Christianity as old as the Creation:
OR, THE
GOSPEL,
A REPUBLICATION of the
Religion of NATURE
by Matthew Tindal
VOLUME I.

Eft autem jus naturale adeo immutabile, ut ne quidem a Deo mutari potest.

The Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law.

God is no Respettor of Persons, but accepteth, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness.

Acts x. 34, 35.

Proinde perfectam illum Religionem quæ Christi prædictione nobis tradita est, non Novam aut Peregrinam, sed fi verum dicere oportet, primam, solam, veramque esse liquido apparat.


Res ipæ quæ nunc Christiana Religio nuncupatur, erat & apud Antiquos, nec defuit ab Initio generis humani, quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne; unde vera Religio quæ jam erat, coepit appellari Christiana.


The Religion of the Gospel, is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature. And its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which was as old as the Creation,

Ser. for prop. the Gosp. in for. pars, by Dr. Sherlock, now Bp. of Bangor, p. 10, & 13.

God does nothing in the Government of the World by mere Will and Arbitrariness. — The Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things. All rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in ALL their Actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason.


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ERRATA.

Page 10. Line 9. for absurd, read a great Mistake; and Line ib. after Obligation, add of moral Duties. p. 16. l. 3. in the Margin, read 1 John 4. 19. p. 68. l. 6. for Agreement, read Agreement. p. ib. l. 7. add which, at the Beginning of the Line. p. 156. l. 14. for Legislator, read Legislature. p. 227. l. 29. in the Margin, for Serm. 77. read Serm. 74. p. 254. l. 3. at the Beginning of the Paragraph, for One, read Some. p. 270. l. 21. the Parenthesis stands the wrong Way. p. 287. l. 20. for Papist and Mahometan, read Papist, or Mahometan. p. 299. l. 17. at the Beginning of the Paragraph, for If the Religion of Peasants, read If, say they, the Religion of Peasants, &c. p. ib. l. 31. for If in the earliest Times, read If, add they, in the earliest Times, &c. p. 347. l. 4. for Must Men, read Must not Men, &c. p. 355. l. 4. add the Comma's thus, at the Beginning of the Line. p. 414. l. 23. dele And before the Words much less.
THE

PREFACE.

The Author of the following Sheets, makes no Apology for writing on a Subject of the last Importance; and which, as far as I can find, has no where been so fully treated: He builds nothing on a Thing so uncertain as Tradition, which differs in most Countries; and of which, in all Countries, the Bulk of Mankind are incapable of judging; but thinks he has laid down such plain and evident Rules, as may enable Men of the meanest Capacity, to distinguish between Religion, and Superstition; and has represented the Former in every Part so beautiful, so amiable, and so strongly affecting; that they, who in the least reflect, must be highly in Love with it; and easily perceive, that their Duty
Duty and Happiness are inseparable. Whether he has succeeded in this Noble, and Generous Attempt, the Reader will be better able to judge, if he reads with the same Freedom, and Impartiality, as the Author wrote.

The Manner of debating a Subject Dialogue-wise, (as This between A. and B.) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent, Way of exposing prevailing Absurdities; and Tully's two Discourses, de Natura Deorum, and de Divinatione, both levell'd against the Superstition of his Country-men; are living Monuments of the Expediency, and Usefulness of this Way of Writing: And certainly, the Reader may be better entertain'd thus, than by that dry Way of Objection and Answer, with which Controversies are usually manag'd.
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A Philosopher's Prayer.

Written by... recommended.

O First-Mover! O cause of causes! O
Potent, omniscient, incomprehensible, men call God! if these words fail to say
thoughts, the words, or the actions of man
not criminal: in so wretched an anim
prostrate himself before thee, if the in
the most ardent prayer that my heart e.
or my tongue, can utter; be not an a
hear me, O Almighty Being! and have
have mercy upon me!

I find myself placed by thy providen
spoil of the universe, where I daily
of my own species, who value themsev
they call reason; saying such a sort
thee, as in my own opinion is also
worthy of thee? I am told by some of
I ought to believe such things concern
wonder.
I cannot, as I not give my affem
regard the thoughts of men: they,
ne knowest, O Almighty Being! the
why I neither can, or dare: to believe.
as men report of thee, it becaus most
appear to be nothing else but the.
hider, and to be utterly unworthy of thy
Wisdom, and infinite Perfection.

