thinks proper. Do you not directly give the lie to those very writings which you profess to acknowledge ? According to you, not “ all scripture,” but only some part of it, “ is given by inspiration of

* John xvi. 13.

of God." "All" of it is not "profitable." There must be no inconsiderable portion that is pernicious, as containing inconsistencies and mistakes, inconclusive reasonings and ill-digested stories. Do you really expect to persuade men to believe the truth of a revelation from God, by doing your utmost to shew them, that what you receive under this character is in fact no revelation, but a mixture of truth and falsehood, of sound doctrine and error? The attempt is vain. All that remains for you is, either to return to the true faith of christians; or, as many once belonging to your class have done, honestly to assume the character of deists.

Socinianism is indeed the high-way to deism. To an intelligent deist, the socinian must appear as a fellow traveller, who has accompanied him all along during his journey, but is seized with a sudden remorse, and at once stops short, when the end of it is in view;—stops short, without any apparent reason, or any proper resting-place. He may justly say to them: "Your faith is more absurd than that of any other christian. You ought either to believe more with respect to revelation, or to believe nothing. You give revelation as a mistress to reason: yet you allow the servant to dispute all the dictates of the mistress. You reject
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what have been called the mysteries of christianity. But you certainly substitute others. You deny that Jesus is the Son of God, as being of the same essence with the Father; because this doctrine is, in your estimation, a contradiction to reason. Yet you believe a thing fully as incredible; that a mere man can have "all power in heaven and in earth." You refuse that a divine person was incarnate: but you admit that the deity dwelt in the man Jesus. You deny that your saviour is omniscient: yet you believe that he will judge all the millions who have existed, or who shall exist. You urge the argument from miracles, but blush at the idea of Jesus casting out devils. You make *madmen*, as you call them, who never saw nor heard of Jesus before, as well acquainted with his person and character as any of his disciples. You call us to believe in the scriptures as a divine revelation, while you acknowledge that they contain many errors and mistakes; that is, while you acknowledge that they are destitute of the great evidence of being a divine revelation. You may as well bid us believe the infallibility of the papal chair; although the bull, that is issued to-day, flatly contradicts that which was issued yesterday."

That famous deist, Voltaire, was too quick-sighted not to discern the affinity of focinians. "A
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number of celebrated writers," he says, "have made open profession of deism; and most of the Socinians, have at length joined them. The great reproach against this numerous sect, is, That they consult only reason, without any regard to faith; an indocility which a christian can never forgive.—Hitherto only a very small number of those called unitarians, have held any religious meetings. But these, indeed, stile themselves primitive christians, rather than deists*." It has been justly observed, that this compliment was paid them by Voltaire, "when few of their sect merited it so well, as many of the German, and some of the English modern reformers have since done†." But this acute infidel distinctly saw the native tendency of their scheme. I have elsewhere shown that the celebrated Gibbon, one of the most insidious enemies of christianity, exhibits them in the same light‡.

CHAP.

* Additions to Voltaire's General History, Vol. IV. Edin. Edit. 1777. p. 243, 244.

† Dr Erskine's Sketches and Hints of Church History, p. 69, 70.

‡ Vindication of the Doctrine of Scripture, and of the Primitive Faith, concerning the Deity of Christ, Vol. II. p. 477.

CHAP. II.

The influence of the arminian system. Its connexion with socinianism; and with popery. The policy of Rome for the destruction of the protestant religion.—The more immediate influence of arminianism, as it respects fundamental articles, the state of the heathen in regard to salvation, the reason of faith, the depravity of human nature, divine sovereignty, free-will, and the operations of the spirit.

WHILE Socinians have contributed so liberally, to the support, and even to the spread of deism, ARMINIANS cannot be entirely acquitted from the charge of encouraging the same system. I am far from supposing that they have had any design to do so. I will not presume to impute this even to socinians. I am abundantly sensible that the christian world is indebted to arminian writers for many valuable works against the deists. In these, they have shewn the insufficiency of the light of nature in a variety of respects, and done much to illustrate some of the evidences of christianity. But, in this important controversy, they have been necessarily crippled by the peculiarities of their system.

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They are convinced of the tendency of the *focinian* scheme to support infidelity. But in as far as their own leads to focinianism, it must eventually have the same fatal tendency. They may not indeed perceive, that it is friendly to focinianism. But the fact is indisputable. The denial of absolute predestination necessarily leads to the denial of divine prescience. For, as "faith is not of ourselves, but the gift of God," it is impossible that he could certainly foresee that some should believe, without a certain determination to confer on them this "good gift."—The doctrine of universal redemption directly tends to the denial of the atonement. For if many, for whom Christ died, finally perish, it must follow that a sufficient satisfaction was not made for their sins. If the full price of their redemption was paid, why are they not liberated? If this work fails as to any, the ransom was not of infinite value; and he who paid it could not be the Son of God.—The denial of the perseverance of the saints has the same issue with the doctrine of universal redemption. It supposes, either a failure as to purchase, or a defect as to the power necessary for the preservation of the redeemed.—If the will of man, in his natural state, retain a freedom to what is truly good, it will be difficult to prove that his understanding should not also know

know it; and of consequence, that any work of the spirit is necessary. If the act of his own will make him to differ from others, and be the immediate cause of his justification, the socinian doctrine must be true, that a man is justified by his own works. "But if righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain."—If the spirit may be resisted in his gracious operations on the heart, it follows, that our salvation is more a human, than a divine work which is the very soul of the socinian scheme. For, in any business, that must be the principal, which is eventually victorious.

It is certain, that the steady prosecution of arminian principles has landed many learned and able writers in downright socinianism: while *perhaps* there is not an instance of one, who has adhered to the doctrines called calvinistic, making a transition to the socinian system, without taking arminianism in his way. Such was the effect of the errors of Arminius in Holland, that many, who did not plainly avow their accession to the Racovian school, very soon assimilated their tenets to it, as nearly as they could without assuming the name.

The tendency of *popery* to support infidelity has been already seen. But popery has been greatly indebted to arminianism. I need scarcely say that this scheme, although it has received its name

from Arminius, as he was the great instrument of its propagation among protestants, had been adopted, as an essential part of the antichristian system, long before Arminius had a being. The doctrines of predestination on the ground of foreseen faith and good works, of the self-determining power of the will in conversion, of the possibility of resisting efficacious grace, and of perseverance as the effect of our own goodness, necessarily open a wide door to creature-merit. But the doctrine of merit is the great basis of the antichristian fabric. The complicated system of indulgencies, dispensations and pardons, of prayers for the dead, and to the dead, of penances and pilgrimages, nay, of purgatory itself, rests on this broad foundation. What, but this inexhaustible mine of spiritual riches, has made Rome the mistress of the drossy treasures of nations? Therefore, we need not be surprised, that she hath still kept the doctrines formerly mentioned as the apple of her eye; that she hath reserved her fulminations, and kindled her fires, for all who dared irreverently to touch them. From the history of the church during the dark ages, it appears undeniably, that in general, those who opposed the tyranny of antichrist, equally opposed the doctrines now called arminian; and that they were condemned as heretics, and suffered as martyrs,

on this ground as well as on the other *. Need I say, that, under God, the great mean of the glorious reformation was the faithful preaching of justification through the righteousness of Christ alone, to the exclusion of faith itself considered as a work, or as having the least degree of merit? Nothing is more certain, than that however much the worthy reformers differed in other respects, they all cordially agreed in leaving to "the mother of harlots" the corrupt spawn of Pelagius, as her natural property. Not only the writings of the reformers, but the confessions of all the protestant churches, however different their tongues, however distant their situations, however adverse their rites and discipline, will stand to the end of time, as irrefragable proofs of the unity of their faith as to salvation by sovereign grace.

When the doctrine of freewill began to be broached by some who called themselves protestants in England, the friends of the reformation were filled with the greatest alarm. They feared this single doctrine more than all the fires and faggots of Rome. Thence, that holy martyr Bradford and others, in their letter on this subject to

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* See Toplady's Calvinism of the church of England, Vol. I. p. 149, &c. a book worthy of the serious perusal of every protestant.

Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, express themselves thus. "The effects of salvation they (the freewillers, as they were called) so mingle and confound with the cause, that, if it be not seen to, more hurt will come by them, than ever came by the papists.—In freewill, they are plain papists; yea, pelagians: and ye know that *modicum fermenti totam massam corrumpit* *."

Were the pelagian doctrines so signally instrumental in the erection and support of the antichristian kingdom? Its earthly superior has discovered the wisdom of the serpent, in attempting to "heal his deadly wound" by the very same means. Even that learned Jesuit, Petavius, acknowledges that the famous council of Trent was called together, to oppose the errors of Calvin, as much as those of Luther †. The virulence, and the variety of their decrees, in opposition to the doctrine of grace, plainly shew their full conviction that this doctrine made the throne of antichrist tremble at its base. Soon after the dawn of the reformation, appeared Ignatius Loyola, the father of the Jesuits, who exerted himself to the utmost of human power to support this tottering throne. Two great lines ap-
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* A little leaveneth the whole lump. See Toplady, as above, p. 439, 440.

† Rationarium Temp. p. 1. lib. 9. c. 12.

pear in the formation of this extraordinary society; blind devotion for the pope, and unparalleled zeal for freewill and its kindred articles. In consequence of the latter trait in their character, they have not only been the warmest antagonists of all without the pale of their church, but the most bitter enemies of all within it, who have held the opposite doctrine. Thence, their unrelenting persecution of the Jansenists in France, who were considered as traitors to the interests of Rome, because of their adherence to the doctrine of grace; although they scornfully disclaimed the name of calvinists, and were in other respects zealous catholics. Thence their adversaries could not rest, till they got their doctrines condemned as heretical; the leaders of the party deprived and imprisoned, or banished; and a decree passed, that all, whether clergy or laity, should formally abjure sentiments which threatened the very existence of the holy mother church.

As this has been the interior policy of Rome, it may not be improper to attend to her mode of management without her pale. There is every reason to believe, that the publication of arminian doctrine in the church of England, was the result of Jesuitical craft. When Archbishop Laud's papers were examined, a letter was found among them,

them, thus indorsed with his own hand; *March 1628. A Jesuit's Letter, sent to the Rector of Brussels, about the ensuing Parliament.* The design of the letter was to comfort the heart of his superior, who might be apt to fear that the unexpected calling of a parliament would blast all the schemes formed in England for the restoration of popery. To shew that there was no reason for despondency, he says: "We have now many strings to our bow. — We have planted that soveraigne drugge, ARMINIANISME; which, we hope, will purge the protestants from their heresie: and it flourisheth and beares fruit in due season. — I am, at this time, transported with joy, to see how happily all instruments and means, as well great as lesser, co-operate unto our purposes. But, to return unto the *main fabricke*: OUR FOUNDATION IS ARMINIANISME*."

Even Heylin, blindly as he was devoted to the ruling party, acknowledges the justness of the statement given by another jesuit of that age, who expressed himself in the following terms: "Protestantism waxeth weary of itself. The doctrine is altered in many things for which their progenitors forsook the church (of Rome): as, *Limbus Patrum; Prayer for the Dead; the Possibility of keeping God's commandments*:"

* Rushworth's Collect. Part I. p. 62. 475. Toplady's Calvinism, &c. Vol. I. Introd. p. xxxviii.

commandments ; and the accounting of CALVINISM to be HERESY at least, if not TREASON.*" The learned and judicious Haliburton observes on this subject, that the jealousies of many discerning people were considerably increased, when it was seen with what violence the abettors of this new divinity appeared against the more moderate part of the church of England, as well as the dissenters, upon the account of some ceremonies, owned by themselves as indifferent in their own nature : while, at the same time, they expressed a great deal of tenderness, if not respect to the church of Rome, and made proposals of union with her.†" Here I shall only subjoin the words of an historian : "The churches were adorned with paintings, images, altar-pieces, &c. and, instead of communion-tables, altars were set up, and bowings to them and the sacramental elements enjoined. The predestinarian doctrines were forbid, not only to be preached, but to be printed : and the arminian sense of the articles was encouraged and propagated‡." Thus arminianism was introduced as the body of popery, and a new fleece of superstitious ceremonies as her proper garb.

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* Life of Laud, p. 238.

† Natural Religion Insufficient, p. 23.

‡ Tindal's continuation of Rapin's Hist. Vol. III. Oct.

It is well known to those who are acquainted with the history of the church of Scotland, that the learned and eminently pious Rutherford was, A. 1636, banished by the high commission court from his parish; discharged from exercising any part of his ministry in Scotland, under pain of rebellion; and ordered to confine himself within the city of Aberdeen during the king's pleasure, where he continued for more than a year and a half. The principal reason of this tyrannical sentence, was his publishing *Exercitationes Apologeticae pro Divina Gratia*. We have his own testimony on this head. "The cause that ripened their hatred was my book against the arminians, whereof they accused me those *three days* I appeared before them*." He had been summoned to answer for this publication so early as the year 1630. But as the archbishop of St Andrew's was prevented, by tempestuous weather, from being present at the court, and as Mr Rutherford was befriended by one of the judges, the diet was deserted. This work was supposed to cut the very sinews of arminianism, which the jesuits acknowledged to be their *main fabricke*; and the court-party considered as indispensably necessary for consolidating their system of tyranny both in church and state.

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* Letters, Ep. I. p. r.

But while the Arminian system ultimately encourages deism, by its connexion with socinianism and popery; it, at the same time, operates more immediately: Arminians inform us, that they do not see how "it can be proved that the belief of any other *articles* is necessary to salvation, than of those few which are admitted by all" who are called christians *. They grant that these are *few*; and according to their limitation, they must be *few* indeed. The trinity, the incarnation, the atonement, regeneration, justification by faith alone, and all the other great doctrines of revelation are denied. Thus, those articles only, which respect the perfections of God, will be accounted fundamental. But even these are not left entire. Socinians deny his essential omnipresence, his omniscience, his immutability, his punitive justice. Some of these have been acknowledged by heathens, and are acknowledged by deists. But here is a plan of christianity, which releases them from the necessity of believing such articles.

The doctrine of arminians concerning the *heathen* has the same tendency. Some of them hold that the heathen may be saved, if they live according to the light of nature. This is merely a revival of the
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* Remonstrant. Apolog. ap. Haliburton, p. 23. Rhetor-
tortis Examen Arminianismi, c. 1.

old pelagian tenet, that "every one who was sincere in his own religion, would be saved." Others do not go so far; but assert, that those, who make a right use of the light of nature, entitle themselves to a communication of the light of grace*. They suppose that God imparts this in a way similar to that in which he deals with children within the pale of the church. But as we are not to be "wise above what is written," the language of inspiration must equally limit our charity. We are expressly assured that—"where no vision is the people perish †," that God will pour his fury on the "heathen, and on the families," or "kindreds that call not on his name ‡." The Ephesians, it may be supposed, were in general no worse than other heathens. Yet the apostle affirms that, while without the gospel, they "had no hope, and were without God," literally, "atheists in the world ||." For the spirit of truth, so far from admitting that heathens may serve the true God, expressly asserts, that they "know not God," but "do service to them that are no gods §." He declares, without any limitation, that "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God ¶." When human wisdom, aided only by the
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* Turretin. Theol. Loc. i. Qu. 4. † Prov. xxix. 18.

‡ Jer. x. 25. || Eph. ii. 12. § Gal. iv. 8. ¶ 1 Cor. x. 20.

light of nature, and by some faint glimmerings of tradition, had gone to its utmost stretch, in the famous schools of Greece and Rome, what estimate did the spirit of God form of it? That it had brought men nearer to the true God? The very reverse. “The world by wisdom *knew not God*.” What God may, or may not do, in an extraordinary way, we dare not pretend to say, where God himself hath not said it. But we are certain that, as there is not “another name under heaven given among men, by which we can be saved, but the name of Christ,” the scripture gives us no idea of the salvation of adults but by the outward means of grace. And with respect to the heathen it is expressly said: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher.—So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God †.”

Besides, this doctrine proceeds on a false ground. It supposes that heathens may be found, who live according to the law of nature. But scripture asserts the very contrary; that they are “without excuse,” that “they are all under sin ‡.”

Those who hold this doctrine, which imposes upon many under the notion of an amiable charity, unwittingly controvert the great evidences which

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* 1 Cor. i. 21. † Rom. x. 14, 17. ‡ Rom. i. 20. iii. 9.

the spirit of God hath given of the *necessity* of a revelation. The apostle of the Gentiles illustrates the necessity of "the revelation of the righteousness of God—to faith," from the consideration of his "wrath being revealed against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." This he applies immediately to the heathen; and primarily, because of their idolatry*. It is because there can be no faith without hearing, and no hearing without the word of God, that he introduces that prophetic language with respect to the ministers of Christ: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring good tidings of good things†." There is not one word in scripture, which exhibits the wisdom of God as procured by that of man, or the grace of Christ as superinduced upon heathen virtue. The one must be renounced as ignorance, and the other as unrighteousness, before God. The revelation of grace is represented, not as giving perfection to human wisdom, but as the remedy provided, in sovereign mercy, for those whom this wisdom hath blinded. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?"

* Rom. i. 18—28.

† Rom. x. 14, 15.

world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*." Did Jesus send his apostles to perfect what heathenism had begun? The commission of Paul runs in a very different strain. He was sent to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the kingdom of Satan unto God†."

This doctrine, how far soever it may be from the design of those who publish it, has certainly a great tendency to confirm professed christians in their indifference to the gospel. To declare that sinners may be saved without this revelation of grace, cannot be a cogent motive to the obedience of faith. This is not the way to recommend the great blessedness of "knowing the joyful sound." To ascribe as happy an effect to the darkness of heathenism as to this "marvellous light," may well lull sinners in their eternal security, but will never be the mean of awakening them to a due consideration of "the things that belong to their peace." It may make them wish that they had been born pagans; as thus they might have been saved on easier terms. But it will never excite them to bless God that their lot was cast in "the valley of vision."

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* 1 Cor. i. 19—21.

† Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

For certainly it is one of the first steps of the gracious operation of the spirit, deeply to affect the hearts of men with a sense of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour," in favouring them with precious light, without which they must have "sat in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death." Therefore, this charity for the heathen, however specious, bears not one mark of true charity to those who enjoy the gospel.

On the contrary, it obscures the wisdom of God in the work of salvation. If men may be saved by faith in a Mahomet, a Confucius, or a Zoroaster, why should not God have spared his own Son? Why did he "give him up to the death," if men could as certainly enjoy eternal life any other way? Under pretence of ascribing the greatest benevolence to God, it denies the peculiar glory of this benevolence. It denies the freedom of its operation. All must indiscriminately partake of it, who have lived soberly, whether believers in the Son of God, or in the false prophet, whether they have worshipped the true God, or worshipped devils. According to this doctrine, the grace of the gospel deserves not the name of grace, unless it run in every devious or polluted channel formed by the vanity of the human mind, as certainly and copiously as in that of the blood of the Lamb.

It is easily conceivable that the mind, under this delusive system of charity, may make the most rapid progress to infidelity. We have seen that it necessarily disparages the gospel revelation, and directly tends to strengthen our natural disregard for it, by denying it to be a distinguishing mercy. It also pours contempt on the great doctrines of faith, and prepares the mind for the rejection of all mystery in revealed religion. It becomes necessary to explain away the meaning of many passages of Scripture, that express the contrary, some of which have been already mentioned. Thus, a man is led to "handle the word of God deceitfully." If he finds it difficult to avert the force of these, he perhaps entertains a secret disgust at revelation, because it does not so easily bend to his system, as he could wish. He may adhere to it for a while, struggling between its natural meaning, and the contrary dictates of his own mind; conscience secretly whispering the truth, and his perverse will opposing it. But let a temptation enter from another quarter, he will find it an easy matter to quit his hold of that religion which seems irreconcilable with his feelings, and at once to embrace a system more perfectly in unison with his boasted liberality.

Yet this extreme, like many others, works its own cure. We perceive the folly of this sort of

charity, from the length to which it has carried some who have consistently followed its dictates. While it professes the most ardent love to man, it gives a sanction to those deeds which are most abhorrent to humanity. Under pretence of exhibiting God as a being of pure benevolence, it represents him as taking pleasure in horrid cruelty. Thus Steinbart, whose doctrines have of late attracted much attention on the continent, asserts that even in such heathenish rites as that of a king offering his only son to Molech, in a time of national calamity, the good exceeds the evil; that, by the religion and patriotism of such actions, heathens have set an example to christians; that there is nothing in such a sacrifice, on the ground of which they could be pronounced guilty; nay, that it may be reckoned among the most worthy actions of men, comparable to, which few are to be met with among christians. *

It has been formerly observed that writers of the arminian persuasion have been serviceable to the church,

* Steinbart *Leere der gelukzaligheid*, (or, *Doctrine of Salvation*,) §. 20. See also Mebins' *Verhandeling over de eenheid van den weg der gelukzaligheid*, in deezen staat van algemeen bederf, (or, *Dissertation on the unity of the way of salvation, in this state of universal corruption*,) §. 13. This Dissertation obtained the prize given by the Hague Society for the defence of the Christian Religion, A. 1790.

church, in illustrating various *arguments* in defence of revelation. But, from the nature of their system, they have necessarily failed as to the principal one. Arguments of a rational kind, in support of christianity, may produce a rational faith. But a divine faith can only flow from a view of the divine perfection and authority impressed on the word, and manifesting itself to the soul by the operation of the holy spirit who indited it. This alone can support the christian during the rage of corruption or temptation, when he loses sight of every other argument. Many arminian writers speak as if the proper ground of faith, in the apostolic age, had been the evidence of miracles; and seem to suppose that the great evidence, which we, in these later ages, have of the authenticity of scripture, is the testimony of the inspired writers, viewed as men of unexceptionable characters. But this faith, whether we consider its immediate object, or its origin, is merely of a human kind; and is essentially different from that which is “of the operation of God.”