What, would make this humble petition:
namely, that if any of my actions can so
be corrected or dissuaded, there wouldst much safer
me clearly and plainly, what is really
thy will. But what am I, that I should
make such a request to thee? How dare I
see or ask to be thus highly favoured above
of mankind? I will endeavour to avoid
thee, and be not contented in that state of
Darkness and Ignorance, wherein it hath
been my lot to have that Species to which I belong.

I cannot distinguish good from evil, and
ignorant of what things are most proper for
be not presumptuous to make any particular request.

all I have the confidence to do, is thus humbly
myself before thee, to acknowledge thy
mine thy Wisdom, imploring thy Mercy, and
fully to submit myself to thy Will, what
is before me, O Almighty Being! in
manner Thou pleasest; yet do forgive
inspired limits of matter, if what it ac-
thy power, and adore thy Wisdom; it like-
sumes, the with a resigned and submissive
ly to entreat and to implore thy Mercy.

Sir, 1735.
CHRISTIANITY as old as the CREATION:

OR, THE

G O S P E L,

C H A P. I.

That God, at all Times, has given Mankind sufficient Means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those Means are.

A. His early Visit, Sir, gives me Hopes it will not be a short One.

B. I come to talk with You on a Subject, which may, perhaps, keep me longer with You than You desire.

A. Your uncommon Temper and Candor, in debating even the most important Points, will always make your Conversation agreeable, tho' ever so long; but pray, what is to be the Subject of our Morning's Discourse?

B. I was Yesterday in Company with a great many Clergymen, it being our Bishop's primary Visitation; where the
Complaint was general, of the Coldness and Indifference, with which People receiv'd the speculative Points of Christianity, and all its holy Rites; for which formerly they had shewn so great a Zeal. This Coldness they chiefly imputed to those Low Church-men, who lay the main Stress on Natural Religion; and withal so magnify the Doctrine of Sincerity, as in Effect to place all Religions on a Level, where the Professors are alike sincere. The Promoters of these Notions, as well as the Notions themselves, were expos'd with Warmth; how justly I will not determine, till we have talk'd the Matter over with our usual Freedom: For which Reason, I have made You this early Visit, and would be glad to know the Sentiments of so good a Judge, on these Two important Points; viz. Sincerity, and Natural Religion.

A. I thank You for this Favour; and shall freely tell You, I so little agree with those Gentlemen in relation to Sincerity, that I think a sincere Examination into religious Matters can't be too much press'd; this being the Only Way to discover True Christianity: The Apostles thought themselves oblig'd, in making Prosélites, to recommend an impartial Search; they both desir'd, and requir'd Men to judge for themselves, to prove all Things, &c. this they thought necessary, in Order to renounce a Religion, which the Force of Education had impress'd on their Minds; and embrace another directly contrary to the Notions, and Prejudices, they had imbib'd. Nay, even those very Men, who most ridicule the Doctrine of Sincerity, never fail on other Occasions to assert, that Infidelity is owing to the Want of a sincere Examination; and that whosoever impartially considers Christianity, must be convinc'd of its Truth. And I might add, That cou'd we suppose, a sincere Examination wou'd not
not always produce this Effect, yet must it always make Men acceptable to God; since that is all God can require; all that it is in their Power to do for the Discovery of his Will. These, in short, are my Sentiments as to This Point; and as to the Other, I think, too great a Stress can't be laid on Natural Religion; which, as I take it, differs not from Reveal'd, but in the Manner of its being communicated: The One being the Internal, as the Other the External Revelation of the same Unchangeable Will of a Being, who is alike at all Times infinitely Wise and Good.

B. Surely, Sir, this must be extremely heterodox. Can you believe, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ in nothing, but the Manner of their being convey'd to us?

A. As heterodox as I may seem at present, I doubt not, but by asking you a few Questions, to let you see, I advance nothing in either of these Points without Reason; and in Order to it, I desire to be inform'd, Whether God has not, from the Beginning, given Mankind some Rule, or Law, for their Conduct? And whether the observing That did not make 'em acceptable to him?

B. There can be, no Doubt, but the observing such a Law, must have answer'd the End for which it was giv'n; and made Men acceptable to God.

A. What more can any external Revelation do, than render Men acceptable to God? Again,

If God, then, from the Beginning, gave Men a Religion; I ask, was That Religion imperfect, or perfect?

B. Most perfect, without Doubt; since no Religion can come from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.

A. Can, therefore, a Religion absolutely perfect, admit of any Alteration; or be capable of Addition, or Diminu-
tion; and not be as immutable as the Author of it? Can Revelation, I say, add any Thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect, universal, and immutable? Besides, If God has giv'n Mankind a Law, he must have giv'n them likewise sufficient Means of knowing it; he wou'd, otherwise, have defeated his own Intent in giving it; since a Law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a Law. Shall we say, that God, who had the forming human Understanding, as well as his own Laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?