Undoubtedly, one of the most forcible arguments for the necessity of a revelation, is the depravity of human nature. There are two characters of the christian revelation, which powerfully recommend it as divine; its efficacy in giving the
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finner such a display of his spiritual necessities as experience exactly verifies, and its exhibition of a salvation perfectly commensurate to these necessities. Men may be at first shocked at the strong language of scripture in regard to themselves, and endeavour to explain it away as much to the honour of human nature as possible. But if they give due attention to the word, they will find that it not only declares the truth as to what in their situation is too plain to be denied; but that it shews them a spiritual deformity in their hearts and practice of which they formerly had not the least conception; and discovers this so clearly, that they can no more deny it than those facts which they learned from the dictates of a natural conscience. They, at the same time, perceive that the word of God exhibits a salvation of the very same extent with their greatly varied necessities; that this salvation wants nothing which they need, and that it has nothing superfluous. If at any time they discover a spiritual disease which was formerly hid, they may be at first in danger of supposing that their case is unexampled. But eventually, the discovery of this new disease proves only the occasion of their being more fully confirmed in the all-healing efficacy of the divine word.

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But, according to the arminian scheme, the force of such reasoning is lost. While those who fairly follow the foot steps of Pelagius, absolutely deny original sin; the substance of his heresy is adopted by arminians. If, as many of them affirm, man has no occasion for the gracious illumination of the spirit, in order to a right understanding of the scriptures*; if his will retains an inclination to what is truly and spiritually good, and a power of determining itself to the choice of this; if he can do something to merit justification; the fall has done him no great injury. This view of human depravity will never convince men of the necessity of revelation. It cannot be supposed that arminians should successfully recommend the word of God to infidels, as what can alone acquaint them with their spiritual wants; while it costs themselves such labour and ingenuity to explain away a great variety of passages on this subject, which flatly contradict their system.

Their denial of the *sovereignty* of God in election affords a great handle to deists. The plan can never make revelation in general more palatable to the carnal-mind. For to be consistent, it ought to go a great way farther. By the strong language used against the doctrine of particular election, arminians

* Rhetorfort. Examen Armin. p. 83.

minians only open the way for others, to attack the divine sovereignty with respect to angels. Is not this perfection of deity as much displayed in passing by all "the angels who kept not their first estate," as in the proterition of some of the lost family of Adam? Can it be said that the one is irreconcilable with infinite justice, without arraighing the same attribute in respect to the other? arminians admit the election of particular nations to the enjoyment of the means of grace, while they deny that of particular persons to the enjoyment of grace itself. To countenance this absurdity, they suppose another,—a possibility of salvation without these means, that is, a possibility of receiving the grace of God in another way than that to which he hath expressly restricted its operation. But the vanity of this idea has been already considered.

By impartial judges, the denial of *particular election* can be viewed in no other light, than as a tacit crimination of the justice of God in his conduct towards nations. If the great potter hath not a right to make his vessels as he pleases, what right could he have to choose the Jews to the means of salvation, and to leave all other nations "to walk in their own ways," "without hope, and without God in the world?" If we sincerely receive the scriptures ourselves, or wish to recommend them

to others, as a divine revelation, we must receive them as they really are, and not reject one doctrine, while we assent to others equally obnoxious to reason as depraved. The sovereignty of God, in commanding the extermination of the nations of Canaan, and in afterwards bearing with the Jews, although they did worse than they *, has been still as exceptionable to deists, as the doctrine of particular election. To admit the one, and deny the other, is to set revelation at variance with itself.

The doctrine of *free-will* can be of as little service in recommending christianity to its adversaries. If they judge of the whole system from this pretended specimen, their prejudices must be increased. Many, who, acknowledge no revelation, are convinced that the arminian doctrine on this head is irreconcilable with philosophy. Reason undoubtedly teaches that, if God give a revelation, it must not only be recommended by the clearest evidence, but be accompanied with such power as to have all that effect which he designed. But while arminians represent the effect of the outward means, nay, the efficacy of the divine operation, as entirely suspended on the uncertain will of the creature, notwithstanding God's will to save all; instead of exalting revelation, they virtually represent

* 2 Chr. xxxiii. 9.

sent it as a revelation unworthy of God. For its effect must thus be uncertain as to any, and its end must be certainly defeated as to a great part of those whose salvation God meant by it. If there be merely a possibility of salvation to all, there must be at the same time a possibility that not one should be saved. Does not this system supply the enemies of christianity with an argument against the very duties of religion? for why should I pray to God, for what does not depend on *his* will, but on *my own*? the system called calvinistic, how much so ever it may be objected to in other respects, must be acknowledged to be consistent in this. For as it supposes that God, by the revelation of grace, meant to save some only, it asserts the immutability of his purpose, and the efficacy of his operation, as to every individual whom he meant to save. While it does not pretend fully to explain the mysterious operation of God, any more than the mystery of his being; it asserts, according to scripture, that the natural and essential liberty of the will is no wise impaired in the change accomplished by grace, although this grace is certainly efficacious.

The arminian faction, in the reign of Charles I, keenly pointed the shafts of their ridicule against many of the most important doctrines of christianity;

nity; as regeneration, imputed righteousness, union to Christ, and the whole of the spirit's work in the hearts of men. It has been supposed, with much appearance of probability, that this was one great occasion of the growth of infidelity. I am far from charging a continuance of this conduct on arminians in general. But many, who do not openly espouse any other system, are very liberal in abusing these and similar doctrines, as if they had no foundation but the reveries of enthusiasts; and as if the very language of the spirit of God, in the volume of inspiration, were the language of cant and enthusiasm. Such *christians* save infidels the trouble of attempting to laugh men out of revealed religion.

The ravings of quakers and other enthusiasts have been improved as an handle for throwing reproach on the whole of the *spirit's operation* on the soul. Many, who wish to pass for good christians, have proceeded thus far. Nothing can be more certain, than that a claim to the operation of the spirit, without or in opposition to the word, is gross enthusiasm. But it is equally certain, that a pretence to believe revelation, to the exclusion of the convincing, illuminating, renewing and sanctifying influences of the spirit, is merely a refined species of infidelity. He does not truly believe divine re-

velation, who acknowledges that only which is of an objective and outward nature. This is merely the rod in Christ's hand. It is only by the operation of his spirit that it becomes "the rod of his strength." This is the sword that he wields. But the people will not "fall under him," unless he strike with it. It is not enough that the Son of God is revealed *to* us, in the dispensation of grace. Unless it "please God to reveal his Son *in* us," we shall still "confer with flesh and blood *." The external evidence of revelation may produce a rational conviction of its truth. But unless we receive the "spirit of wisdom, and of revelation in the knowledge of Christ," not as communicating new doctrines, but, as "enlightening the eyes of the understanding," that it may apprehend these already communicated in scripture, we can never "know what is the hope of his calling †."

To deny the truth of an inward work of the spirit, as accompanying the word, because of the madness of enthusiasts, is as absurd as it would be to deny the truth of the miracles of Christ, because of the "lying wonders" of antichrist; or even to refuse that Jesus is the true Messiah, because many deceivers have laid claim to this character. When men, who call themselves christians, act such a

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* Gal. i. 15, 16.

† Eph. i. 17, 18.

part, what can be expected of those who make no profession? When they experience a convincing work of the spirit in some degree, they endeavour to reason, or to ridicule themselves out of it: and it must have no inconsiderable influence as to their success in the attempt, that many, who profess to believe revelation, disclaim the idea of such a work as mere delusion.

As this conduct has a direct tendency to banish from the minds of mere professors all impressions of the truth of christianity, we can scarcely conceive any thing that can be more provoking to that blessed spirit who is the immediate author of all grace. How astonishing his condescension, in working on the hearts of guilty rebellious men! But when his operation is not merely resisted,—but ridiculed, when it is represented as madness and delusion, even by those who pretend to believe revelation; need we wonder that many of this description are left to make an open apostacy from the faith, or that the same judgment should be inflicted on them as on ancient Israel; “They rebelled, and vexed his holy spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them*?” When such contempt is poured upon his grace, is it surprising that a righteous God should suffer or-

dinances to prove to the generality but a dead letter, and judicially say; "My spirit shall not always strive with man *?"

CHAP. III.

The modern plan of preaching. Worldly greatness of those who call themselves the servants of Christ. Dishonest subscription of creeds and confessions. The practice of many invested with a sacred character. The law of patronage.

IT is much to be regretted that, in different churches of the reformation, the *plan of preaching*, too generally adopted, keeps at as great a distance as possible the peculiar doctrines of the christian faith. A scheme of moral doctrine is substituted in the room of these, little better than what was taught in the schools of heathenism; no better than what might have been taught, had the sages of antiquity known the precepts, without knowing the fundamental principles of our holy religion. The very terms of heathenism, or of moral philosophy, are preferred to those of inspiration. Many, who pretend to be the ministers of Jesus Christ,

Christ, discover a peculiar degree of ingenuity, in keeping it a profound secret to what master they belong.

Am I told, that the theological phraseology of the last century was abused by ranters and enthusiasts? Be it so. But are the terms any worse for it? Is there one doctrine of revelation that has not been abused in some shape or another? Are its doctrines therefore less true, or less worthy of acceptance? Is not the holy name of God every day profaned? Shall we therefore refuse the lawful use of it; The pretence is too shallow. When the terms, sanctified by the spirit of God, are treated with disgust, it is a sad evidence that the doctrines themselves are unpalatable. I speak not of the terms as expressed in so many letters; but as conveying a peculiar sense, although translated into another language.

Is it said, that there can be no true religion without morality? It is cordially admitted. But it is no less worthy of attention, that there can be no true religion without faith. Does God require *not* the worship of our understandings, as well as of our wills and practice? This mode of preaching sets a mark of approbation on the socinian plan, of reducing faith to mere obedience.—It must also be remembered, that there is no true morality

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without faith. Can "the fruit be good," before "the tree be made good?" Will men "be careful to maintain good works," before they "have believed?" To attempt to reverse matters, is to turn the whole of christianity upside down.

I am persuaded, that upon the most rigid examination it will be found, that the practice of religious and moral duties bears pace with the preaching of the peculiar doctrines of christianity. Men may affect to represent that religion, which is the effect of such preaching, as of a gloomy cast. But the question is, whether is it such religion as the bible prescribes? That kind of religion, which consists merely in hearing a sermon, or in receiving the sacraments, but permits the neglect of all personal and family duties, and an almost unlimited compliance with the customs of the world, deserves not the name. It was unknown to the primitive christians. To the heathen around, it seemed "strange that they would not run to the same excess of riot" with them*.

It is to be lamented, that the gospel is purely preached in many places where there is very little fruit. But still, in a comparative point of view, this kind of preaching will be found to be most useful. In general, wherever the peculiar doctrines of

* 1 Pet. iv. 4.

of the gospel are most faithfully preached, and most firmly believed, men will not only be most regular in the duties of the first table, but also in those of the second: and on the contrary, the neglect or contempt of gospel doctrine is invariably productive of the neglect of duty both to God and to man. Is it to the want of moral preaching that we must attribute the mournful and threatening increase of profane swearing, sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, uncleanness of every kind, dishonesty, murder and similar crimes? It is doubtless in a great measure owing to the want of the faithful preaching of these great truths of christianity which are revealed by God as the means of changing the heart. If these be neglected, all the labour that men can bestow in preaching moral duties, is merely like attacking the outworks, without any regard to the citadel. The heart, as being the source of all outward evil, must be purified, before the life can be pure. And whatever way men may choose, we are sure that God "purifieth the heart through faith." "Holding the mystery of faith," and "a pure conscience," are inseparably conjoined.

You, who follow a different course, do not consider that, while you are pruning the branches, others are laying the axe to the root of the tree. Socinians, little account as they make of faith, are
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far more zealous in propagating the peculiar articles of their creed, than many who pretend to hold their doctrines in abhorrence. You leave those, who are entrusted to your charge, without any scriptural principles; and thus give them up as a prey to those who “compass sea and land to make one profelyte.” The fatal effects of such a plan of preaching begin to be perceived even by some of the dignitaries of the church of England. They see that, in their zeal to avoid puritanical principles, they have paved the way to socinianism; nay, that by the encouragement given to a method of preaching which excludes the fundamental doctrines of christianity, the work of deists has been half done. Can any thing, indeed, more effectually serve the cause of infidelity? Not only do you expose those for whom you have to account, to the insidious attacks of deists, without any of that armour which the knowledge of divine truth supplies: but at first instance you provide these enemies of our faith with an argument which confirms them in their delusion, and which is peculiarly successful in gaining others. “How can we believe,” do they say, “or why should we trouble ourselves to enquire into that religion, the distinguishing doctrines of which its very ministers are ashamed to preach? They tell us nothing that we cannot learn from

Socrates

Socrates or Plato. It is inconceivable that they can believe a creed, which they evidently wish to consign to oblivion."

Let the ministers of Rome shame you out of such conduct. Amidst all the corruptions of antichrist, more of the peculiar doctrines of christianity are preached in some popish churches than in others occupied by protestants. Whatever you may consider as the motive, their conduct is certainly far more consistent than yours. Are you sincere protestants? Be not ashamed, then, to preach those doctrines, which our great and godly reformers preached; which were the principal means of that deliverance, the blessed fruits of which we now enjoy. Were men made worse christians by their plan of preaching, than they are by yours? Do you imagine that yours would make them as good martyrs? Do you pretend to be successors of the holy apostles? Why, then, are you such strangers to that resolution; "I determined not to know any thing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified?" Why do you give reason to suspect, that you are determined to know any thing but this? In a word; do you call yourselves the servants of Jesus? Why, then, do you not preach such doctrines as he did to Nicodemus? Are you afraid of the old reply; "How can these things be?" But "shall the disci-

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ple be above his master?" Better that many should be offended, than that all should perish in their sins. Be assured that if the gospel, by your ministrations, be not to some "the favour of death," it will never be to others "the favour of life."

The *worldly greatness* of many, who are invested with a sacred character, is unfriendly to the interests of religion. I am far from supposing, that ministers of the gospel ought to be reduced to a state of penury. For, though the temptation might not be so great, this would as really prove a temptation to them as the other extreme. Besides, there is a certain external respectability of character, which they ought to have it in their power to maintain. Without this, their instructions will, in a natural point of view, have less weight. But there is a wide difference between such a decent mediocrity and that lordly splendour which some reckon ornamental to religion. To one, who imagines that "the kingdom of heaven" appears in her greatest beauty and perfection, when assimilated to the kingdoms of this world, it may be pleasant to see a minister of the gospel taking place of a Duke. But when it is urged, that such a plan is necessary for the support, or at least for the recommendation of christianity, not a few will
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be in danger of entertaining a suspicion, that it has certainly some great internal defect. It is not enough, that the suspicion rests on an insufficient ground. Those, who call themselves the servants of Jesus, are under the strongest obligations to do every thing in their power to avoid laying stumbling-blocks before others. It is vain to imagine that the external splendour of ministers recommends religion to the great. It may produce a greater degree of outward respect to the individuals who are thus distinguished; but it will not make religion itself appear more amiable. Whatever outward respect they receive, the remarkable contrast between the character of the Master and of the servants, must occasionally strike the minds of persons in various ranks: and the consequent impressions will be by no means favourable to christianity. Never hath the religion of Jesus appeared so lovely, never hath she won so many hearts, as when recommended by no charms but those that are peculiar to herself. For of her *loveliness* it may truly be said, that it

Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,
But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.

The *dishonest subscription* of creeds, articles, and confessions, is another thing that gives great encouragement

ragement to infidelity. It is a mournful, but an unquestionable fact, that, in various churches of the reformation, many enter into the office of the holy ministry, by subscribing, or by solemnly engaging to teach doctrines, which they neither believe nor mean to teach. Would to God! that there was no reason to suppose that this was the conduct of the greatest part. When those, who have witnessed their ordination vows, who have heard them promise that they shall teach, maintain, and defend these doctrines, as they shall answer to the Lord Jesus at his appearing, observe that they immediately begin to decry them, and to inculcate others diametrically opposite; what must they think of such men?

Were this the only consequence, the damage would be far less. But while they know that their teachers act so unworthy a part, what benefit can they receive from their instructions, even when they may be unexceptionable? However, they are not merely prejudiced against such unworthy teachers. From the depravity of the human mind, they are naturally disposed to transfer the faults of professors, and especially of ministers, to religion itself. When they perceive such conduct in their spiritual guides, they do not stop short at the idea of religion having no hold of *them*. They unjustly infer that

it is wholly a system of deception. When they see men, who have devoted their lives to theological inquiries, playing fast and loose with what they call the *doctrines of salvation*, they hastily conclude that it is not worth while to give them any serious attention.

But the fatal influence of this conduct reaches still farther. It directly tends to corrupt the morals of those under their charge. When they find their teachers, in the whole of their public instructions, boldly trampling on the most solemn ties, are they not under a powerful temptation to imitate their conduct? If they consider their spiritual leaders as ensamples, what regard will they have to the strongest bonds of society? What estimate will they form of the heaven-daring crime of perjury? They will doubtless flatter themselves with the idea, that, although they were chargeable with it, they would be far less guilty than their guides.

From a conviction of the fatal influence of such conduct, the present king of Prussia, in his edict concerning religion, discharges it under severe penalties. Speaking of the three different confessions, the Reformed, Lutheran and Roman Catholic, "Every teacher of christianity," he says, "in our dominions, who belongs to any of these confessions, must teach agreeably to the established
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doctrines contained in it; for to this he is bound by his office, his duty, and *the condition under which he was placed in his particular charge*. They who teach otherwise are punishable by the laws of the land, and *can, with no propriety, any longer retain their functions*. We cheerfully allow the clergy in our dominions the same liberty of conscience with the rest of our subjects, and are far from offering the least violence to their inward convictions. The teacher who is convinced that the scheme of doctrine contained in his confession is wrong, may, at his own peril, retain this conviction undisturbed; for we arrogate to ourselves no dominion over his conscience. Only, *according to his own conscience, he must cease to be a teacher of his church*. He must lay down an office, for which, from his change of sentiments, he feels himself useless and unqualified; for the doctrine of a church must not vary according to the present persuasion of this or the other clergyman *."

You, who subscribe confessions which you do not believe, and swear to doctrines which you never meant to preach, would in vain attempt to palliate your conduct by the plea of necessity. If you enter into the ministry, "necessity is," indeed, "laid upon you, and wo is unto you if you preach not
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* Edict, 9th July 1788. Dr Erskine's Sketches, p. 96.

the gospel." But you can be under no necessity of entering into a church, whose doctrines you disbelieve; unless it be that of the posterity of Eli, against whom it was denounced as a curse, that they should come and crouch for a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread, and say, Put me (I pray thee) into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread †." Can the most unbounded charity conclude that you are actuated by a real concern for the glory of Christ, in the salvation of precious souls, if you enter into office, by calling upon him to witness a falsehood; if the first act of your ministry be a virtual abjuration of the very grounds on which you have been intrusted with it?

Lay not the blame of your conduct on creeds and confessions. Attempt not to vindicate yourselves, by complaining that these are a yoke of bondage. They gall those only whom they ought to gall,—men who wish to eat the bread of a church whose principles they disbelieve. Shall not the church have the same liberty with every other society? Does not every civil community under heaven demand obedience to her laws? If these are deemed oppressive, the individual may change his situation. But was it ever supposed, that a civil society ought to conform her constitution to the humour of eve-

ty individual ; or leave it absolutely indefinite, that every individual might endeavour to mould it according to his own fancy ? There never was a society on earth, in which unity was so necessary, as in the church of God. It is one of her distinguishing characters, that, though she consists of many, they are “all one body, and one bread,” have “one faith, one hope, one baptism.” The very design of her formation, is, that all her true members may eventually “be one.” In this consists their supreme perfection, not merely in unity of practice, but in “the unity of the faith.” Were she divided against herself, she could not stand. When one minister decries what another maintains, especially with respect to the great doctrines of christianity, it defeats the very end of a church-state, produces divisions and animosities among those who are taught, plunges their minds into the most disagreeable uncertainty in matters of faith, relaxes their notions as to moral duty, and prepares them for the denial of all revelation. A church may alter her *Formula*, if she pleases. But no individual can justly complain that subscription is an embargo laid on his conscience, while he is at liberty to connect himself with another church, whose principles are more agreeable to him, or to endeavour to form one entirely on his own plan.

But there is every reason to suspect, that the bondage complained of does not, lie in subscription, abstractly viewed, but in subscription to the articles of a church which possesses the best emoluments. How far civil establishments of religion are expedient, or consistent with the character of the New Testament dispensation, it is not the proper place to enquire. One thing can scarcely be denied. They have often proved an inlet to such dishonesty in sacred transactions, as would render men infamous in those that are merely civil. The fatal influence of such duplicity is sufficiently demonstrated by this very circumstance, that it scarcely affixes any stain to character, or deprives a man of confidence in civil concerns. The frequency of the evil has gradually produced an indifference to its enormity, by effacing impressions of responsibility to the Judge of the universe. The man, who is known to swear to a falsehood in the affairs of this life, is shunned by society. But he, who is known solemnly to vow his adherence to what he disbelieves in religious matters, is accounted a wiser, if not a better man, than one who would shudder at such villany. Men have been so accustomed to see those who are entrusted with the charge of their souls deal falsely in spiritual concerns, that they scarcely pass a thought on the subject. "What can the poor men do?"

may they say. "They cannot otherwise obtain the living." *It is* surprising that men should be disposed to indulge the idea, so natural to them, that their souls are of very little value, when they see those who pretend to "watch for souls, as they that must give an account," so indifferent not only to theirs, but to their own?

Even those who *bona fide* subscribe the doctrines of a church, may be involved in the guilt of this aggravated dishonesty. They must be so, if they use not every scriptural mean for exoneration. If they have sufficient evidence that others, in communion with them, act a dishonest part, they are under indispensable obligations to endeavour their conviction. For no command can be more express than that; "Thou shalt not suffer sin upon thy brother." If, after the production of sufficient evidence, the majority retain such men in communion, if they persist in this course, and refuse to be reclaimed; then undoubtedly, those who adhere to the principles of the church ought to listen to the language of inspiration: "Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us *." The obligation of the duty cannot

* 2 Thess. iii. 6.

not be affected by number. If there be any difference, the greater the number of those who "walk disorderly," the greater must be the necessity of "withdrawing from" them. For the truth must be exposed to danger, in proportion to the number of its assailants.

The *practice* of many who are invested with a sacred character, does unspeakable hurt to religion. They go as far as others in the fashionable follies, which dissipate the minds of men, and banish all serious reflection. In company they seem ardently to wish that their character should be forgotten; lest it should throw its saddening gloom over the joyful groupe, by giving birth to one thought worthy of an immortal being. The lightness of their conduct would sometimes suggest, that they are afraid of being thought serious in what they are under the necessity of doing once a week. They can join with others, in laughing at the unpleasant campaign, when the fatigues of it are over. That unfashionable book, *the Bible*, hangs as a mill-stone around their necks, one day in seven. But they have ample restitution; as they are indebted to it for many sprightly sallies of wit, during the other six.

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Nay, perhaps the preacher retires from the pulpit to the dining-room, to spend the evening with *My Lord*, or with *the Squire*. Soon does the work of the Sabbath seem as “a tale that hath been told.” He joins in the frivolous or mirthful conversation of a giddy company; and seems fully as much in earnest in attempting to efface, as he was a little before in attempting to make any serious impressions on the minds of his hearers. As he has evidently left all his religion in the pulpit, his conduct seems, to the rest of the company, a sufficient apology for leaving theirs in their pews. It is expected that, on the day of sacred rest, he shall regularly take his seat at this table; as if his presence were deemed necessary to sanction the total oblivion of those sacred services in which he has presided.

Can it be refused, that many, who call themselves the servants of God, not only hear his name profaned by others, without giving the smallest testimony of their disapprobation, but even dare to profane it themselves? Yet these are the men, perhaps, who pretend the greatest zeal for morality, and who traduce the preaching of the gospel, as if it “made void the law.” But such inconsistency plainly shews, that with them morality is a mere name. For he that hath said, *Thou shalt not steal*, hath also said, *Thou shalt not take the name of*
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the Lord thy God in vain. Now, if thou dost not steal, yet if thou profane the name of God, "thou art become a transgressor of the law." Does the one precept rest on any better foundation than the other? Or hath God given men a right to dispense with those precepts which immediately respect our duty to him, while he hath indispensably bound us to those which regard our neighbour?

Some, it may be supposed, make what they know to be undue compliances, from the fear of offending. They imagine that stiffness, in matters comparatively of less moment, may prejudice others with respect to those of the greatest. But they first injure themselves, by doing what they know to be wrong. For a man ought, in no instance, to make a sacrifice of his conscience. They even prepare themselves for another snare; and most probably, for a more dangerous one. For one sinful compliance naturally paves the way for another. They also injure those whom they mean to gain. Instead of gaining, they prejudice them. For when they observe a religious person make one sacrifice, they conclude that, were the temptation sufficiently powerful, he would with equal ease make a far greater one. They are eager to believe, that it is only fear, or interest, which prevents him from going as far as themselves. Worldly men are amazingly

zingly acute in perceiving any impropriety in the conduct of those who assume a religious profession. Conscience tells them what such men ought to be, by the demands it at times makes on themselves. Therefore, when they perceive persons of this description relax, they are anxious to silence the voice of conscience, by appealing to their conduct, as a proof that its claims are unjust; or at least, that themselves are excusable in neglecting them, while they have the sanction of such an example. The unbending dignity of conscious rectitude is in a human respect, the best safeguard of our own character, and the most genuine kindness to others.

I am far from supposing that infidelity prevails as much among the protestant clergy, as many avowed deists pretend. The adversaries of christianity wish to persuade themselves, and to persuade others, that very few of its professors are sincere. Thus they endeavour to silence conscience, to confirm their unbelief, and to apologize for their conduct to the world. If they can propagate the idea, that even the ministers of religion are secretly on their side, it seems to give peculiar strength to their apology, and proves a more effectual snare to others. But there is every reason to fear, that not a few, who call themselves ministers of Christ, have given too much occasion for these injurious reflections.

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We need not pass over to the continent for proofs of this. It is well known that, in Germany, many protestant ministers preach the doctrines of infidelity; and, from the inconsistency of their profession with their system, have received the self-contradictory designation of *Christian Deists*. It is no less openly taught in our own country, that the way of reconciliation with God is made known by the light of nature, though not so clearly as by the gospel. But this doctrine is a virtual renunciation of christianity. It not only gives the lie to the uniform testimony of scripture, but gives up to deists the main point of controversy with them,—whether the light of nature be a sufficient guide to happiness?

It may be feared, however, that infidelity has received still more support, from many of the professed ministers of religion, in private or secret. The manner in which men of the world speak of the clergy, affords reason to suspect, that some of them, if they do not plainly disavow christianity, in their convivial moments, act such a part as to give every reason to suppose that they are insincere in their profession; that, if they do not appear as its enemies, they are ashamed to stand forth as its friends. They perhaps join in the laugh of the corner, or silently hear its most precious doctrines traduced

traduced or ridiculed. They may flatter themselves with the reflection, that in company they appear only as gentlemen, not as clergymen. Do they mean that, in occasional intercourse with the world, they have no call to the discharge of the peculiar duties of their office? There can be no objection to the idea. But is it meant, that in company they are entirely to forget that they are ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, there is no propriety in the distinction which he made, for regulating the conduct of his servants. They are not only *in* the world, but they may be *of* it. Will the servant of an earthly king, unless he be a traitor, patiently sit and hear his master dishonoured? Will he please himself with the frivolous distinction, that he appears in company as a gentleman, and not as a soldier? He would scorn the despicable subterfuge. Nay, where is the lacquey, who will sit to hear that man abused, whose bread he eats, and whose livery he wears? What would his master, what would society think of such a servant?

Modern divines may please themselves in ridiculing the starchness of their predecessors. Nothing, indeed, is more contemptible than grimace or affected austerity. True religion scorns such recommendation. But, in an age like this, propriety may pass for priestcraft, and honesty for unreasonable

able stiffness. Were the clergy of former times less respectable, because they would not sit in company where the name of God was profaned, or drink such toasts as, though veiled perhaps under the appearance of a compliment to the clergy, necessarily imply the grossest and most daring insult that can be offered to them, to religion, and to decency? Certain I am, their conduct secured them a respect, and acquired them an influence, within the limits of their station, quite unknown to their more courtly successors. Am I told, that there is a great difference of times? It is admitted. But to what is it in a great measure owing? I fear, it cannot be denied that infidelity, in its progress in this country, has kept pace with what has been denominated the *moderate* temper of the clergy.

There is every reason to suppose that the Law of *Patronage* has had a baleful influence on the clerical character. They, who from their very initiation into theological studies, have been accustomed to look up to the great, as those who can alone save it in their power to give them a comfortable subsistence for life, are under a strong temptation to connive at their vices, if not to copy them. Such a state of dependance must also eventually degrade the ministerial character, in the eyes of those who possess such undue influence in ecclesiastical concerns.

cerns. It is very natural for men of rank, to spurn at the idea of reproof from those whom they indignantly consider as their own creatures.

CHAP. IV.

The relaxation or perversion of church-discipline. Religious tests, as qualifying men for civil offices. Ceremonies of human invention in the worship of God. Influence of human authority in matters of religion.

THE relaxation or perversion of *church-discipline* is also productive of the worst consequences. God, in his infinite wisdom, hath seen it necessary to “fence his vineyard.” When he visits it with judgments for unfruitfulness, the first that he inflicts is that of removing this fence. “I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up *.” For this is the mean by which he preserves it from the “boar out of the wood, and the wild beast of the field.” But are not some of the protestant churches evidently under this judgment? How earnest soever individuals may be in attempting to preserve or repair the hedge, is it not undeniable that by far the greater part of ecclesiastical judicatories admit

* Isaiah v. 2, 5.

mit those, who are impure as *boars*, and untameable as *wild beasts*, to enter into the vineyard? I speak of those who are openly so: for the purest church cannot guard against hypocrites. Discipline may, perhaps, be exercised with respect to those who break the seventh or the eighth precept of the law. But are not profane swearers, sabbath-breakers, drunkards, and the like, permitted to eat of the bread of children?

Is not church-discipline often commuted for money? He, who is able or willing to pay a fine for his transgression, is either entirely freed from discipline, or suffered to escape from its rigour. It may be said perhaps, that the law of the land ordains the payment of certain fines for certain transgressions which come under cognizance of the church. But in what part of scripture hath Christ appointed his ministers to exact fines, or to inflict any kind of civil penalty? If the state sees meet to punish men, considered as members of civil society, for particular offences which may be at the same time cognizeable by the church, does this give a warrant to churchmen to act as the officers of the state in lifting her fines; or does it supersede the necessity of that spiritual censure which Christ hath instituted in his word? Whatever apologies may be

made for this practice, it acknowledges no higher authority than that of the church of Rome, who hath long made a trade of selling indulgences, pardons and absolutions. It is a mournful reflexion, that any, who call themselves protestants, should make so near an approach to a practice, the enormity of which was the first thing that excited the great Luther to a consideration of the necessity of reformation.

Is it surprising that such conduct should prove an occasion of hardening to infidels, or a snare to those who have no fixed principles? Such men, first, disbelieve the sincerity of those who pretend that Christ hath appointed a discipline for his church, and yet regulate this according to the price paid to judicatories. Then, they proceed to laugh at the whole system of religion, which seems to have so little influence on its most zealous advocates.

In the church of England, the name of discipline is hardly known. Let us attend to the language of an acute writer on this subject. "If the priest denies the sacrament to the most infamous sinner dwelling in his parish, if the man, upon an appeal to the ecclesiastical court can secure the favour of the *Lay-chancellor*, he may securely defy both the minister and the bishop to keep him from the Lord's table. The chancellor's determination shall stand.

stand in law, though contrary to the bishop's; and the minister be liable to a suspension, for refusing compliance; and if he is contumacious, and will not give the man the sacrament, even to excommunication.—Is not the chancellor supreme and uncontrouled in his court, not liable to be restrained or directed by the bishop in his judicial proceedings? Does he not finally and absolutely determine on cases of excommunication; and sovereignly direct who shall be received to, and who cast out from christian fellowship and worship at the table of the Lord*?"

Religious *tests* in general, as qualifying men for civil offices, are evidently inconsistent with the natural rights of men. All, who are good members of society, are not only entitled to protection, but ought to have equal opportunities of contributing to the benefit of society, how much soever they may differ as to religious sentiments. But some tests are far more objectionable than others. To make the celebration of a divine ordinance, especially if it be one of the sacraments of the New Testament, an indispensable qualification for admission to civil or military trust, is to lay men under a powerful temptation to profane that which is

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* Dissenting Gentleman's Letters to Mr White, p. 69, 70. Ed. Lond. 1767.

holy. If a man be in an unrenewed state, he must either forfeit his natural right, or subject himself to an additional load of guilt for eternity, by being "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." If the most solemn duty of our holy religion be administered merely as a passport for "eating a piece of bread," it must tend to confirm many in their suspicions, that religion is entirely a political device, framed and managed in subserviency to the interests of the ruling party.

If the participation of this ordinance be not only required as an indispensable qualification, but if it be necessary that it should be celebrated in one particular form, which form may appear unlawful to many valuable members of society; the grievance is still greater, and the consequences must be more pernicious. For as we have no right to sacrifice to fellow-men what is matter of conscience, there is not only the danger of profaning a divine ordinance, but a temptation to deal unfaithfully towards God, by pretending to do that as duty which conscience declares to be sin.

The use of *ceremonies* of human invention, in the worship of God, has a fatal influence with respect to the interests of religion. They are unacceptable to God. For he says; "In vain do they worship me,

me, teaching the commandments of men*." Therefore, those who believe revelation can derive no benefit from such ordinances; because they are destitute of the impulse of divine authority. Their propriety has been urged, from the consideration of their gaining carnal men who are captivated by external shew. But it is sufficient to observe, that this is not one of the means which God hath instituted for captivating men to the obedience of Christ. The use of such ceremonies confirms delists in their idea, that religion is wholly a human device. It tends to prejudice those who are in a state of scepticism or uncertainty. If it do not prejudice them against christianity itself, it certainly gives them an unfavourable impression with respect to its ministers: and with those who will not give themselves the trouble of a rigid scrutiny, these two are very nearly allied. Now, this fatal influence increases in proportion to the progress of human knowledge.

The tendency of the mummary of the church of Rome has been already considered. Would to God, the charge were confined to this church. It cannot be refused, that many of the ceremonies observed in the church of England, have been borrowed from the church of Rome; or rather, have been

* Mat. xv. 9.

been unwarrantably retained, when her impure communion was renounced. I beg leave to insert the reflections of the intelligent writer last quoted, merely on one of these, viz. the burial-service. After observing that there are only three cases, in which that church refuses this solemn office,—to those who die unbaptised, to self-murderers, and to those who are under the sentence of the greater excommunication, he subjoins, “As for all other persons who are brought to the church-yard, it very strictly commands you, even under pain of suspension, by canon lxviii, that you use over them the form prescribed by the common-prayer. Now, hence it comes to pass, that over some of the most abandoned and profligate of mankind; over men who have been cut down in a course of open impiety by a sudden and untimely death; or who even fell by the hand of justice, for some black and atrocious crime; over these, I say, your church, and I say it with astonishment, directs and commands you most solemnly to declare, ‘That ‘almighty God of his *great mercy* has taken to himself the soul of this your dear brother! You give God hearty thanks that it hath pleased him to deliver him out of the miseries of this sinful world! and you pray God, that when you yourselves shall depart out of this life, you may *rest in Christ*, as your

hope

hope as this your brother doth.' This is what your church commands you solemnly to say over *every* person brought to be buried, the three cases above excepted. So that if the man happened to be killed in the very act of committing murder, adultery, or a rape; or for either of these crimes dies upon the gallows an impenitent hardened wretch, whom vengeance suffered not to live; yet concerning him you are to declare, that 'almighty God hath in great mercy taken him to himself;' though he died a victim to public justice, and was *taken away in wrath*. you are to 'give God hearty thanks that he has taken this your *brother* out of the miseries of this sinful world:' though you have the strongest reason to believe that he is gone down to realms of greater misery below. And you are to profess before God, that 'you hope the man *rests in Christ*,' and pray that you yourselves may rest in Christ in the same manner as this your brother doth: when you have all the grounds in the world to think that he *died in his sins*, and is therefore not gone to be *with Christ*, where nothing that is defiled can ever be admitted.

"Strange! and extremely shocking! what can the people think, Sir! what must *infidels* and *deists* think! when they hear you in the morning denouncing from the scriptures certain death and destruction

struction from the presence of God, to all vicious and corrupt persons; and assuring them that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*: but in the evening, from the common-prayer, shall hear you, *the same person*, declaring before God your hope of the eternal happiness of one of the most debauched and profligate men your parish affords; and sending him hence with all the lofty expressions of confidence and hope, as you would a person of the most shining and exemplary life.

“Do you imagine, Sir, people do not think? Can you wonder DEISM prevails? That the priesthood is ridiculed? And that your *good sermons* are no more effectual to reform a corrupt world? To me this appears (and doubtless it does the same to thousands of your own church) a most indecent prostitution of your *sacred* character and office; a trifling and prevarication in things of everlasting moment; and a fatal snare to the souls of men; who seeing their debauched neighbour dismissed to the other world with such confidence of his good estate, suppress their just fears, and say, *I shall have peace, though I add drunkenness to thirst* *.”

The influence of *human authority*, indeed, whether as to faith or practice, is highly injurious to the

* Dissenting Gentlemen's Letters, p. 63—64.

the interests of religion. We see how blindly the great body of the Jews were attached to "the traditions of the elders," and to what a non-entity this attachment reduced their religious system. To the same influence has the great apostacy in the christian church been in a great measure owing. From an undue regard to the memory of saints and martyrs, did the idolatry of the church of Rome originate. Having such beacons placed before their eyes, protestant ministers cannot be too cautious in guarding those committed to their charge, against receiving any thing in religion on the authority of any man, or of any church. The influence of traditions is offensive to God, and noxious to the church; not because they are of Jewish or popish origin, but because they are "the traditions of men." The piety of the men from whom they have originated, is no apology or recommendation whatsoever. Many of the Jewish elders and christian fathers were as pious men as any who have appeared in later ages. It is enough if they be "the traditions of men,—and not after Christ." In this case, the church is certainly *spoiled* by them*. The effect is the same, if doctrines or practices, in themselves agreeable to the word of God, be received rather on the ground of custom,

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* Col. ii. 8.

or of human authority, than on that of divine revelation. For in this case, the faith 'of the' receivers "stands in the wisdom of men," and *not* "in the power of God *."

Such is the weakness of the human mind, that it seems to have a great proneness to idolize antiquity. We need scarcely wonder that unenlightened heathens worship their ancestors. For the root of this folly seems to be entwined around our fallen nature. But what is false in itself can never lose the least degree of its falsity, by universal reception, or by the faith of thousands of generations. Nor can truth receive additional value, lustre or authority from age. It is immutably the same without the least respect to time. The truth that was unknown till yesterday, is as venerable as that which has been known and believed since the deluge.

The church of Rome has been justly ridiculed for her pretence of infallibility. But it can scarcely be refused, that other churches, though they have renounced this absurdity, have manifested somewhat of a blind attachment to what they have once admitted into their system or administration. Too often have they seemed to consider the idea of altering any thing, that has been once adopted,

* 1 Cor. ii. 5.

as sacrilegious. The raillery of one of our most elegant writers, in a ludicrous epistle addressed to the pope, has not been entirely without foundation. “Your *Holiness*,” he says, “is not perhaps aware, how near the churches of us protestants have at length come to those privileges and perfections, which you boast of as peculiar to your own. So near, that many of the most quick-sighted and sagacious persons, have not been able to discover any other difference between us, as to the main principle of all doctrine, government, worship and discipline, but this one; viz. that You *cannot* err in any thing, and We never *do*. That is, in other words, that You are infallible, and We always in the right. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side, in this case, because we have all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it; and without the uneasy task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of mankind. And you must pardon us, if we cannot help thinking it to be as great and as glorious a privilege in *us*, to be always in the right, without the pretence to infallibility, as it can be in *you*, to be always in the wrong with it. —The reason, therefore, why we do not openly set up an infallibility, is because we can do without it. Authority results as well from power, as from

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right : and a majority of votes is as strong a foundation for it, as infallibility itself. Councils that *may* err, never *do*, &c. *"

I have transcribed the language of this witty writer, in order to shew how necessary it is for church-men to exercise the greatest care, that they do not in any instance *practically* embrace an absurdity, which they *professionally* reject with detestation. Even good and conscientious men may be staggered at the idea of any innovation, from the difficulty of fixing proper limits, and from the danger of making the less judicious hesitate as to the whole of their system. But truth is never an innovation. Error alone deserves this name ; and is still an innovation, however ancient. If any regard a doctrine or practice, merely because it has the sanction of antiquity, and ~~are~~ are determined therefore to adhere to it, without trying whether it be true or false ; their faith cannot be too soon shaken ; for it is destitute of any proper foundation.

But it may be feared that pride often lies at the root of this rigid adherence to what has been once adopted. The best men are subject to the failings of humanity, and may be unwilling to confess that themselves, or their predecessors, have been in any instance

* Sir Richard Steele's Account of the Roman-Catholic Religion, Introd. p. ii—iv.

instance missed. But this species of pride, like every other, defeats its own ends. Those, who refuse to acknowledge an evident error or mistake, justly forfeit that respectability which they vainly court by their obstinacy. Candour will always recommend itself to ingenuous minds. It is certainly the spirit of the gospel. We see with what amiable simplicity and integrity the Apostle Peter confesses his error with respect to holding communion with the Gentiles, when once he had discovered it *. And such a confession was his glory. When men of infidel minds perceive a contrary temper, they are hardened in their opposition to the truth. They represent all religions as alike, and the clergy of every communion as conspiring to hoodwink the multitude. Discerning men, who are in doubt, are prejudiced against the truth, instead of being gained by such conduct. They perceive its direct contradiction to the profession of all the protestant churches,—that “all synods or councils since the apostles times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred;” and therefore, “that they are not to be made the *rule* of faith or practice, but to be used as an *help* in both †.” On the other hand, an ingenuous confession of what is

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* Acts x. 28, 29, 34.

† Conf. of Faith, ch. 31. sect. 4.

found to be untenable, tends at least to impress the minds of others, with a conviction of the integrity of those who make it. The opposite conduct, though perhaps meant for the advantage of the multitude, is very unfriendly to them. For it retains them under the yoke of error and delusion. Besides, it lays a great stumbling-block in their way. For if they discern that, in any instance, their spiritual instructors endeavour to conceal the truth from them, they immediately take the alarm, and are in danger of suspecting that the concealment is far more extensive than it really is, and of throwing aside the whole of their profession without any further inquiry. Let all protestants carefully remember, that, although a church may, in a comparative point of view, be justly called *reformed*, the purest church, since the apostolic age, hath only been, in strict propriety of language, a church *aiming at reformation*.

While human authority *within* the church is of so noxious a tendency, that which is of an *extraneous* kind cannot surely be viewed with a more favourable eye. Our Lord hath expressly declared that his kingdom "is not of this world." Therefore, although all who belong to his kingdom are also members of civil society, and bound to submit to that civil authority under which they are providentially

dentally placed, in all lawful commands, yet in things purely spiritual they are subject to no authority but his. They must call no man father or master. Every attempt to establish any other authority, has been extremely hurtful to religion. Let us again hear that writer, whose sentiments I have already quoted more than once, with respect to the frame of the church of England, and its influence on the religious state of the nation. Whether he has truth on his side, or not, let the impartial reader determine. "In the church of England," he says, "the King, or Queen, is supreme head; vested with all power to exercise all manner of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical persons, have *no manner* of jurisdiction ecclesiastical, but by and under the King's Majesty, who hath full power and authority to hear and determine *all manner* of causes ecclesiastical; and to reform and correct all vice, sin, errors, heresies, enormities, abuses whatsoever, which by *any manner* may be reformed *.—By the constitution of the church of Christ, it is expressly ordered and declared—That *the woman shall not be suffered publicly to teach, nor to surp authority over the man*†. But by the constitution of the church of England, the woman is

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suffered

* 26 Henry VIII. cap. 1.

† 1 Tim. ii. 12.

suffered publicly to teach, yea, to limit and controul in spiritual and religious matters, and authoritatively to instruct all the bishops and clergy, and men in the land. Thus did Queen Elizabeth, thus did Queen Anne, and thus hath every Queen authority to do that sits upon our throne, authority to prescribe and dictate to all, both ministers and people, what the one are to preach, and the other to receive. And was it not, Sir, a very comely and edifying sight, to behold the two houses of convocation waiting upon the good Queen (Anne*) in the case of Whiston's books upon the Trinity, to be instructed by her Majesty, whether they were to be condemned as *heretical*, or not? That venerable and learned body had solemnly decreed them to be *dangerous* and *heretical*; but this their censure was of no force, till they had laid it before the Queen, to have her judgment upon the point. Upon her Majesty's determination it entirely depended, whether Whiston's tenets were to be rejected by the church of England as erroneous, or not. Her majesty, in this case, was of a different opinion from her two houses of convocation. She thought not fit to censure the books. So her single opinion, strange to relate! her single opinion carried it against that of her bishops and clergy.

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* Anno 1714.

She over-rules and sets aside all their proceedings, restrains and counteracts them in one of the very chief of their pastoral functions, the guarding against errors and heresies in the church.

—— “ When you stript the pope of his supremacy, and gave it to our princes, you should have taken care not to have left his infallibility behind. An infallible head and director of the church, be it woman or man, be it an *he* or a *she-bishop*, is a thing plausible enough, and carries a good face: out to lodge the absolute direction of the consciences, the faith, and the discipline of the church with a failible head! to give a prince, yea a lady bred up in all the softnesses and diversions of a court, an uncontrollable dominion over the religious conduct, both of clergy and laity, authoritatively to direct what those are to preach, and what these are to believe as the doctrine of Christ! to make HER the sole judge in all controversies which shall arise upon any the most mysterious and inexplicable points; so that *all the priests* are to *ask knowledge at HER lips*; and whatever she determines, is to be received by the church as christianity, verity, and truth! This is such a constitution as quite shocks the understanding, and comes not a whit behind transubstantiation itself. Hence, doubtless, sir, the triumphs of *popish priests* over you! Hence their inroads

roads upon you, and the thousands they are continually carrying captive from your tents! And hence the sad increase, and the insults of DEISTS, who taking the scheme of the church of England to be that of the christian church, are authorized by common sense, they think, not only to reject, but to treat it with contempt *."

I have already adverted to the influence of ecclesiastical patronage on the clergy themselves, and on those who have the power of nominating to church-livings. But its influence is far more extensive. It reaches to society in general. When men, merely because of their temporal rank, or because they are proprietors of certain pieces of ground, have the power of imposing spiritual instructors on all around them, it greatly injures the interests of religion. It is said, perhaps, that men of rank and education are far better qualified to judge of the abilities of a preacher, than the vulgar. But it is to be regretted, that the generality of those in the higher walks of life are so little acquainted with religion, that they must be very incompetent judges of the gifts of a gospel minister. It seldom forms any considerable branch of their education; and their subsequent habits of life are no wise favourable to its growth. Besides, many who are in-
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* Dissenting Gentleman's Letters, p. 23, 24, 27—29.

vested with the character of patrons, either belong to another communion than that in which they exercise their power, or never go to any place of worship. It may sometimes happen, that the patron has no other acquaintance with the candidate, than what has been contracted at a hunting-match or a dinner. He has no other recommendation, than his being a keen sportsman or a jolly companion.

But let a patron be ever so well qualified, it cannot constitute a sufficient plea for depriving church-members of that spiritual "liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free." What rightful superiority never men may have in civil concerns, they can never acquire dominion over the soul. This acknowledges no lord but one. If many of the common people are incapable of forming a proper choice, it must be in a great measure ascribed to the very influence of patronage. In consequence of this, they have been, for many years, during their whole life perhaps, subjected to ministers who were strangers to the gospel of Christ, and indifferent about the spiritual interests of their flocks.

What a bad effect must it have on the common people, when they see those, who are candidates for the ministry, "crouching" to their earthly superiors "for a piece of bread?" What respect can they have for their persons, what benefit can they
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be supposed to derive from their ministrations, when they are intruded on them, notwithstanding the keenest opposition? Though such ministers should preach like apostles, they cannot expect to be useful. On the contrary, they are extremely hurtful. To the people, it seems incredible that they should "care for the sheep;" or be serious in what they preach; when they pay so little respect to the sacred authority of scripture as to the mode of admission into office. Nay, when religion has so slight a hold of its very ministers, that they trample on that awful sentence of the Lord of the church; "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber*;" the minds of the people are alienated from religion itself. Their prejudices soon acquire strength; especially as its avowed enemies boldly assert, that it is wholly a human device, cunningly framed in subterfuge to interest and ambition. The conduct of the constituent assembly in France seemed to be generally approved in this country. Their wisdom and moderation were greatly extolled by men of very different principles. But it was a measure which that assembly judged necessary for the general good of society, to make even their bishops and archbishops

* John x. 1.

bishops eligible by those only over whom they were to preside.

CHAP. V.

Divisions among Christians. Their ungodly conduct. Unfaithfulness of parents and other guardians of youth. Erroneous methods of education. Viewing religion merely in a political light. Temporizing conduct of ministers of the gospel. Frequency of oaths in civil transactions. The false doctrine, that interest ought to silence the claims of justice.

THE *divisions* which prevail among christians, with respect to matters of faith, have been pleaded by many as a sufficient apology for their indifference about christianity. "Why should we trouble ourselves about it?" do they say; "the most learned and pious christians cannot agree among themselves." It is mournful indeed, that this evil is so very prevalent. But diversity of sentiment necessarily flows from the unspeakable variety discernible in the frame of the human mind. There are few subjects on which any two men think perfectly alike. How various are the systems of philosophy! how different the illustrations of particular branches,

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thes, even by those who adopt the same general system! It is far less surprising, that there should be great difference of sentiment with respect to doctrines so remote from sense, as those of religion. But, indeed, christianity could not be true, were there no diversity of faith among its professors. Its divine author assured his followers, that offences should come, that there should be many false prophets, and that many should be deceived. Nor is this circumstance to be considered as an imperfection attending the christian system. Although our Lord knew that these offences would prove a source of "wo to the world," because many would on this account stumble at christianity; yet, in his infinite wisdom and love, he determined to permit them; for purging his floor of a considerable portion of that chaff with which he knew it would be cumbered; for trying the faith of his people in his testimony, as opposed to the greatest human authorities; for weaning them from confidence in man, and warning them of their own weakness; for illustrating the efficacy of his grace, in preserving them from fatal deception; for manifesting their integrity, as approved by him, and as contrasted with the corruption of others; for the more clear elucidation of divine truth, which, instead of suffering by heresies, has only been better known,

known, and more fully displayed; and for shewing the strength of the foundation which can no more be shaken by the insidious attempts of false friends, than by the open attacks of avowed enemies.

But, perhaps, the *conduct* of many, who seem *zealous* for divine truth, still more deeply affects the interests of christianity. Their faith has little or no influence on their practice. Though they may not “run to the same excels of riot” with others, in the indulgence of the desires of the flesh, they discover the unrestrained power of those of the mind. Instead of “putting on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering,” they display those principles of pride, envy, malice, hatred and revenge, which are given by the spirit of God as the characters of the unregenerate. They discover the same eagerness in the pursuit of the world with those who “have their portion in this life.”

I do not expose the nakedness of christianity, by declaring the unworthiness of some of its professors. It has formerly been tried by the conduct of such as you, and has still stood the trial. “In a great house, there are not only vessels of gold, and of silver, but also of wood, and of earth; and some

to honour, and some to dishonour *.” Your conduct, indeed, is no sufficient apology for those who deny revelation. For the gospel does not pretend to make men better by a mere profession. It ascribes a thorough change of the heart and life wholly to the power of God; and it declares his absolute sovereignty in the exercise of this power. It denounces you, even while you profess to be its friends, as its most cruel enemies; and avows to the world, that it seems most expedient to divine wisdom, that “the tares should grow among the wheat until the harvest.”

But while others, who reject christianity on your account, are not therefore excuseable, you bring a dreadful load of guilt on yourselves, by laying stumbling-blocks before them. For “the name of God is blasphemed through you;” and you “leave your name for a curse unto his chosen †.” Know you not, that, because of your unchristian practice, many take occasion to say that there can be no truth in christianity? They deny the divine origin of its doctrines, because they have no power on you. By your conduct, you deprive them of one mean of conviction. They might otherwise be “won by your conversation.” It is required of you, that “your light should so shine before men, that they may

* 2 Tim. ii. 20.

† Rom. ii. 24. Isa. lxx. 15.

may see your good works, and glorify" him whom you call "your Father in heaven." Either renounce your profession, or shew that you are sincere in it. You do more hurt to religion than its avowed foes. You wound the Redeemer "in the house of his friends." Do you embrace him in an external profession? It is only as Judas did, that you may deliver him into the hands of his enemies.

The *unfaithfulness* of *parents*, and other *guardians of youth*, may be viewed as having no inconsiderable influence with respect to the present growth of infidelity. Religious instruction is certainly far more neglected now, than in the days of our fathers. It must be admitted, that, in this country, there is an increase of seminaries of education. But far less attention is paid to domestic instruction. Some are so extremely bigotted as to lay it down as a principle, that, in religious concerns, they ought to leave their children entirely to the dictates of their own minds. But certainly, it would be as rational to expect a good crop from our fields and gardens without any culture. Others neglect this most important duty from absolute indifference. In baptism, they have solemnly devoted their children to God, and vowed to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." But what

is this ordinance to the generality, but a solemn mockery? Ye cruel parents, although you had really devoted your children to the devil, you could not take a more effectual way to train them up for his service. You suffer them to lie and pilfer, and profane God's name, and break his sabbath, and disobey yourselves; and you are unwilling to correct, it may be, even to reprove them. Some of you, perhaps, indulge your wretched children in the ebullitions of their natural corruption, because forsooth! it shews that they have some spirit, or because it affords you diversion. But will it be matter of sport, when the fruit of your bodies shall rise up against you in the day of the Lord Jesus, as "swift witnesses" for your destruction, because you have been the accursed instruments of theirs; when they shall say at the impartial tribunal; "Here is the cruel father, or mother, who gave me away to God, and yet suffered me to walk in the ways of Satan?"

Even where there is a considerable degree of attention, there are often great *mistakes* as to the mode of communicating instruction. Some devote all their attention to the memory. They are at pains to store this with useful knowledge; and if their pupils can exactly repeat their lessons, although merely by rote, they pronounce them good scholars.

lars. I admit, that there are various branches of religious knowledge, in which the tender mind can be initiated in no other way. But if instruction stop here, however useful it may be in some instances, in consequence of recollection in riper years; it can have little or no effect in the mean time, and its eventual success is extremely precarious. The memory is only a secondary power; and is entitled only to a secondary attention. The great secret of instruction lies in endeavouring, as far as possible, to accommodate it to the understanding, as it gradually opens; to work upon the affections; and even to impress the imagination. A single idea, so far apprehended by the understanding as to display its influence on the affections, is worth a thousand in which the memory is the only agent.

Others, from mistaken apprehensions, or from the natural temperament of their minds, endeavour to enforce religion merely from motives of terror. What is the consequence? Their pupils hypocrise, while under their eye; but when freed from their taskmasters, rush on to greater excess than those who have never had the benefit of religious instruction. From the natural depravity of man, the greater the previous restraint, the greater is the danger of going to an extreme in escaping from it: and when religion hath never been exhibited in

her alluring form, the bands that have been imposed are far more easily broken.

No means of instruction can be effectual without the divine blessing. But as the use of means is required of us, we are bound to employ those which seem most likely to be useful. Even where there is no evidence of a work of the spirit of God, the comfortable effect of well-regulated instruction is often discernible, in rendering men better members of society, and in operating as a mean for preserving them from open contempt of religion, or from gross immorality: while those who have been entirely neglected, who have only learned a little by rote, or who have never had religion recommended to them as “a reasonable service,” become an easy prey to infidelity, or to every species of vice.

Many, in this age, consider *religion* merely in a *political* light. Although themselves destitute of any conviction of its truth, as their view of it plainly proves, they wish it to be supported as a mean subservient to peace and order in society. They acknowledge that it is impossible to restrain the great mass of society, without the aid of religion. But this view of religion has a peculiar tendency to defeat the end proposed. It may be of use for a time, while the lower classes of society are hoodwinked

winked by ignorance. But if they know that their superiors look on religion in no other light, than as a bridle to restrain *them*, the curb will very soon be found insufficient. It is natural for men to imitate those who move in a higher sphere: and although the progress should be slow, it is certain. The opinions of the great will, by an easy gradation, find their way among the vulgar. In this country, society has arrived at that state, that many, who may seem very untutored in other respects, are persuaded that their superiors consider religion merely as an engine of state, for securing submission from the lower classes. "If those in higher ranks," do they say, "really believed the truth of religion, they would certainly pay more regard to it in their practice." It cannot be refused that there is some degree of plausibility in this reflection. There is reason to suppose that there never was an age in which christianity met with so little respect from the great, as it does in this. Even during the dark reign of popery, whatever were the private sentiments of individuals, they were regular with respect to external forms. Can it be denied, that the generality of the noble and the rich pour contempt on these?

That holy religion which I wish to recommend, teaches me to "render honour to whom honour is due."

due." But the importance of the subject, the urgency of the season, love to the peace, order and happiness of society, and that very regard for religion which I profess, must form my apology, if I "use great plainness of speech."

Do you, to whom God, in his all-wise providence hath "given riches and honour," wish to persuade your inferiors of the excellency of religion? How can you do so, if you neglect its ordinances, if you make the day of sacred rest a day of idleness, of journeying, of amusement, or of dissipation? Do you wish that the ministers of religion should be respected by the common people? Shew that you respect them yourselves, as far as their conduct is worthy of their office; at any rate, how deficient soever the individual should be, that you venerate the character.

Do you profess to be shocked at the irreligion of France? Is there not reason to apprehend that similar causes may produce similar effects? It would not be consistent with candour, to ascribe the change in religious sentiments to the political revolution. This hath merely let loose the torrent. We must go a great way farther back to discover the source. Those who have had best access to know, affirm that the irreligion of a considerable part of the nobility and dignified clergy hath, for

a long course of years, been gradually working as leaven, till it hath communicated its influence to the general mass. The servants of the great always ape their manners. They keep too watchful an eye over their superiors, to suffer their sprightly sallies of wit at the expence of revelation, or their plain declarations of its falsity to escape them. They may at first be started or shocked at these: but *high life* will gradually get *below stairs*. Those who judge for themselves constitute but a small part of society. The generality renounce this unalienable right, in favour of those who dazzle them by the splendour of wealth, by the possession of distinguished abilities, by the shew of learning, or by the appearance of superior sanctity.

But give me leave to ask, Whence is it that religion is so much more necessary for the common people than for you? Is it the pomp of worldly greatness that releases you from this necessity? Undoubtedly, it has an effect entirely the reverse. Your temptations are greatly increased by your superior rank. Surely you are "set on slippery places." Is it the abundance of your wealth? This purchases gratifications for you, which are out of the reach of the poor. It pampers your lusts, and makes you more insatiable. Is it ease? This also renders you a prey to temptations, which are totally

tally unknown to the industrious. Is it a superior degree of refinement? This may make men draw a veil over enormities, which the more unpolished do not attempt to disguise. But perhaps, this very restraint makes them still less refined than they, when the veil is removed.

Honour may probably be mentioned, as that principle which supercedes the necessity of religion in the higher ranks of society. But what is the nature of this all-powerful charm? Does it consist in the holy fear, or in the supreme love of the only Law-giver? Such a definition would, I apprehend, be considered as an insult by many who boast the influence of this principle. Does it consist in a man's loving his neighbour as himself? Its effects by no means correspond to such a description. To what branch of morals, then, does it belong? Or is it something essentially different from morals; something of a more exalted nature, and far more dignified in its operation? As far as I can form any idea of this non-descript, it consists in a supreme love of self. The character of its possessor is his idol. But if this account be just, it must have a direct tendency to foster pride, one of the most baleful principles known to society.

Its nature, however, may be better learned by its effects, than by any abstract definition. Is it a
friend

friend to veracity? It certainly belongs to the character of a man of honour, to adhere to his promises. Yet it will not be viewed as any great infringement on it, though he should save appearances at the expence of truth. A man of honour will suffer no personal insult. But it is perfectly consistent with his character, hourly to insult his maker by the profanation of his name; though this practice eventually unhinges the strongest bonds of society, by removing the fear of an oath. He, who aspires to this character, considers it as indispensably incumbent on him to discharge all those debts which are called *debts of honour*. I pretend not to determine, whether this designation has been given them ironically, from a design to expose; or seriously, in order to cover the *infamy* of the means by which they are too generally contracted. But how often is it seen that the same person, who strains every nerve to discharge such obligations, discovers no anxiety for his character, although he obstinately refuse payment of a just debt to a poor tradesman, and suffer him, perhaps, to perish in a jail, for want of that money which he basely detains!

Does honour tend to subdue passion? The very contrary. It has been already seen, that it necessarily cherishes pride. It also supports and sanctions

tions revenge. A man of honour is bound to prosecute an insult at the expence of life. For a rash word or an unseasonable jest, he must run his dearest friend through the heart. If he recoils at the sacrifice, he is hissed out of society. Although both human and divine laws call him a murderer, honour dispenses with the crime, and even vindicates the action. Nay, so powerful is its influence, that, in instances of this kind, it frequently procures a relaxation of the established laws of society.

How, then, can a principle, which fosters the most dangerous passions of the human mind, be a restraint to you; while you inculcate on others a system which commands the subjugation of passion? God, in his providence, hath placed you in a superior station. But hath he given you a different frame from others? Does rank bring virtue along with it? Are you not born with the same passions with your inferiors: and do you not need the same means for subduing them? Are not your minds influenced by the same principles of hope and fear: and are you alone excepted from the necessity of having *eternity* thrown into the scale? Besides, if different principles of action are necessary for different ranks in society, where are you to draw the line? At what particular step in the ladder of honour, or of wealth, does a belief of religion

religion cease to be necessary? You may dignify, with the name of *great*, those who are only the *great vulgar*; and you may stigmatize those as *vulgar* who indignantly transfer the designation to others.

But are you really convinced that the pretence of a revelation from heaven is absolutely necessary for restraining the great mass of society; that it is otherwise impossible to procure from them any due respect to human laws? Then, that system, which you distinguish by the name of revelation, is not merely entitled to a far greater share of external respect, than is paid to it by the generality of those in the higher ranks of life; but has an indisputable claim to something more. It deserves the most serious attention from *yourselves*. You acknowledge too much, to be consistent, if you disbelieve revelation. I do not say, that, if your position be just, it necessarily proves the truth of christianity. But it reduces you to this dilemma: either, that God hath actually given a revelation of his will; or, that he hath not employed those means for the moral government of mankind, which the wisdom of all ages, and of almost every nation under heaven, hath pronounced to be most proper, nay, to be indispensably necessary. If you choose the latter, you not only give the lie to your own estab-

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blished maxim; you make a wide step towards downright atheism. For if the most proper means are not employed for the government of society, how can there be a God? If you do not wish to plunge into atheism, you are under a necessity of admitting that God must have actually given, a revelation of his will; and that this must be found among the different systems which claim a divine origin.

Surely, then, that religious system which you have hitherto pretended to believe, and which you consider as the principal mean of preserving order in that community of which you are members, deserves your primary attention: and if it exhibits the best evidence of a divine origin, you are bound to receive it with your whole hearts. If surpassed in evidence by any other, you are bound, as those who sincerely wish the welfare of society, to use every effort in your power, for convincing the society to which you belong of the superior excellency of that system which, to your conviction, evidently bears the impress of heaven. If, therefore, you continue to disbelieve revealed religion, while you adhere to this principle, that it is indispensably necessary for the bulk of mankind, instead of imposing upon them, you impose upon yourselves. You are the dupes of your own artifice.

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You give them the gold, while you reserve nothing for yourselves but mere dross.

It tends greatly to strengthen men's prejudices against our holy religion, and to confirm them in their delusive idea, that it is merely an engine of state, when *ministers* of the gospel, in their official character, appear as *advocates* for particular *political measures*. There is undoubtedly an extreme on either hand, which they are bound carefully to avoid. Their great work is to preach the doctrine of salvation. They are "given for the edifying of the body, and for the perfecting of the saints." To endeavour to alienate their people from the established government, or from subjection in all things lawful, to stir up a spirit of revolt, or to countenance tumult of any kind, would be a profanation of their character. On the contrary, whatever may be their private sentiments with respect to the origin or comparative merits of that particular form of government under which they are placed, or the characters of those entrusted with power, they are commanded by that very authority on which their office depends, to "put" others "in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates*." They are to teach them to "render to all their dues, tribute to

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whom

* Tit. iii. 1.

whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour *;” and, “if it be possible, as much as in them lies to live peaceably with all men†.” Indeed, if measures are adopted which are evidently and directly sinful, or obviously meant to oppose the interests of religion, their station as watchmen requires that they should point out the sin and danger of these: while, at the same time, this must be done in such a way as not to trench on the authority of government in its lawful commands.

But while ministers of the gospel avoid one extreme, they must beware of rushing to another. As their own scriptural subjection to lawful authority lays them under no obligation to approve of all public measures, they cannot reasonably require this of others. To become the trumpeters of war, is certainly very unlike their character as servants of “the prince of peace.” To plead for the unsheathing of the sword of destruction, especially under the pretence of religion, is virtually to disown him as their master, who “came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save.” It is to expose religion to the ridicule of its adversaries; who know abundantly well that christianity, as it lies in the New Testament, disavows the use of carnal weapons.

* Rom. xiii. 7.

† Rom. xii. 18.

pons. To recommend the extermination, or even the subjugation of men, because of their atheism or infidelity, is considered by them as a proof that christianity is in its last stage, because it hath hitherto proclaimed that it was the duty of its professors, and especially of its ministers, "in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves, if peradventure God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." When protestant ministers follow such plans, they do far more injury to christianity, than all that infidelity or even atheism can do. They give occasion to its adversaries to raise an outcry, that, notwithstanding all their pretended zeal against popery, and their former prayers for its downfall, when they see this event happening in a way that they did not expect, they are so actuated by fear for their own interest, as to adopt the persecuting principles of that very church which they formerly reprobated, and to consider their own as a common cause with her's.

Those, who are entrusted with civil power, did they judge coolly, would see that they had far more reason to distrust the men who, without any hesitation, can approve of every public measure, and swallow every thing by the lump, than others who modestly express their dissatisfaction with some measures; while they practically give as undeniable

evidences of due subjection as those who make the greatest professions of attachment. They were not the true friends of Rehoboam, who advised him to pour contempt on the counsel of the aged, whose fidelity had been tried by his father. Those, who are most violent, whether in politics or religion, are generally the first to desert their cause, when they meet with temptation. The reason is obvious. They have been actuated, either by bigotry, which has prevented any exercise of judgment; or by natural violence of mind, which produces the same effect; or by interest, which will still make that side of a question the most eligible, which presents the best prospects of aggrandizement. It is well known, that the very men, who by their preachings and writings in support of the doctrine of passive obedience, hurried on James II. to his ruin, were the first to oppose him, when he applied their doctrine to themselves.

The *frequency of oaths*, in civil transactions, seems to be one of those things that support the interests of infidelity. An oath is meant "for confirmation." That it may serve this end, as far as human power can reach, it is of the utmost importance that the idea of its solemnity be preserved. But it is impossible that this can be the case, if

oaths

oaths be administered in the most trivial manner, and on the slightest grounds. If a man in order to qualify himself for the enjoyment of a civil office, must take oath after oath; if, in the discharge of this office, he must often invoke the great name of God in one day; society, instead of obtaining any greater security, loses what she had. For this irreverent reiteration of a solemn duty, so far from awakening conscience, tends to lull it asleep. Thus an oath, instead of being viewed as an awful appeal to the searcher of hearts, comes to be a matter of mere course, transacted with as much indifference as any thing in the ordinary routine of business. Thus, many, who at first "feared an oath," become so callous, that they can swear to any thing. It must be obvious to every impartial observer, that this plan has the most direct tendency to efface from the minds of men all impressions, not merely of revealed, but even of natural religion.

It is a doctrine, alas! too common, that in the conduct of individuals or of nations, *interest* ought often to supersede the claims of justice. How many laugh at the very idea of conscience in political transactions? The evil is so obvious that evidence is unnecessary. To mention only one instance;—When the attention of the nation was lately turned

to the consideration of the slave-trade, an host of advocates appeared in favour of it, and reckoned it a sufficient reply to all the arguments urged for its abolition, that this would be immediately prejudicial to the interests of Britain. Even although this argument had been well-founded, which was not only denied, but disproved by the friends of humanity, it must still have been a very bad one. For righteousness is the only exaltation, and the only security of a nation. We can have no just hope of the divine protection, if we practically deny that "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness." If we profess to humble ourselves before him because of our iniquities as a people, ought we not to remember that he hath said; "Is not *this* the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?—*Then* shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am: if thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke," &c.* The doctrine of the precedence of interest to equity must be unspeakably prejudicial to the cause of christianity. For it strikes against all moral obligation; and is therefore inimical even to natural religion. Give this fatal principal its full influence, and

* Isa. lviii. 6, 9.

and it will convert the most civilized society into a horde of robbers.

PART II.

OF SOME OF THE MORE IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF
THE RAPID PROGRESS OF INFIDELITY.

CHAP. I.

*Pride of reason, and unrestrained spirit of inquiry.
Character of modern philosophy. Love of pleasure.
False ideas of the character of a Gentleman. A
wish to avoid the appearance of superstition and fan-
aticism. Contempt of divine ordinances. Profanation
of the Lord's day.*

I NOW proceed to consider some of the more IMMEDIATE causes of the growth of infidelity. Among these may be justly reckoned the *pride of reason*. This, it must be granted, has a similar tendency in every age. But its influence is greater or less.

less according to circumstances. If the state of society in our time be considered, it will appear that circumstances were never more favourable to the influence of this principle, if ever equally so. The sun of science hath not merely risen, but hath attained a splendour unknown to former ages. His illuminating rays have discovered many of the operations of nature, which were formerly veiled in obscurity. We smile at the learned ignorance and laborious trifling of our predecessors, as we do at the recollections of the foolish ideas of childhood. But weak and depraved reason knows not where to stop. She penetrates into regions impervious to the eye; and boldly attempts to arrest objects that elude her grasp. Having made such progress in discovering the works of God, she presumes to summon the Creator himself to the bar. Although an avowed enemy to all systems, she first forms a system of her own, and then brings all the truths of revelation to this test. Whatever deviates from it, she rejects. The controversy comes to this issue between reason and revelation, that the one must submit to the other. But reason often finds, that all her boasted ingenuity cannot supply her with expedients for getting rid of many "hard sayings" contained in the volume of inspiration; and that, after all the pains she hath taken to torture its language,

guage, it still refuses to bend to her humour, nay tramples her honour in the dust. Therefore, indignant of its stubbornness, she denies it the character of a revelation from heaven. She hath formerly deigned to acknowledge the necessity of a divine instructor. But now she finds, that the proper exercise of her own powers is sufficient. The honour, which she formerly ascribed to God, she now arrogates to herself. She "saith in her heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;—I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most High."

The pride of reason hath, in every age, cavilled at the truths of revelation. But, in the present, it hath given birth to a *spirit of inquiry* which spurns all restraint. This, again, hath produced a false philosophy;—a philosophy subversive of both faith and morals;—a philosophy which bids defiance to God, and brings destruction to man. It virtually denies the existence of every object that comes not within the sphere of sense. It rests on cross sophistry, to supply its defect of evidence: and its very darkness pleases the vain and superficial, as giving the idea of great profundity. It wants one invariable mark of true wisdom. It states, instead of humbling the mind.

It is not meant indiscriminately to condemn a spirit of inquiry in religious matters. Faith, resting on human authority, is unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man. We are expressly commanded to "prove all things." But are we to adopt the sceptical mode of probation? Are we at first instance to reject all preconceived ideas, under the name of blind prejudices? Are we at once to fling away as false the principles which we have imbibed in early years? Is it a sufficient demonstration of their falsity, that they have been painfully instilled into our minds by our best friends? Must we reject the natural dictates of understanding and conscience; because they have not been the result of a tedious process of reasoning; Let us begin, as we rationally ought, with things which are more simple. Let us scorn the vulgar idea, that such a *noble* creature as man cannot subsist without the gross sustenance of meat and drink. Let us resist the mean cravings of appetite, as bad habits originating from the erroneous ideas of our parents. Let us boldly walk on all four, as other animals do, and as all children evidently incline to do. Though we should at first find some difficulties attending our endeavours, why should we be discouraged by these; any more than by those which we meet with in attempting to throw ourselves loose from

from the ignoble fetters of religious prejudice? Without such a persevering trial as becomes a philosophic mind, we can have no *rational* assurance that animal habits are not the result of prejudice and custom, as much as religious impressions.

I am told, perhaps, that animal appetites or habits are objects of sense, that our feelings will not allow us to doubt of their being congenial with our nature. But certainly, there is an internal sensation, which, to every man truly rational, brings a conviction as irresistible as that which proceeds from the operation of his external organs. The soul bath its *senses*, as well as the body: and their testimony can no more be rejected than that of the corporeal senses. Are the former subject to illusion? So are the latter. The eye sometimes mistakes a fog-bank for a promontory; or may be so disordered as to see every object yellow. The ear often errs as to sounds. Indeed, it is habit alone that produces the just exercise of the bodily organs. Therefore, it needs not seem surprising, that the *exercise* of our spiritual *senses* should be necessary in order to their “discerning between good and evil.” But there is one principle, which is as certainly known to every rational person by internal consciousness, as the existence of any external object can be known by the organs of sense;—and this is,
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that he is an accountable being. It seems fully as inconceivable, that a man in the exercise of his reason should deny this, as that he should deny that grass is green, or that snow is white. Conscience as plainly tells him that he must give an account of his conduct, as appetite can tell him that food is necessary for the support of his body.

There is one circumstance which peculiarly characterises the *philosophy* of our times. This is a total disregard of divine subjects. In former ages, these were reckoned worthy of the contemplation of philosophers. I refer not to a Bacon or a Newton, to a Boyle or a Locke, who were warm advocates for christianity; but to deists themselves. The controversy between natural and revealed religion, was whether the former did not give as just a representation of the divine being as the latter, and therefore preclude the necessity of it. Even the heathen considered this as the principal branch of their philosophy. But their successors in this refined age seem to reckon the nature and perfections of the Deity unworthy of their contemplation. The investigation of finite things engrosses their attention. Nor do they use these as means for leading them up to their glorious Author. Their wisdom leads them farther away from God. The enraptured philosopher looks down from his mental elevation

elevation on his various discoveries in science, as if the very objects of these were all his own creation. If he deign to call in a First Cause, perhaps it is only to degrade him, by making him the soul of the universe, or by representing the universe as constituting his essence.

When such the character of the prevailing philosophy, is it surprising that it should make many converts to infidelity? Can it be supposed that the men who turn a deaf ear to the voice of nature, when proclaiming the perfections of her Author, should listen to the language of revelation; or that they should diligently investigate the characters of divinity impressed on the word of God, when they contemptuously turn away from those which are so distinctly written on his works?

To call this philosophy, is to prostitute so honourable a name. Can that be a *love of wisdom*, which confines its attention to things comparatively trivial, and despises those of the last importance; which investigates the *minutiae* of nature, and overlooks her God? All, who do not pretend to deny the being of God, must acknowledge that he is the greatest and the best. Therefore, that only can deserve the name of wisdom, which proposes him as the supreme object of contemplation, imitation and delight. Those must be the greatest philosophers,

who know him best, and who resemble him most. Does the haughty sage survey with contempt the brute animals, that merely by instinct know those things which he examines with the critical eye of reason, endeavouring to account for the whole progress of their formation? And does not *he* bring his reason as nearly as possible to a level with brutal instinct, who confines his attention to the effects, without ascending to the First Cause? Whether is he or the brute wisest? He, who neglects all the *use* of his investigations? Or the brute, which instinctively examines only that it may *use*? Which of them makes the most of the faculties enjoyed? The philosopher, who is formed for knowing God? Or the brute, that is incapable of this sublime knowledge?

There can scarcely be any thing more *irrational* than that pride of reason, which is the parent of such a "vain philosophy." Right reason certainly declares the absurdity of supposing that we can comprehend objects the most remote from ourselves, while we are nonplussed by those which are most within our reach. Can reason account, in a satisfactory manner, for the astonishing effects of instinct in brutes? Can it tell how spirit and body are conjoined, and reciprocally operate upon each other in the human frame? Even the formation
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of a single blade of grass defies the power of the greatest philosopher. He pretends to obviate many difficulties, by resolving them into what are called *laws of nature*. But this language is used by reason to conceal her own ignorance. What are these, but the inscrutable ordinances of that God whom reason vainly attempts to comprehend? Learned men, in examining a dead language, find that it is constructed in this, or in that manner. Thence they form what are called *grammatical rules*, for assisting others in learning it. But they form these from facts only. They can give no better reason for the peculiar construction which characterises the language, than the will of the people who at first framed it. In like manner, the philosopher concludes that this or that is a law of nature, because he finds, from all the facts which come within the sphere of his observation, that it is the established order. But he cannot assign any natural reason for this law, nor declare how it immediately operates. Such a law is, in strict language, nothing but the will of the supreme agent; or his immediate operation, the mode of which is incomprehensible to man.

If the volume of nature contain such mysteries, how arrogant is man in rejecting, for the very same reason, that of inspiration! If he cannot compre-

hend his own frame, how irrational is it to think of comprehending his Creator ! If the line of reason is too short for what is finite, how can he imagine that it should fathom infinitude itself ? But many are determined, if possible, to admit nothing mysterious in the natural world ; because they cannot comprehend the nature of a spirit, or its union to body, deny its existence, and boldly assert that the soul is merely a modification of matter.

But while the pride of reason slays its thousands the *love of pleasure* slays its ten thousands. All the race of Adam are by nature the votaries of sense. They are “ lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” Many are restrained for a time, in consequence of religious education and example, or serious impressions made in their early years. But passion “ grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength.” They launch forth in the dangerous sea of life ; and find themselves exposed to a multitude of temptations formerly unknown. For a time, perhaps, religious convictions resist the tide of passion and the blast of temptation. But at length they give way, hoping that it may be in their power to recover themselves. However, the first compliance with the allurements of pleasure only paves the way for a second. When she again
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exerts her fascinating power, the resistance is generally more feeble. Thus, the transgressor becomes more habituated to the ways of iniquity. Accustomed to disregard the voice of conscience, he is seldom troubled with its remonstrances. The light of his understanding waxes more dim. Many things, which he formerly accounted sinful, now appear perfectly innocent. He hesitates as to others, that he once viewed with horror. He doubts, or disbelieves a variety of doctrines, which he once believed as firmly as his own existence. He wonders perhaps at the change, and cannot account for it. He considers not, that conscience, often resisted, becomes "seared as with a hot iron." He knows not the natural progress of error. Is it declared that, "if any man inclines to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine*?" The progress of mental darkness is exactly consonant to this progress of light. He, who has no inclination to do the will of God, as far as he is acquainted with it, but on the contrary, opposes the light of his understanding, and turns a deaf ear to the dictates of his conscience, will gradually lose the light which he had. It shall be turned into darkness.

Few have so plainly avowed their principles, as openly to attack the morals of the Bible. They have

* John vii. 17.

have generally made their assaults on abstract doctrines, or on the external evidence of revelation. But the profligacy of many professed infidels affords too much ground for supposing, that they are fully as adverse to the morals, as even to the mysteries of christianity. Were not this the case, while they extol natural religion, they would not practically deny its dictates. With many, atheism, in affection at least, lies at the root of deism. They do not merely disbelieve the doctrines, but they disregard the precepts of revelation; because they wish to get free of religion altogether. They renounce the God of the holy scriptures, because they say in their hearts, in their wishes and desires, "No God."

To carnal men, the worst feature in revealed religion has still been its determined opposition to the pleasures of sin. Those systems, which are most repugnant to the understanding, will be readily embraced, if they lay no fetters on the will. So attached were the Israelites to "the flesh-pots of Egypt," that even the absurdities of the worship of Apis seemed preferable to the service of Jehovah. They had no difficulty in embracing the religion of Baal-peor; because it suited their lusts. * To men under the dominion of sin, the sacrifice of the will,

* Numb. xxv. 1—3.

to the authority of the supreme Lawgiver, hath ever seemed more unreasonable than even that of the understanding. Indeed, the rebellion of the will, and the carnality of the affections have often incited the intellectual powers to frame objections to revelation, lent a new edge to the inventive faculty, and greatly increased the natural darkness of the mind.

Many entertain very false ideas of the *character* of a *gentleman*. They seem to suppose that it is utterly incompatible with religion; that this must be left to those grovelling souls who never ventured to think for themselves; and that the fear of God is a certain evidence of weakness of mind. But one, whose works, although viewed merely as human, will remain as an immortal evidence of superior understanding, formed a very different estimate. He considered genuine piety, not merely as a proof of wisdom, but as the very beginning of it. So far from thinking that religion indicated mental weakness; he viewed it, on the contrary, as an unquestionable evidence of strength. "The fear of the Lord," says he, "is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments." *

Christianity,

* Psalm cxi. 10.

Christianity, indeed, directly opposes some of those principles and practices, which the world reckons essential to the character of a gentleman. Instead of that quarrelsome disposition, by which many affect to maintain their honour, it requires "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." It expressly prohibits revenge. The duellist may pass for a man of honour with the world. But according to our holy religion, he is a deliberate murderer; and one who bears the image of that accursed spirit who was "a murderer from the beginning." What a shocking perversion may custom produce! "*Man* is the image, and the glory of God." That he may be entitled to the character of a gentleman, must he become the image of the devil, by destroying that of God?

But setting aside these barbarous and brutal sentiments; if it belong to the character of a gentleman to be gentle, courteous and condescending; to be benevolent and compassionate; to avoid contention, threatening and reviling; to "use hospitality," to "owe no man any thing," to "do good to all;" christianity not only recommends and exemplifies these amiable accomplishments, but teaches us how to make them all our own.

Some are afraid of seeming religious, because they wish to avoid the appearance of *superstition* or *fanaticism*. The history of mankind affords them many examples of the absurd or fatal consequences of both: and they know not how to draw the line between them and true religion. They see men of superior genius exerting all their powers, in order to exhibit such mimic sanctity,* or even that which is real, in the most ridiculous light: and they turn away from religion itself, as it were a mere illusion. Thus, they are afraid to act according to the dictates of conscience, lest they should be exposed to the laugh of the world. Therefore they refuse to listen to the voice of this internal monitor. And is it surprising that, by and by, they should themselves laugh at religion in common with others around them? He who "standeth in the way of sinners," will soon "sit in the seat of the scornful."

But nothing can discover greater weakness of mind than such conduct. With equal propriety might one refuse the lawful use of meat and drink, because some are gluttons and others are drunkards. Why is not philosophy itself avoided as the way to folly, as there are many fools who call themselves philosophers? Who ever attempted to pass counterfeit coin in a country, where there was no genuine coin? The very counterfeits of religion prove the

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the existence of something that is real. The evidence of this reality is increased even by the multiplicity of these.

Perhaps, there never was a time when divine *ordinances* were more despised than they now are. Many avow that they can learn *as much* from a well-wrote tragedy, as from a sermon. It would seem, indeed, that they thought they could learn *more*. Let the crowded theatres, and the empty churches, in our cities and villages, tell whether this be the truth. When a remnant of the heathenish worship is supposed to be at least *as* useful to mankind as the institutions of the true God; when the representation of a fiction is viewed as no less serviceable to the best interests of society than the “setting forth of Jesus Christ as crucified and slain;” need we wonder that infidelity pours in like a torrent, and threatens to sweep every thing before it?

Experience teaches us, that a renewal of former sensations is necessary for preserving the impressions which the mind has once received. All, who believe any religion at all, whether natural or revealed, must be persuaded of the necessity of means. Those who believe the truth of christianity, are assured that the ordinances of worship are as much
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from God as any other part of it. Does the life of a spirit consist in union to the Father of spirits, in conformity to his image, in fellowship with him? How can any one suppose that he shall be admitted to the participation of these distinguished blessings, if he despises the outward means which God hath appointed for this end? As reasonably might he expect the continuance of natural life, without the use of that food which is adapted to the necessities of the body. For "faith cometh by hearing." We are "sanctified through the truth." It is concerning the tabernacle that God hath said; "There will I meet with thee." He, therefore, who neglects or despises divine ordinances, although he may flatter himself that he does not disbelieve revelation, is certainly in a fair way to do so.

Another inlet to infidelity, nearly connected with that last mentioned, is the *profanation* of the *Lord's day*. We have good reason to admire the mercy of God towards the bodies of men, in appointing one day in seven as a day of rest. But far greater reason have we to admire his mercy toward our souls, in sanctifying this as a day of spiritual rest. So hath he ordered matters, in his all-wise providence, that by far the greatest part of men are deeply engaged in the concerns of this life for six

days of the week. Were no particular portion of our time set apart for spiritual exercises, mankind would soon lose all impressions of religion. Did the time set apart recur seldom, these impressions would become very indistinct. Those, therefore, who profane the Sabbath, do all in their power to frustrate the merciful end which God hath proposed in the institution of it. He hath consecrated this day, both for commemoration, and for anticipation. It is commemorative of the finishing of the work of the new creation, as illustrated by the resurrection of Jesus. It is also a blessed prelude of that "sabbatism which remaineth for the people of God" in glory. If men profane that day which by way of distinction and eminence is called *the Lord's*, it is because they have no proper impression of the magnitude of that work which he hath accomplished: and in continuing to do so, their impression must be more and more weakened, till it be gradually effaced; till they, although still retaining the honourable but insulted name of christian, be completely heathenized.

They at the same time shew, that their minds are indisposed to that eternal rest, of which this is the prelude; and they take the most effectual plan to banish it entirely from their thoughts. If men are not so besotted as to disbelieve an eternal state, they

they must be persuaded that the supreme felicity of a rational soul consists in the contemplation and enjoyment of the Chief Good, nay in conformity to him. But how can these be attained without preparation? How can the soul be prepared, if it be constantly immersed in the concerns of the body? How can this be avoided, unless time be set apart from worldly engagements? Even natural religion teaches, that there must be a consecration of some part of our time to the consideration of those things which respect eternity. The voice of reason proclaims, that God must be judge of the proper portion. Experience tells us, that if there be not a limitation of a certain time, there is every reason to suppose that the concerns of eternity will be entirely neglected.

May I not appeal to the experience, not of individuals merely, but of nations? The history of the christian world assures us, that true religion and the strict observation of the sabbath have still gone hand in hand; and that infidelity and the profanation of this holy day have extended their baleful influence together? In Britain, since the reformation, there never was an age in which the day of sacred rest was so generally and daringly profaned: and there never was an age in which infidelity made such an alarming progress. This day hath

God given to his people, to be a sign between him and them, a permanent evidence of his being "the Lord that sanctifieth" them, * a perpetual badge of distinction between them and the heathen. When therefore, "his sabbaths are profaned," the hedge is broken down; and need we wonder that "the heathen should enter into his inheritance?"

The enemies of revelation, in a neighbouring country, have testified their conviction of the inseparable connexion between christianity and the observation of the Sabbath. As the most effectual plan for bringing men back to what they call *the Religion of Reason*, they have changed the day of rest. With an evident design that the very day of the Sabbath may be gradually forgotten, they have totally altered their calendar. Candour itself cannot devise another reason for their conduct; unless it resolve to make a sacrifice of common sense. It may be said, that in this manner they have wished to get free of the multitude of festivals of human appointment; and that as the Sabbath had been observed merely as a holiday, though perhaps with less devotion than many other days which bore this name, they found it necessary to treat them all alike. But would any man, or body of men, who wished well to christianity, act thus "unrighteously for

* Exod. xxxi. 13. Ezek. xx. 12.

for God?" Could not the observation of saints-days have been abolished, without an attempt to obliterate the Sabbath? Could reason suggest no plan for destroying superstition, but one that should sweep away every vestige of religion?

Let none, however, pretend to shudder at this conduct, who themselves habitually profane that day appropriated to the worship of God. They certainly do all in *their* power to abolish christianity. Their practice declares it to be the wish of their hearts, that such "mischief were framed by a law." It is an insult, not only to religion, but to common sense, for men of this description to declaim against the impiety of the French. "To the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?"

CHAP. II.

A traditionary faith and mere form of religion. Reading on one side of the question only. Neglect of reading the Scriptures, or reading them in an improper manner. Profaning the language of Scripture. Stumbling at the falls or imperfections of the saints, whose history is recorded in Scripture. Of the character of David.

IT proves a snare to many, that they rest satisfied with a *traditionary faith*, and with a *mere form* of religion. Ask them, why they believe the bible to be the word of God? They can give you no better reason than that they always believed this; that it is the common faith of their country; or that they have received it from their parents or their instructors. Hence, many who never entertained a doubt of the truth of christianity, when they hear it denied by others, although they may be at first shocked at their impiety, finding that they have little or nothing to reply to their arguments, begin to doubt of it themselves. Ridicule finishes what sophistry begun. They cannot think of seeming less *rational* than their fellows. Therefore they at once sacrifice to them their *traditionary faith*, and their empty form.

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Those, then, who do not wish eventually to embrace infidelity, ought diligently and seriously to investigate the grounds of their faith. If they find that they do not transcend those already mentioned, as they value their immortal souls, they should try the evidences of christianity, especially by searching the scriptures; and they should earnestly pray for that light of the spirit which can alone guide them into truth. They ought, without delay, to devote their principal attention to this most important work. It may be too late, when they find such a trial necessary in consequence of their faith being shaken. Surely, it is not the proper time to examine the strength of a citadel, when the enemy has begun to assault it. By taking the start of the adversary, they will be "ready always to give every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them." *

It is not meant, that they should adopt this plan with a view to disputation. This, especially among the unlearned, generally does more hurt than service to religion. When men have apostatised to infidelity, there is little hope of reclaiming them. The attempt may be dangerous to those who make it; because error has always a strong party within it, and, on every subject, it is more easy to make objections:

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

objections than to answer them. But it is proper to be in readiness to "give a reason," when there seems to be a proper call; not with a contentious spirit, or for displaying our own knowledge; but "with meekness and fear," and for the vindication of injured truth. One, who is in readiness to do so, will not himself be shaken by the cavils of adversaries. It is not at all surprising, that those whose faith has wanted a solid foundation, and whose worship has consisted in a mere form, should be "soon moved away." They have nothing to lose but a shadow. 'This, I fear, is the case with the generality of professed protestants. A real knowledge of the truth, and a heart-felt experience of its power, can alone form a sure bulwark against apostacy.

Many *read on one side of the question only*. Books, which are avowedly wrote against christianity, are read by them with the greatest eagerness. They enter on this course of reading, merely from curiosity, or from a wish to know the worst that the adversaries of our faith have to advance; while as yet they have no fixed prejudice against it. But, blinded by the misrepresentations of deistical writers, bewildered by their sophistry, or what is probably the most general case, captivated by their wit
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and humour, they refuse to read any thing in reply. So well suited is the syren-voice of infidelity to the natural unbelief of the heart, that they turn a deaf ear to every remonstrance. Mere fallacies pass for unanswerable arguments. The shafts of ridicule seem to accomplish more against christianity, than all the learning of philosophers, and all the power of monarchs have been able to do. They seem to overpower the combined force of unquestionable testimony, and of long-lived experience. Popish persecutors dress up worthy men, whom they are pleased to call heretics, in the supposed likeness of devils. Deists exhibit the sincere friends of christianity, under the odious name of fanatics in the garb of fools. Both have the same end in view;—that they may deter others from true religion.

Many become the victims of infidelity, by their neglect of the *holy scriptures*; or by reading them in an *improper manner*. They hear them traduced or ridiculed by others. In the writings of deists, they occasionally meet with particular passages mangled and misquoted, or at least detached from the connexion, and held up in this form as the butt of saillery. They take them upon trust. They will not be at the trouble to look into the book of God, to see if its language be fairly represented. Is any
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one part of scripture exhibited as contradictory to another? They will not do it the justice to make an accurate comparifon. With unwearied patience will they follow an arrogant caviller through all his fophiftries; but they will not for a moment allow revelation to fpeak for itfelf. Thus, the natural unbelief of their hearts is confirmed by acquired prejudices.

If they do examine fcripture, it is under the influence of prepoſſeſſion. They have no deſire that it ſhould vindicate itfelf from the criminations of adverſaries. Is it ſurprizing that ſuch inquirers ſhould meet with ſtumbling-blocks? Revelation would be as falſe, as many represent it, were not this the caſe. For it affures us, that “a ſcorner ſeeketh wiſdom and findeth it not,”* that “the backſlider in heart ſhall be filled with his own ways,”† and that “the wicked is ſnared in the work of his own hands.”‡

There are others, again, who read with a different temper. They wiſh to find the ſcriptures true. But their reading is entirely of a deſultory kind. Their minds are not impreſſed with the importance of what they read. Or, perhaps they are determined to reject every thing which they cannot fully underſtand. Now, it is impoſſible that the bible ſhould

* Prov. xiv. 6.

† Ver. 14.

‡ Pſal. ix. 16.

should be found to be true in contradiction to itself. We can only rationally expect that its truth should be discovered by us, in that very way in which it exhibits itself to our examination, and assures us of conviction.

But, in the whole of revelation, there is not one word of encouragement to a careless inquirer. The blessing is pronounced on him only, who "watcheth daily at the gates of wisdom, waiting at the posts of her doors."* Those, who act otherwise, have themselves alone to blame, if they continue in darkness. "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures: *then* shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."† Therefore, let not a careless reader go away from the Word, pretending that it bears no impress of divine majesty. Unless thou canst say, that thou hast sought divine wisdom, as earnestly as ever thou didst pursue any temporal enjoyment, thou hast no right to complain of a defect of evidence. Thou hast never been sincere in thy search after truth: certainly thou wouldest, some time or other, have devoted as much attention to it, as thou hast done a thousand times to the trifles of this world.

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* Prov. viii. 34.

† Prov. ii. 3—5.

As little may those expect success, who approach revelation as judges. It permits us, indeed, to try its *evidence*. It requires, in a variety of respects, the exercise of reason as illuminated by divine grace. But it refuses to subject its doctrines to the judgment of carnal reason, or to admit this as the standard of truth. It presents us with the most abundant evidence of its being a revelation from God; evidence not merely external, but internal. It calls our attention to its penmen; who could neither be themselves deceived as to what they testify, nor have any interest in deceiving others, but the very contrary; who discover the greatest candour and integrity, in recording their own faults; and many of whom sealed their testimony with their blood. We discern the most beautiful harmony in all its parts, although written by men of different ranks, and who lived in ages very distant from each other. It exhibits a multitude of miracles, attested not merely by its own friends, but by its most inveterate enemies. It contains numberless predictions, with respect to a great variety of persons, nations and ages; many of which have already been so exactly fulfilled, that its adversaries can find nothing better to say, than what is contradicted by the most unexceptionable witnesses, that they were written after the events. It holds up to our view a particu-

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cular nation, who for seventeen hundred years, nay, I may say, during the whole period of their existence as a nation, have been standing witnesses to its veracity; while at the same time witnesses against themselves. It challenges all other religions to a comparison, as to the purity of its precepts. It claims an incomparable efficacy in discovering the diseases of the heart; and produces myriads of instances as to its sovereign influence in curing them. It appeals its power and majesty even to the consciences of those who resist it.

But while revelation affords us all this evidence as to its authenticity, it plainly avows that it contains various doctrines which it cannot subject to the authority of our reason. It is absurd to suppose that it should. For it recommends itself to our regard, as having two great objects in view;—to point out the depravity of reason, and to provide a remedy. The gospel is addressed to men as spiritually blind. But can the eye, that is covered with darkness, be a proper judge of the applications which are necessary for effecting its cure? Nay, there are various points of revelation, which seem to transcend the comprehension of reason even in a state of perfection. But, in this respect, revealed religion requires no greater sacrifice from us than natural. From the light of nature we learn that

there is a God; and even corrupt reason admits that this being must be immense and absolutely eternal. But let the votaries of reason tell, if they comprehend immensity or absolute eternity? Can that, then, be sustained as a fair objection to revelation, which equally strikes against the religion of nature; which, if it have any force, must go to the denial of all religion?

Many seem to read the scriptures, merely that they may *profane* their sacred language. The *salt*, with which their conversation is seasoned, is not that of *grace*. Their only claim to wit consists in an occasional allusion to the phraseology of scripture, or in assimilating one of the common incidents of life to some part of its history. If they are so happy as to excite a laugh, they have their reward. They consider, neither the insult offered to the great revealer, by the profanation of his words, which are all “most pure;” nor the injury they do to their own souls, or to the souls of others. For if such persons do not already disbelieve revelation, they seem eager to do so. There is scarcely a practice which tends more directly to efface all remaining impressions of the divine authority impressed on the scriptures. Some, who are chargeable with this audacious conduct, may
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flatter themselves that they believe the oracles of truth. But they are certainly destitute of one distinguishing character of those who fear God. They do not "tremble at his word *."

Some are staggered at revelation, or pretend to be so, because of the great *falls* or *imperfections* of those who are there described as eminent *saints*. But considering the compass of revelation, which includes not merely doctrine and precept, but history; it would be insufficient as a rule of manners, were not the persons, who are held up to our imitation in as far as they did right, exhibited as men "of like passions" with ourselves. We are commanded, indeed, to press on towards perfection. We have one spotless pattern set before us. But were those mere men, who are proposed as examples, exhibited without any shade in their characters; conscious of our countless imperfections, we would conclude, either that this was a fabulous history, or that it was *vain* for us to think of imitating them. *va*

Nay, this very circumstance, which is objected to the truth of scripture, is a striking proof of its divine origin. Those who write fabulous histories, generally ascribe to their heroes a perfection which

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* Isa. lxvi. 2.

mere human nature hath never attained. Even the annalists of truth usually exert their utmost abilities to palliate the vices of a favourite character. But, on the page of inspiration, the characters of priests and prophets, of kings and conquerors, of all without distinction, are fairly blazoned. He who wrote for the sons of Abraham, for the posterity of Jacob, although they gloried in their progenitors, impartially narrates the unmanly falshood of the one, and the base deceit of the other. Where is the writer among ten thousand, who will record his own faults or failings; or record them without any extenuation, or without any obvious design to serve his own purposes, perhaps to acquire greater honour by the confession, than he could have done by the concealment. But Moses candidly relates his offence and his chastisement. He informs us of his sinful wrath, of his unadvised language, of his presumption in smiting the rock, in smiting it twice, although he was commanded only to "speak to it." For the instruction of future ages, he records this sentence of Jehovah with respect to himself and Aaron;—"Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them *." Mathew and John

* Numb. xx. 8—12.

John honestly narrate the various evidences of the astonishing ignorance and stupidity, carnality and unbelief of the twelve, although the selves of the number. They as particularly describe the apostacy of Peter as the treason of Judas. They appear as witnesses of their own infidelity to their master, in testifying concerning the apostles, without any palliation or exception, that they "all forsook him and fled."

David has been the principal butt of the arrows of infidelity. It has been represented as entirely incongruous to our ideas of divine perfection, that one of such a character should be designed by God "a man after his own heart, who should fulfil all his will*." "How," may it be said, "could such language be used by a being of infinite purity, with respect to him who committed adultery with Bathsheba, and murdered her husband, his own faithful servant?" I am far from wishing in the least to extenuate these heinous iniquities. But they do not falsify the character given of David in scripture. For it must be remembered, that he is called "a man after God's own heart," not absolutely, but comparatively. In this language, he is contrasted with Saul. It may primarily refer to David's being properly the object of the divine choice;

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* 1 Sam. xiii. 14. Acts xiii. 22.

whereas Saul was "given in anger." But it especially respects the conduct of the one as opposed to that of the other. Therefore, the character of David, although evidently meant as substantially the same with that formerly given, is afterwards expressed merely in the language of comparison. Thus Samuel said to Saul; "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is *better than thou* *". David was peculiarly to "fulfil the will" of God, with respect to that ritual worship which he had given to his church; and which, during that dispensation, was of the utmost importance to her, as it unfolded the whole of her salvation. In this respect Saul had signally offended God, especially by intruding himself into the office of the priesthood †. Nearly the last act of his life was a renunciation of the God of Israel. For "he asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the Lord ‡."

Some have presumed to prefer Saul to David as to moral conduct. David, indeed, was guilty of adultery and murder. Had these been habitual crimes, he would have been a very wicked man.

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* 1 Sam. xv. 28.

† Chap. xiii. 9, 12.

‡ 1 Chr. x. 13, 14.

We are not, however, to form our estimate of any character from particular acts, but from habits, or from such a repetition of acts as gives reason to conclude that there is an habitual attachment to the sin committed. Saul was chargeable with some of the most enormous acts recorded in history. Not only did he give his daughter in marriage to David, with the base and iniquitous design that she might prove a snare to him *: but he sought the life of his son Jonathan, merely for speaking in favour of his friend and brother †. He slew in one day fourscore and five of the priests of Jehovah; nay, spared no living creature in the city; for no other reason than that Ahimelech, one of these priests, had given David bread, and the sword which he had won from Goliath, and enquired of God for him ‡. The same spirit characterises his habitual conduct. He, for many years, indulged the most cruel revenge against David, and used every mean for accomplishing his destruction; although, according to his own confession, he “knew well that David should be king, and that the kingdom of Israel should be established in his hand §.” During this most violent, unmerited and long-continued persecution, David did

* 1 Sam. xviii. 21.

† Chap. xx. 23.

‡ 1 Sam. xxii. 13. 18. 19.

§ Chap. xxiv. 20.

did not once discover the least resentment. He often spared Saul, when he had him in his power, although urged by his attendants to rid himself of so implacable an adversary. So greatly is he shocked at the idea of doing any injury to "the Lord's anointed," that his heart smites him for merely cutting of the skirt of his garment.

David, indeed, has been represented as a most cruel man. His conduct towards the Ammonites has been especially reprobated *. Some, however, understand the passage as meaning no more than that he employed the people in working with saws, harrows and axes of iron, and in making bricks. Others render it; "And he put the people to work in iron, and in iron-mines, and in quarries with instruments of iron, after he had made them to pass before him †." But supposing our translation to express the true meaning of the original, it seems to be a probable conjecture, that this cruel mandate was issued by David, at the time that his heart was hardened after his great transgression. For although the account of his conduct with respect to the Ammonites, follows that of the birth of Solomon, it must be remembered that the order

* 2 Sam. xii. 31.

† Vidi Poli Synops. in loc. Danzii Dissert. de Davidis in Ammonitas devictos mitigata crudelitate, cit. ap. Stockii. Clav. Ling. Sanct. voc. *Harotiz.*]

of events is not always strictly adhered to in scripture-history. According to our translation, it is impossible to vindicate the conduct of David, but it may be viewed as an alleviating circumstance, that the Ammonites had poured the greatest possible contempt on his ambassadors. Besides, it is well known that, in these times, war was universally carried on with a barbarity, which excites the horror of more civilized ages. It seems incredible, that David should have treated all the inhabitants of the cities of Ammon in this manner. For we find that afterwards, when he was a fugitive from his rebellious son Absalom, Shobi, the brother of that Hanun king of Ammon, who was slain in the siege of Rabbah, liberally supplied David with necessaries *. This liberality must have been entirely voluntary. For David was in a defenceless situation. Had his cruelty to the Ammonites been as great as it has been generally represented, it is natural to suppose that Shobi would have embraced this opportunity of wreaking his revenge on him; especially as he would thus have secured the favour of Absalom, who at this time seemed to be certain of possessing the throne of Israel.

David, so far from being cruel in the general tenor of his conduct, discovered a clemency unknown

* 2 Sam. xvii. 27—29.

known to the princes of that age. It has been common, in some eastern countries, for the reigning prince to destroy all the posterity of his predecessor, in order to prevent a competition for the crown. Long after the time of David, this was frequently done in the land of Israel. Such was the barbarous policy of Zimri* of Jehu†, and of Athaliah‡. Jehoram, in order to “strengthen himself, slew all his brethren§.” David, on the contrary, spared all the posterity of Saul; and not only restored to the son of Jonathan all the land which Saul had possessed, but made him to “sit at his table continually.” Towards the end of his reign, indeed, seven of the descendants of Saul were given up to the Gibeonites. But it is evident that David consented to this, only in consequence of a response from the oracle of God, which declared the necessity of an atonement for the aggravated crime of Saul in slaying the Gibeonites ||

But notwithstanding all the obloquy that infidels have poured on this monarch, the history of mankind does not afford us an instance of a mere man, who was more regular in the external duties of religion, more zealous for divine ordinances,
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* 1 Kings. xvi. 11.

† 2 Kings xi. 11.

‡ 2 Kings xi. 1.

§ 2 Chr. xxi. 4.

|| 2 Sam. xxi. 1. 14.

more heavenly in his habitual temper, more patient in adversity, more dutiful to his lawful superiors, or less actuated by a spirit of resentment than David. These atrocious acts, with which he was chargeable, throw a shade on his character; but they do not change it. If his fall was great, his repentance was no less remarkable. Even these dark lines in his conduct, instead of obscuring the light of revelation, occasionally lend it new lustre.

God is well pleased sacred records, do we find a end in the ing with his own hand a confession of vided so exhibiting them in the most atrocious ry from publishing this confession to all his sub- to de according to the common principles of hu- For- ature, had not David been inspired by God, is hardly conceivable that he would have wrote his enitential psalm for the use of the church in her public worship, and for transmitting a narrative of his guilt to all succeeding ages. In this instance, rarely, he did not act *after his own heart*.

CHAP. III.

Resisting the evidence of facts, in respect to human depravity. Extreme assiduity of infidels. A little learning. Uncommon spirit of innovation.

MANY prove their own tempters, by resisting the clearest evidence from *facts*, as to the *corruption of human nature*. It must strike, and not only re- who believes the being of God, and which attentive view of society, that man cannot at his in that state in which he dropt from the reign, his all-wise and beneficent Creator. When we were turn our eye, we see vice more prevalent than virtue. We perceive that this is not peculiar to one generation. If we consult the page of history, we find it blotted with crimes. It seems to be little more than a mournful record of human wickedness, and of its fatal consequences. If we endeavour to trace this depravity as near to its source as possible, it appears revolting to reason to suppose that all this can be ascribed to the influence of example. We discern this bitter fruit breaking forth from the most tender shoots of our nature. We see the very blossoms of infancy blasted by perverseness, disobedience, envy and resentment. The tongue

tongue seems more willing to utter falsehoods, than able to express sounds. It is no less evident that this evil is universal; that it extends its influence through every nation, and that the same corrupt propensity appears in the children of religious parents, as in those of the wicked.

Now, as reason itself assures us that this could not be the original state of man, what inference are we to deduce from his present state? Either, that God is well pleased that he should entirely lose his end in the creation of man: or, that he hath provided some means for securing that revenue of glory from our nature, of which sin hath attempted to deprive him. The first inference is unnatural. For it would follow, as to all that can be perceived, in the present state at least, that God had "made all men in vain." Now, it is not supposable that, through the whole period of the revolution of time, God should do nothing for the vindication of his honour. It is certainly, therefore, most reasonable to suppose that he hath provided some means for restoring the ruins of that fall, which the evidence of facts forbids us to deny.

But those who overlook or resist this striking evidence, lay a snare for themselves. For it is one of the strongest collateral proofs of the truth of scripture. It pleads the *necessity* of a divine revelation.

tion. It proclaims a defect in our nature, which human exertion cannot remedy. It produces the experience of thousands of years to prove, that all the efforts of human reason have been insufficient to discover the source, and much more to perform the cure of this universal disease. It exhibits all the wisdom of heathen philosophers as learned ignorance, and all their virtue as a gaudy veil to vice. It also in so far contributes its testimony to the *truth* of christianity. For it confirms the scriptural account of the depravation of our nature, in all its extent. The evidence of facts cannot indeed reach to the origin of this evil. But it has nothing to object to the truth of the scriptural account. On the contrary, it presents something in its favour. It assures us that the evil is too general, that its effects are too much alike in all the different modifications of human nature, and that they appear too early, to proceed from imitation. It looks with a favourable eye to the doctrine of transmission. As the same effects appear in all nations, and in the earliest ages, it seems to lead us away from our immediate parents to the parents of our race. As it supplies us with no proof that this disease of the soul is analogous to those of the body; that its virulence is either increased or diminished by transmission through innumerable generations; or that
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its strength in the child depends in any respect on the immediate parent ;—the most wicked children often proceeding from the most virtuous parents, and *vice versa* ; it affords a presumption, at least, in favour of a *federal* transmission.

The extreme *assiduity* of those who embrace infidelity, may be another reason of its success. This seems to exceed any thing recorded in the history of former ages. Their attacks are not directed merely against the great or the learned. They strain every nerve for disseminating their principles among the common people. And it is a circumstance truly alarming, that their success seems in some degree to correspond with their assiduity. This destructive leaven is fast spreading through the mass of mankind. Those, therefore, who “ watch for souls ” are certainly bound to use every endeavour for preventing its fatal effects ; particularly, by illustrating the grounds of christianity in the plainest manner possible, by urging the necessity of a faith resting solely on the authority of God manifesting himself in the Word, and by preaching those great doctrines of our holy religion, which, by the divine blessing, have proved the support of the church through so many ages.

It is also incumbent on all who wish to adhere to christianity, to avoid an intimate correspondence with avowed infidels. Their zeal to make proselytes renders them dangerous companions. They have many ways of insinuating themselves. They may assure you, that they only wish your illumination : and perhaps they think so. They may tell you, that they were once as ignorant and prejudiced as you ; but that reading and reflection cured them. They may endeavour to insinuate themselves into your favour, under the mask of politics. If their sentiments coincide with yours on this subject, they may urge you to the same exercise of reason in religious matters ; assuring you that, upon a fair trial, you will find your prejudices on this head as ill-founded as many that you have formerly entertained with respect to politics.

Do you refuse to listen to them, they may tell you that it is a poor opinion which cannot bear to be disputed ; that you are certainly conscious of the weakness of your cause. They will probably attempt to work on your pride ; and here they will be very apt to make an impression. You may perhaps be so confident of the goodness of your cause, as to fear no danger from their company. But whatever confidence you have in this respect, beware of confidence in yourselves. “ Be not high-minded ;

mind; but fear." "An haughty spirit goeth before a fall." How many, who have formerly detested drunkenness or lewdness, have fallen a sacrifice to such vices, because they trusted in their own strength, and could not suppose that they would be ensnared by others? Therefore, they have ventured into their company, and become their prey.

The bold assertions of an arrogant writer may confound and overpower one who has read little, who is not well established in the principles of christianity, or who does not know that bold assertion has still been the main fort of the adversaries of our faith. A parade of learning, and high pretences to philosophy may please another, who is of a heady turn of mind, and who may be utterly incapable of detecting a false quotation, or perceiving the fallacy of an argument. Many indeed, in our time, become the victims of a *little learning*. During the former part of their lives, they have never thought. Through the persuasion of others, perhaps, they turn their attention to some of the deistical writings, which are circulated with such industry. In these they meet with a system, if it can deserve the name, suited to the temper and wishes of their sinful hearts. They find it easy to believe what they wish to be true. Scarcely have

they read a few books of this kind, or a few pages of one book, ere they are elated with ideas of their own wisdom. They look down with contempt on the folly, prejudice, and *bigotry* of those, who, although they have a thousand times considered the arguments by which *they* are so easily captivated, have been so *blind* as not to perceive their force. Thus they verify the language of the poet, and shew the propriety of his advice;

A little learning is a dangerous thing :

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

But if *you* know your own hearts, you must feel that they are naturally prone to error. Why, then, put yourselves in its way? Listen to the language of one, who, it must be admitted, was justly celebrated for wisdom. “If sinners entice thee, consent thou not *.” “Cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the ways of knowledge †.” In the present state of your minds, you surely reckon those *sinners*, who deny divine revelation. If, therefore, you have any regard for this, listen to the precept; “Consent thou not.” If you observe that such men are not reclaimed from their vices by this new doctrine, you may consider them as still more entitled to the designation of *sinners*. If the tavern or the brothel be their
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* Prov. i. 10.

† Chap. xix. 27.

only temple, they must be in a piteable state who become their profelytes.

An uncommon *spirit of innovation* presently actuates society. As to its extent, and similarity of operation in places very remote from each other, it has no parallel in history. That such is the general state of society as, in a variety of respects, loudly to call for a change, will scarcely be denied by any person of ordinary candour. But, from the depravity of our nature, what is in itself good, can seldom be effected without a mournful display of evil. What is eventually beneficial, is often in the first instance pernicious; as the pearl cannot be formed without the destruction or disease of the animal to which it owes its birth.

Even at the time of the glorious Reformation, some of its pretended friends went to such excess, as to bring a load of reproach on the whole cause. When we look back to the early ages of christianity, we are shocked at the blasphemies and immoralities of the Gnostics, and astonished that a great body of those who assumed the christian name, should become a prey to this horrid contagion. We find heathen writers charging christians in general with these impieties, and representing them

as the necessary effects of the christian doctrine. But when we examine more narrowly, we perceive that these excesses were nothing more than the accidental consequences of the wonderful change introduced into the religious state of mankind, by the propagation of the gospel; and that they were properly the effects of human depravity, which had only sought out a new channel. We can even trace this impious system back to heathenism itself; and obtain the most satisfying evidence that its authors had merely given it a new name.

Some, because of the dreadful working of human corruptions, may discern, in the present convulsions, no hand but that of man. But he who reads the volume of providence by the light of revelation, will not only discern the holy hand of God, but rest assured that he will make even "the wrath of man to praise him;" and that, when he hath accomplished his own purposes, he will "restrain the remainder of it." But an assurance of this kind can be no apology for indifference with respect to those things which are previously hurtful.

The conjecture of the penetrating Sir Isaac Newton, that God would make use of a temporary prevalence of deism for destroying the power of Antichrist, seems highly probable. But no sincere christian will therefore look with a favourable, or even

even with a careless eye on the mournful progress of infidelity. The infinitely wise God can make the greatest evil subservient to the accomplishment of the greatest good. He hath permitted and overruled the fall of man, for a more illustrious display of his perfections, than could have been given if sin had never entered. But sin is not, on this account, one whit less abominable, or less to be avoided by us. Even when there may be an absolute certainty as to the goodness of the end, it cannot justify us in desiring the means, if in themselves evil. The believing Jews were assured that God was to melt, and try, and refine his church by means of the inroads of the heathen, the desolation of his sanctuary, and the captivity of Judah. Yet there is a wo denounced against them who "desired the evil day." And the reason of this denunciation commends itself to every rational mind: "For the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light." * Although he be pleased eventually to make light to arise out of obscurity; yet the evil of sin, or of affliction is still the same in its nature.

A spirit of innovation, as has been already observed with respect to a spirit of inquiry, is in great danger of trespassing all reasonable bounds. It is disposed to be jealous of every thing that has the stamp

* Amos v. 18.

stamp of antiquity, and partial to whatsoever appears in the garb of novelty. Often does it make no distinction between truth and falsehood. If it find them blended, it will not be at the trouble to attempt a separation.

The baleful effects of this spirit, when not properly regulated, are alas! too visible in a neighbouring country. When not properly regulated, —I say; for what some may indiscriminately call *innovation*, may be more justly termed *renovation*, and may be indispensably necessary for the happiness of society. I sincerely wish that there were just grounds for attempting to exculpate France from the charge of irreligion. The truth is, even before the revolution, the great body of the nation had no religion to lose, but that which consisted in bowing to an image, or in observing a holiday. However, when the nation as such is accused of speculative atheism, the colouring of the picture seems too strong to be just. That not a few had the audacity to avow atheism, cannot be doubted. It seems no less certain, that the generality of those in power, for a considerable time at least, wished to discourage the christian religion, as far as they could do it without avowedly renouncing the national doctrine concerning the natural rights of men:

It is not my design to enter into any political discussion. But it seems no more than justice to observe, that it is not a fair argument against any particular system of civil policy, that those who have embraced it discover no predilection for christianity. Our holy religion teaches us to give all due subjection to any government, under which we may be providentially placed. But it does not recommend any particular form in preference to another. There is reason to fear, however, that the connexion which takes place in a neighbouring country between the principles of civil liberty and those of infidelity, although this connexion is merely accidental, may prove a snare to many. They are friends to the civil rights of society. They see a great nation emancipating themselves from slavery. They sincerely wish them success. They perceive that interested or bigotted priests have exerted themselves to the utmost to preserve the failing fabric of the antichristian constitution; and, for this purpose, have attempted to form a rampart in defence of civil tyranny. They see that nation exasperated against these ministers of despotism. They observe their jealousy of all who are invested with a spiritual character. They first view the excesses committed with a partial eye, and wish to apologize for them. From their ardour as apologists, they,

they, inadvertently perhaps, are hurried into the rank of defenders. They look around them, and discern some who call themselves the ministers of religion, although not the votaries of Rome, avowing themselves enemies of every species of reform; lamenting the destruction of those altars which have been deluged with the blood of innocents, and loaded with many more human sacrifices than ever stained the altars of heathenism; and earnestly invoking the blessing of "the Prince of peace" on "the confused noise of the warrior," for the purpose of defending his holy religion. They persuade themselves that such persons are actuated by no other motive than interest; and are thence in danger of hastily concluding, that the ministers of every religion are animated by one spirit; and that every thing which bears this name is merely a political device for securing the obedience of the ignorant.

Others may be ensnared by a process somewhat different. When they read the works which have appeared in favour of liberty, they are amazed that they have never formerly discerned what now appears so obvious. Their mental powers are confounded by what they consider as a blaze of light. But, in these writings, they perceive a variety of sly insinuations to the prejudice of christianity; per-

haps,

haps, open assertions of its being a gross imposition. They are probably shocked at first. But they discern so much truth in these publications, that they are unwilling to suppose that there can be any mixture of falsehood. They are satisfied that they have been hitherto misled as to politics; and they begin to suspect that they have been equally under the prejudices of education with respect to religion. They probably meet with the works of some of the most zealous adversaries of christianity who have appeared in this century. They find that these men were friends to the natural rights of men, that they abhorred persecution, and unmasked the villainy of such priests, as pretended to "do God service" by destroying his image. They consider not that their favourite authors had no access to see christianity in her native purity; that they saw her only as employing the deceptions of a vile forceress, and as unsheathing the sword of a bloody Amazon. But finding that these enemies of religion were the friends of liberty, they incautiously infer that the combination is natural and necessary.

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CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

Address to Britons; in which some of the prejudices against christianity are considered.

FRIENDS and COUNTRYMEN, let me intreat you to beware of deceiving yourselves, or being seduced by those who, it may be suspected, are more inveterate enemies to our holy religion than to any particular system of politics; and are chiefly influenced, in their zeal against despotism, by the fascinating hope that christianity shall perish with it. In the heat of action, friends have been often mistaken for foes, and treated as such. In the ardour of your zeal for what you consider as the common interest of society, some things may seem insuperable objections to the christian religion, which are in fact as repugnant to its spirit as they can possibly be to yours; and others, which, instead of being objections, are invincible arguments in its favour.

Do you detest the abominable priestcraft and hypocrisy, by which a great part of the world has so long been enslaved? And are they not totally inconsonant to the spirit of christianity? In any of the writings of the sons of Reason, are these hateful characters exposed with more plainness and energy than in the discourses of Jesus? Does he

not expressly prohibit all grimace, ostentation or chicanery in religion? Was there not a brand of infamy set on priesthood, on its very first appearance in the christian church? Peter dissembled, and symbolized with the judaizing christians. Not only did Paul withstand him to the face; but, for the instruction and warning of all succeeding ages, it is recorded by the spirit of inspiration, that "he was to be blamed."

Are you shocked at the ridiculous mummerly, superstition, and idolatry introduced, under the name of worship, by many who have called themselves christians? And can any thing be more adverse to the genius of our religion? Does not Jesus expressly forbid "vain repetitions;" and declare the vanity of that worship which has no other authority than "the commandments of men?" Does his doctrine afford the least ground for superstition? On the contrary, does he not reprehend every appearance of it with the greatest severity? Instead of encouraging men to think that austerity and penance are acceptable services, does he not enjoin mercy in preference to sacrifice? Is not the worship of angels, of all creatures, forbidden in the most explicit terms? Is not the church released from the stated observance of any day but the christian sabbath? Does not the whole of that wor-

ship required in the New Testament, recommend itself as a "reasonable service?"

When you read the history of the christian world for a long series of ages, you are disgusted at the usurpations of the clergy. You complain, that you find them still grasping at power and aggrandizement, thrusting themselves into the cabinets of princes, and even presumptuously seizing the reins of empire. Hence, you are jealous, perhaps, of the very character, and prejudiced against a religion, whose ministers seem to have almost uniformly acted so unbecoming a part. But is it fair to judge of a religion by the conduct of its ministers, unless that religion authorizes this conduct? Will any one presume to say that this is the case here? Does not the author of our religion reprobate this conduct? Did he not severely check the spirit of ambition on its first appearance among his followers? Did he not prohibit them from imitating the Gentiles, in exercising dominion one over another? Did he not require that he who would be the greatest, should seek this distinction only by striving to surpass others in humility?

The apostacy of a great part of the christian world, as has been formerly observed, instead of being an argument against christianity, was necessary to display its truth. I do not mean that it was

so abstractly. But it being the sovereign pleasure of God, that there should be a second Babylon for the trial of his church; and this being expressly foretold; christianity would have no claim to our faith, had not the prediction been verified. Every circumstance of this "falling away" is as particularly declared in the New Testament, as if it had been written after the event. No terms can more emphatically express the character of the Romish usurper, than those employed by the Apostle Paul. He is described as "opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God," whether in heaven or in earth, "or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God;" impiously claiming a power to pardon sin after it is committed, and to grant a dispensation for the commission of it. He is also said to come with "lying wonders;" imposing upon mankind by a false claim to miraculous powers, and by mere juggling under this name.* It is declared that he should "forbid to marry, and command to abstain from meats."† The very seat of his empire is so particularly marked out, that no other city in the known world can be mistaken for it. ‡

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* Theff. ii. 3, 4, 9.

† 1 Tim. iv. 3.

‡ Rev. xvii. 9. 18.

It merits your particular attention, that the church of Rome refuses the use of the bible to the laity, and therefore keeps it locked up in an unknown tongue. For what reason, but because she knows that her doctrines and practices flatly contradict the language of inspiration; and that nothing more is necessary for convincing the unlearned that this is the case, than merely to suffer them to read the scriptures? The priestcraft and villainy of the Roman clergy can therefore be no just objection to christianity. For here we have a decisive proof of their being convinced that the holy scriptures are directly against them.

While there is the fullest evidence that the characters already mentioned, with a variety of others, exclusively apply to the bishop of Rome, it is absolutely inconceivable that these could have been thrown out by the Apostles in the way of conjecture. Wise men might, on probable grounds, have foretold the fall of the Roman empire; because it was taught by the experience of ages, that the greatest empires had their rise, their zenith, and their declension. But when the Roman empire was not only at the summit of its glory, but when the ministers of Christ were accounted "the offscouring of all things," and exposed to the severest persecution; was it in the least degree probable, that

that the whole power of this empire, after its being shattered to pieces, should not merely be revived under another form, but be engrossed by one calling himself a minister of the crucified Jesus, and claiming all this power solely on a religious ground; nay, that, under this new form, the dominion of Rome should be far more stable, permanent and extensive than it had ever been under the conquerors of the world? No one, acting on rational principles, would have hazarded such a conjecture. For the history of mankind had presented nothing analogous. Priests had been known to enjoy very great influence over various nations. But there had been no example of one claiming a right to the regal, merely because of his possessing the sacerdotal character. Hitherto the sceptre had never been ingrafted on the crozier. It was more improbable that this should take place at Rome than any where else. For there, as if it had been meant to prevent any priestly usurpations, the supreme pontifical authority had been assumed as a mere appendage of the imperial.

You observe, perhaps, that the church has generally discovered a persecuting spirit; that this has not been peculiar to the church of Rome, but that it has more or less characterized the professors of christianity in every age; and that, in this respect,
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the difference between one party and another has been principally owing to the possession, or to the want of power. Would to God, that I could avert these criminations from the church, with the same ease as from christianity. It must be acknowledged with regret, that the professors of our holy religion have, in this respect, afforded too much ground for the reproaches of its adversaries. Not a little of the corrupt leaven of a persecuting spirit, imported from the church of Rome, has hitherto disgraced the generality of the protestant churches. Never, till the present age, do the rights of conscience seem to have been generally understood. Even in this age, there are many who, if they understand, are nevertheless determined not to admit them. They refuse that a man is entitled to discharge any civil office, but on the ground of a particular profession of religion. Christianity has been so betrayed or mismanaged by its professed friends, that it must long ere now have perished, had not its origin and support been from above.

A distinguished writer of this age has aimed a fatal stab at christianity, by assigning the intolerant spirit of this religion as one of the principal causes of its rapid propagation and general establishment. But let the decision of the controversy be referred to the writings of the New Testament. There we
find

and that our compassionate Saviour severely checked this unchristian spirit, as soon as it made its appearance. When some of the disciples, in the warmth of their zeal for the honour of their Master, proposed to bring fire from heaven for the destruction of the Samaritans, who had rejected him, he sharply reproved them, saying; "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save." * When Peter smote with the sword, he commanded him to put it up into the scabbard, and miraculously repaired the injury he had done to the high-priest's servant. Our Lord seems to have had no other reason for permitting Peter to carry a sword with him, than that he might, at the most proper time that could have been chosen, give his express testimony against the unhallowed idea of propagating or supporting his religion by carnal weapons; and of pronouncing this sentence, as a premonition to his followers in every age; "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." † We are expressly taught that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal;" and that the church has nothing "to do with them who are without" her pale, for "them that are without the Lord judgeth." ‡ In the

* Luke ix. 55.

† Mat. xxvi. 52.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 12, 13.

the revelation made to John, Jesus seems to allude to the language he had formerly addressed to Peter; as appropriating the spirit of persecution to that usurper who pretends to be the successor of this apostle. He at once expresses both his character and his fate: "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword." Instead of permitting his faithful followers to recriminate by the use of similar weapons, he arms them with those only of a spiritual kind: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." *

The very persecutions of the saints are expressly predicted in scripture; not merely those that they should sustain from avowed enemies of christianity, but those also in which professed christians should be the agents. The persecuting character of anti-christ is particularly marked. It is declared that he should "wear out the saints of the most High." †

It may be justly affirmed, that many of the most cruel persecutors of the saints have themselves been infidels. They have pretended to act from zeal for a particular profession of religion; but have otherwise given the most satisfying evidence that they believed no religion at all. Particularly some of the greatest persecutors of the protestants have been actuated by no other principle than hatred of those
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* Rev. xiii. 10.

† Dan. vii. 25.

who exposed their vices, or who had the presumption to differ from them in their external profession. The learned Bayle, although himself still accused of scepticism, and even suspected of infidelity, has observed, that "we may perceive the trick of those panegyrists and flatterers, who ascribe to a great zeal for the truth the persecution of those who have been called heretics. It is nothing in general," he says, "but ferocity, rage, brutal passion, ambition, and principles of a similar nature *." How unjust, then, to charge christianity with crimes which acknowledge no other source than human corruption; which, so far from proceeding from a genuine persuasion of its truth, may more justly be ascribed to a deep-rooted hatred of it.

The pride of sovereigns has been more frequently the source of persecution than any zeal for religion. Louis XIV. so unjustly called *the Great*, discovers the true motive of his barbarity towards the protestants, in a letter wrote by the Marquis de Louvois, one of his ministers. "It is *the king's pleasure*, that such as refuse to conform to *his* religion should be punished with the utmost rigour." The servility of the court co-operated with the pride of the sovereign. For, the violences referred to "were the consequences

* Critique Generale de l'Histoire du Calvinisme de M. Laimbourg, p. 48.

quences of the spirit which then prevailed at court that every thing ought to submit to the will of Louis XIV.*" If the barbarous policy of the court, during this period, in forcing upwards of a million of protestants either to leave their country, or to abjure their religion, did not proceed from infidelity; there is every reason to suppose that it greatly contributed to the interest of this system. Nothing could operate more effectually for exposing religion to ridicule, than to use it as a pretence for such shocking cruelty; while it was at the same time evident, that the arbitrary will of a tyrant was the true reason.

But it may still seem an important objection, that you have never seen or read of any civil establishment of christianity, which has not been unfavourable to the natural rights of men, or included in it some degree of persecution. It must be acknowledged, as a fact attested by history, that in general the church has either usurped authority over the state, or the state has endeavoured to make a tool of the church. When the latter has not appeared as an arrogant and imperious mistress, she has often sunk into the line of a cringing dependent. But as you are not to judge of christianity by the
spirit

* Voltaire's Age of Louis XIV. chap. 43.

spirit of her professed votaries, as little are you to judge by the form which they have given her. Christianity and the church *should be* always in unison. The latter *ought to be* the exact image of the former. But alas! they frequently *are* very different things. Christianity has never yet appeared in the garb of a civil establishment, without being in some degree disfigured by it. Do you wish to see her native beauty? You must look for it, not in the decrees of monarchs, nor in the decisions of senates; but in the sacred volume of inspiration. There you will find no command, no warrant whatsoever for the interference of the civil arm. The church of Christ seems to be so moulded, as to preclude not only the necessity, but the propriety of such an interference. She can have no need of walls of parchment, who hath "a wall of fire" around her; a wall, indeed, which threatens to consume every other that may be put in its room. She hath no occasion for the literal sword. "The sword of the spirit" answers all her necessities. If we view her for nearly three centuries, she appeared comparatively "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." She rose superior to all the power of the Roman empire, which had broken in pieces every other kingdom. This kingdom, which "came not with ob-

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servation,"

ervation," with earthly pomp or by means of human power, alone survived, nay triumphed; because she fought her battles with her own proper arms. But no sooner is she girt, by Constantine, with the civil sword, than the most astonishing change takes place. "The sword of the spirit" is neglected. She, who had hitherto appeared in the modest attire of a virgin, is decked out in the tinsel of an harlot. The voice and temper of the lamb are changed for those of the lion. In a short time, the christian church seems to be only heathenism modernized. The most inveterate enemies of christianity have never injured her half so much as her well-meaning but injudicious friends. All that the church requires, is to be left to the peaceable enjoyment of the rights conferred by her almighty Head. He hath amply endowed her with means for her support. The interference of any, not directly in the character of church-members, tends only to defeat these means; and instead of increasing her strength, to produce imbecility.

The testimony of a bishop of the church of England, on this subject, merits our particular attention. It is a striking instance of the force of truth. Illustrating Dan. xi. 34. and speaking of the last general persecution, which was begun by Diocletian, he says; It "was suppressed entirely by Constantine

stantine, the first Roman emperor, as it is universally known, who made open profession of Christianity; and then the church was no longer persecuted, but was protected and favoured by the civil power. But still this is called only *a little help*; because though it added much to the temporal prosperity, yet it contributed little to the spiritual graces and virtues of christians. It enlarged their revenues, and increased their endowments; but proved the *fatal means* of corrupting the doctrine, and relaxing the discipline of the church. It was attended with the peculiar disadvantage, that *many clove to them with flatteries*. Many became christians for the sake of the loaves and the fishes, and pretended to be of the religion, only because it was the religion of the emperor. Eusebius, who was a cotemporary writer, reckons that one of the reigning vices of the time was the dissimulation and hypocrisy of men fraudulently entering into the church, and borrowing the name of christians without the reality*." Whether similar causes may produce similar effects, in our own time, the good bishop does not inform us.

You may be captivated by what is called the religion of reason, from its fair pretences to establish

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* Newton on the Prophecies, dissert. xvii. part 2. vol. ii. p. 144. Lond. edit. 1758.

universal peace, to overthrow despotism, and to ensure the possession of those rights which are the natural and unalienable property of man. But does not christianity enjoin universal peace? Was there ever a system that could vie with it for the benevolence of its precepts? Can the religion of nature be supposed to produce greater effects now, than when it was taught in the celebrated schools of Greece and Rome? Are the morals of a Voltaire or a Hume to work greater wonders than those of a Socrates or a Seneca? Did the doctrine of the schools banish war from Athens, or did it cause the Temple of Janus to be kept shut at Rome? What sort of effect had it in humanizing men, when it was one of the most delightful gratifications of the people, which were illumined by it, to see men fighting with beasts; or turned out, like beasts, to fight with one another?

No man can justly conclude that christianity is inimical to liberty. It indeed enjoins obedience to all in civil authority. The only condition that it requires, as to the objects of this obedience, is that they possess the power. But still it enjoins a limited obedience. We are to obey man, only when we do not disobey God. Christianity does not, in this case, enter into the abstract question of right. For it principally respects the eternal interests.

terests of men. It is addressed to them as in a certain established order of society, with which it does not intermeddle. The external management of civil concerns it leaves to human reason, as being properly within its sphere. It is also its design, that, in things merely temporal, right should be sacrificed to expediency, and to the general interests of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. It does not prescribe any particular form of civil government; but points out the proper mode of living "in whatever state." In temporal concerns, it declares to men their duty as individuals, not as in a collective capacity. It exhibits the world in general as adverse to christians: and therefore suits its counsel to men as in a suffering state. But is it therefore friendly to despotism? With equal propriety may it be said that it befriends robbery, because it requires that a man should rather suffer in his property, than run the risk of indulging a spirit of resentment, and of injuring religion, by entering into a course of litigation. Or that it means to patronise every kind of crime, because it is written, "Avenge not yourselves." The scripture contains innumerable denunciations of the most awful nature against oppressors of every description. It even teaches us, that it is an act of divine justice to punish a people for the crimes of their rulers;

when that people, collectively considered, silently submit to them. Thus God punished the nation of Israel, by a severe famine of three years duration, because they had submitted to the bloody treachery of Saul towards the Gibeonites*.

In the history of mankind, we have hitherto seen the love of liberty far more frequently going hand in hand with a zeal for christianity, than leagued with infidelity. What people ever made more glorious exertions for liberty than the inhabitants of the United Provinces? And were they not equally zealous in contending for the protestant faith, as in opposing the despotism of Philip of Spain? Are not we in Britain and Ireland, under God, indebted for some of our most valuable privileges to these very men who were branded with the name of enthusiasts in the cause of religion? By whom has arbitrary power been formerly shackled even in France? Was it not by protestants; by men, who were willing to lose their all, rather than renounce their faith? Did they not struggle for a long series of years against their arbitrary and treacherous rulers, because they refused them the protection of subjects?

It is easy to see that the connexion between the true principles of civil liberty and a sincere love to christianity,

* 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

christianity, is natural. Those, who really believe revelation, how peaceable soever in their dispositions, cannot obey man at the expence of renouncing their allegiance to God. These are the persons, with whom it is equally a principle of conscience, to obey their civil superiors in all lawful commands, and to refuse obedience to things unlawful. Infidels, on the contrary, however ardently they may plead the cause of liberty, have almost universally had it as an established maxim to comply with the religion of their country, however absurd and irrational. They have still thought it great folly to sacrifice the enjoyments of the present, for those of the future life. From the same love of ease and pleasure, they have generally been the most obsequious minions of despotism. *in*

It may still be said; "Although it should be admitted that the principal evils which have disgraced the profession of christianity have been expressly foretold; and that they have proceeded merely from human depravity; yet there must surely be some radical defect in this system, as it seems never to have fully answered the end proposed by it. There appears to be a want of power, which would argue that it has no claim to a divine origin. Does it recommend universal peace and benevolence? Where is the evidence of its success? This does
not

not seem to correspond with the pretended prophecies. Christianity, since its propagation, has produced more war and destruction, than all that have proceeded from any other cause. Its path may be traced in history by the blood it hath shed, or by the light of the fires-it has kindled. Can this be a divine remedy for human misery, which has so sadly failed in its operation?"

I have given this objection all possible force; being convinced that the more accurately our holy religion is investigated, its evidence will appear with the greater lustre. There is abundant proof that revealed religion, however far short it may have come of that success which, from its excellent frame, might have been expected by man, hath in every age answered its end to all the extent designed by God. It is evident, that he never meant it as an universal remedy for moral evil. For in the very first revelation, he declares that its success shall be limited: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed.*" Here is a proclamation of war made by Jehovah himself; of war, to continue, in a greater or less degree, as long as the world lasts. It is his will, that the gospel should be the great mean of displaying

* Gen. iii. 15.

playing that sovereignty which characterises all his operations.

To some, this very distinction may seem a sufficient objection to the truth of our religion. "It is inconceivable," may it be said, "that a being of infinite benevolence, in providing a remedy for fallen creatures, should not intend that its effects should be of equal extent with those of moral evil?" But this objection strikes equally against all religion, against the very being of God. For it is undeniable, that the distinction, which has been made, still has subsisted, and still does subsist. In every age, there have been wicked men, who have hated the righteous. Now, it must either, be admitted, that God meant to permit this; or asserted, that, in providing a remedy, he hath been defeated as to his end. This cannot be asserted, without supposing a want, either of wisdom for digesting a proper plan, or of power for executing it, or of both. If so, he could not be God. It is vain, therefore, to reject the God of the scriptures for this reason; because it is equally cogent against the existence of any being entitled to the characters of all-wise and almighty.

The divisions and devastations, which have taken place in consequence of christianity, are by no means to be ascribed to this as their cause. They have

have proceeded merely from the corruptions of men, laying hold of this as the occasion of their operation. This event is expressly foretold. Thus, our Saviour says; "I am come to send fire on the earth. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household *." But the excesses and cruelties committed under a pretence of religion can no more be ascribed to christianity itself, than the atrocities which have been perpetrated in France can be ascribed to liberty. Would you reckon the latter a just ascription? Would you admit that liberty makes men barbarous and sanguinary? "No;" would you readily reply. It is only the horrid abuse of liberty; which is not more owing to liberty itself than intemperance to the vine.

Wherever the gospel has been sincerely embraced, it has produced all the blessed effects ascribed to it in scripture. The wolf has dwelt with the lamb, and the leopard has lain down with the kid. Men, naturally of the most savage dispositions have been civilized. When received by the Roman empire,

* Luke xii. 49. Mat. x. 34--36.

pire, it even produced a general change. The barbarous customs of heathenism were abolished. Infants were no longer exposed by public authority, nor were the inhuman shews of gladiators permitted. Many nations, among which we may reckon Britain, were weaned from the horrid iniquity of offering human sacrifices.

But where the gospel has been received merely in a nominal way, need we wonder that it has not had its full effect? When it "comes in word only," it does not pretend to be a cure for human corruption. But a variety of other reasons may be assigned for its apparent want of efficacy.

In the first ages of christianity, its benevolent spirit was so fully displayed, as to fill its very persecutors with astonishment. Nothing surprised them more, than that unity of soul which distinguished its professors. Therefore they used to cry out; "Behold! how the christians love one another!" But when christianity became the religion of the empire, many embraced it for fear, or from interest. Thus, they imported the errors of heathenism into their profession of christianity. This profanation of religion God punished, by "giving them up," still more and more "to strong delusions to believe a lie." Particularly, a great part of the christian world lost the foundation of

our holy religion, in denying the supreme deity of its author. The subsequent reception of the error of Pelagius was quickly succeeded by an evident restraint of divine power. When men impiously arrogated the work of the holy spirit as their own it is not surprising that he should "cease to strive with" them, that he should leave them to be "filled with their own ways."

Besides, from the age of Constantine the Great the generality of professors seem to have principally trusted to the state for the support of christianity. They had the most abundant evidence that the religion of Jesus had, for three hundred years, supported itself against all the power of the Roman empire. They saw that it had baffled all the cunning of priests the sophistry of philosophers, the force of tyrants, and the fury of slaves. Uninstructed by this important lesson, they attempted to establish christianity by those very means which had been so ineffectually opposed to it, which had been so insufficient to support its rival. They practically inverted that divine declaration; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." They forgot the dying testimony of the King of martyrs "My kingdom is not of this world." The altar was profaned by the unhallowed touch of the sceptre. The sanctuary of the living God was trans-

transformed into the temple of idols. The unadorned altar of Jehovah was displaced, to make way for one after the pattern of that at Damascus, that it might be better fitted for receiving the oblations of royalty *. Was it not just with God to forsake his temple, when thus polluted; and to withdraw that power which was so evidently despised? By hasty steps, "the mystery of iniquity" attained its completion: and under this load the church was suffered to groan, for many centuries, as the just punishment of her iniquity, in preferring the arm of flesh to the arm of Jehovah. For the period of the papal tyranny is expressly called "the indignation †."

It must be also remembered, that God hath designed the present state of the church to be a state of trial. He exercises her genuine members, by afflictions, not merely from those who are avowedly the men of this world, but from false brethren. Now, the partial success of the gospel is suited to such a state.

One undeniable fruit of the inefficacy of outward means, is the propagation of the most pernicious errors. But even this is over-ruled for the greater good of the church. It can easily be demonstrated, that scarcely any error has been broach-

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* 2 Kings xvi. 10—12.

† Dan. viii. 19.

ed, that hath not eventually proved the occasion of a more full illustration of the truth opposed to it *. Thus hath God displayed his infinite wisdom, in defeating the archdeceiver by means of his own weapons. The most artful or violent attacks which have been made on the truth, have only more clearly displayed the security of the church's foundation.

By this limited success of the gospel, it would seem that God means to shew the absolute necessity of a divine operation. He hath employed a variety of means for the reformation of man. He destroyed all the inhabitants of the antedeluvian world, save eight persons, for the punishment of their iniquities, and for a warning to those who were to succeed them. When he made a new world to rise up out of the wreck of the deluge, it soon appeared that the most terrible judgments were inadequate to the reformation of sinners. Therefore he left the bulk of mankind to walk in their own ways, allowing them no other guide than the light of nature, aided by tradition. The
system

* Vid. Szathmari Dissertat. Historico-Theologic., qua ostenditur, quomodo quantumque conatus Adversariorum Doctrinæ Christianæ, a prima ejus informatione et deinceps, profuerint augendæ ipsius evidentix et certitudini. Amstel. 1791.

system of tradition was soon so completely perverted, as rather to mislead than to direct. There was not a single nation, one excepted, whose religious creed was not a compound of the grossest absurdities. But in some of the most celebrated states or nations of the world, individuals at length arose, distinguished by their natural powers, by their acquired learning, and by their deep researches. These seemed to promise a happy reverse. But after human wisdom had the fairest trial, what was the result? "The world by wisdom knew not God." Then was he pleased to reveal to mankind in general a system of the most sublime theology, and of the purest morality. The influence of this, however, has been comparatively very limited. It would appear, that the all-wise God hath so ordered matters, to shew that human depravity is so virulent, that not only the most tremendous judgments, and the greatest efforts of human reason, but even the clearest outward revelation, are insufficient to subdue it; and that nothing can accomplish this, but an inward revelation by the same Spirit who hath given the outward.

The great end which God hath proposed by the gospel of his grace, is "that no flesh may glory in his presence, but that he that glorieth, may glory only in the Lord." The pride of man opposes this

end especially in two ways; operating either in respect to natural wisdom, or to natural power. It has been seen that, after the fullest manifestation of the vanity of human wisdom, mankind were favoured with a revelation of "the wisdom of God in a mystery." But the generality of those who have embraced this, if they have seemed to renounce human wisdom, have still trusted, in one shape or other, to human power, and have subjected themselves to that awful denunciation; "curled be the man that trusteth in man." Thus, the history of the christian dispensation, as to the past, seems designed to convince mankind, that there is the same necessity for an exertion of almighty power, as for a display of infinite wisdom, in order to the salvation of lost man.

"Are matters, then," may it be inquired, "still to be left in this state?" By no means. The same revelation informs us that there shall be a blessed change; that, when the great enemies of the church, and especially "the Man of sin," shall be destroyed; when those mountains, to which she hath in vain looked for help, shall be removed; she shall enjoy a state of blessedness which she hath never yet known, her sight shall be greatly increased, and ordinances shall be attended with such power, that "a nation shall be born at once, and a people

a people as in one day." Then "the remnant of Israel shall no more again stay upon him that smote them: but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy one of Israel in truth*." When it hath been fully seen that revelation itself can never reform the world; that that species of christianity, which rests its success on human endeavours, is only refined heathenism, and merely prepares men for the renewed reception of heathenism undisguised; and when God hath awfully punished false professors for their iniquity; then shall his spirit be poured out so abundantly, that all former effusions shall seem to have been merely as drops before a shower, or as the first-fruits before the harvest. Such shall be the circumstances of this work, as to give the fullest conviction that it is wholly divine. In former events, which have been in general favourable to the church, the hand of man has been too much engaged, extolled and relied on. But there is every reason to suppose that, in this, God will employ such means as to secure the whole glory to himself. Then shall there be so great an *increase* of the Redeemer's *peace*, that men "shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

The change that hath lately taken place in one of the kingdoms of the Beast, is truly astonishing. But as far as it affects the interests of the antichristian power, it hath been long expected by the genuine friends of christianity. You, who burn incense to Reason, may ascribe the whole of this change to your idol. I will not refuse that reason hath been useful in discovering the influence of despotism, and the folly of false religion. This is within her own sphere. But were not the same things fully as obvious some centuries ago? Whence is it that reason did not make these discoveries formerly? Had she not the same powers of exertion? Who hath now called forth her powers? It is that God whom this insolent hand-maid despises. He does so, because his time is come; the time which he hath fixed in his purpose, and pointed out, in his predictions. Is it a Voltaire, or a Rousseau, that hath delivered France from the yoke of an absolute monarchy, or from the dominion of Rome? If they have been useful in disseminating the general principles of liberty, they have only been instruments in the hands of that Supreme Governor, who hath formerly employed a Sennacherib, and a Nebuchadnezzar, in subserviency to his pleasure. The philosophic infidel may proudly say, with the king of Assyria; "Shall I not, as I have done to
Samaria

Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" But Jehovah shall "punish the fruit of his stout heart, and the glory of his high looks.*" To *him*, the overthrow of christianity may seem as easy, and as certain as that of the antichristian power. But that faithful Witness, who hath foretold the destruction of the latter, assures us of the perpetuity of the former. Do the operations of Providence illustrate the truth of that prophecy concerning antichrist; "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion?" We have the same authority for what immediately follows; "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him†."

* Isa. x. 11, 12.

† Dan. vii. 26, 27.

THE END.

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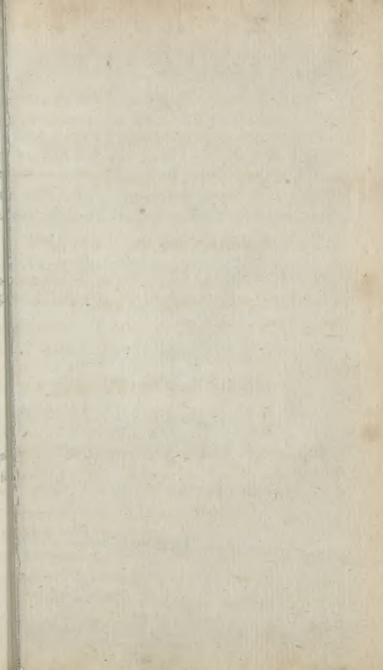
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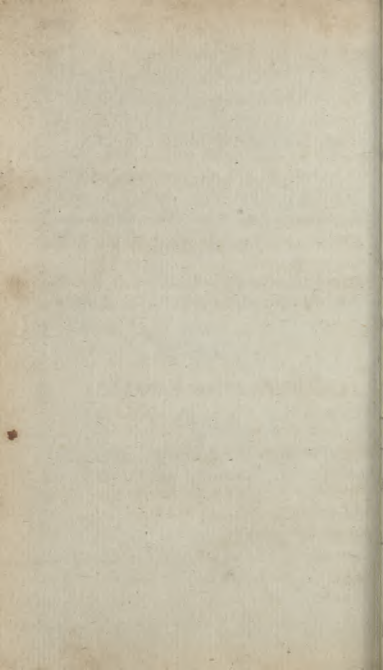
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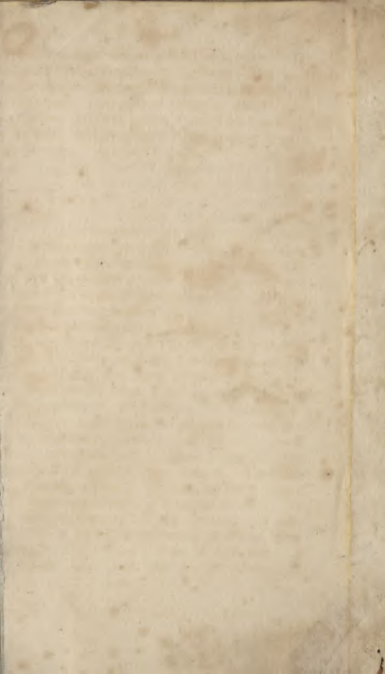
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