If God, at all Times, was willing all Men should come to the Knowledge of his Truth; cou'd not his infinite Wisdom and Power, at all Times, find sufficient Means, for making Mankind capable of knowing, what his infinite Goodness design'd they shou'd know.

B. I grant You, that God was always willing, that all Men shou'd come to the Knowledge of True Religion; and we say, that the Christian Religion being the Only True, and Absolutely Perfect Religion, was what God, from the Beginning, design'd for all Mankind.

A. If so, it follows, That the Christian Religion has existed from the Beginning; and that God, both Then, and Ever since, has continu'd to give all Mankind sufficient Means to know It; and that 'tis their Duty to know, believe, profess, and practise It; so that Christianity, tho' the Name is of a later Date, must be as old, and as extensive, as humane Nature; and as the Law of our Creation, must have been Then implanted in us by God himself.

B. It wou'd be too presuming in us poor Mortals, to pretend to account for the Methods Providence takes, in Relation to the Discovery of its Will; and, therefore, a Person of less Moderation, might condemn your Questions as captious, presumptuous, and founded in Heterodoxy.

A. If
Chap. 1. Christianity as old as the Creation.

A. If God never intended Mankind shou’d at any Time be without Religion, or have false Religions; and there be but One True Religion, which ALL have been ever bound to believe, and profess; I can’t see any Heterodoxy in affirming, that the Means to effect this End of infinite Wisdom, must be as universal and extensive as the End itself; or that All Men, at all Times, must have had sufficient Means to discover whatever God design’d they shou’d know, and practise. I do not mean by This, that All shou’d have equal Knowledge; but that All shou’d have what is sufficient for the Circumstances they are in.

B. Since You have ask’d me Questions, let me, in my Turn, demand of You, What are your Sentiments in this Matter? Particularly, What are those Means, which, You suppose, God has, at all Times, given the whole Race of Mankind, to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise?

A. I ask’d You those few Questions at present, not to determine the Point; but only to let You see, You had no Reason to be surpris’d at my saying, Natural, and Reveal’d Religion only differ as to the Manner of their being communicated: I shall now readily answer your Questions; and, as I think it my Duty never to disown my religious Sentiments, so I freely declare, that the Use of those Faculties, by which Men are distinguish’d from Brutes, is the Only Means they have to discern whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himself with human Affairs, or has given them any Laws; and what those Laws are? And as Men have no other Faculties to judge with, so their using These after the best Manner they can, must answer the End for which God gave them, and justify their Conduct: For,
If God will judge Mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the Judgment must hold an exact Proportion to the Use they make of their Reason. And it would be in vain to use it, if the due Use of it would not justify them before God; and Men would be in a miserable Condition, indeed, if whether they us'd it, or not, they shou'd be alike criminal. And if God design'd all Mankind shou'd at all Times know, what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise; and has giv'n them no other Means for this, but the Use of Reason; Reason, human Reason, must then be that Means; for as God has made us rational Creatures, and Reason tells us, that 'tis his Will; that we act up to the Dignity of our Natures; so 'tis Reason must tell when we do so. What God requires us to know, believe, profess, and practise, must be in itself a reasonable Service; but whether what is offer'd to us as such, be really so, 'tis Reason alone which must judge; as the Eye is the sole Judge of what is visible; the Ear of what is audible; so Reason of what is reasonable. If then, Reason was giv'n Men to bring them to the Knowledge of God's Will, That must be sufficient to produce its intended Effect, and can never bring Men to take That for his Will, which he design'd, They, by using their Reason, shou'd avoid as contrary to it.

B. If Men, having done all in their Power, all that God requires of 'em to find out his Will, shou'd fall into opposite Sentiments; must it not be the Will of God that it shou'd be so? Can God will such a previous Examination, and not will what he foreknows must be the necessary Consequence?

A. There is, I think, no Way to avoid this Objection, of God's willing Contrarities; but by supposing he requires nothing of Men, but what is founded on the Nature of Things, and the immutable Relations they bear to one another; and what
what, consequently, they are, as far as concerns 'em, capable of knowing. But this Objection is unanswerable by those, who believe the Will of God is not always thus founded; but may contain many merely positive Things; since Men may, after having taken all possible Care to be in the right, have very opposite Sentiments; and be oblig'd, by the Will of God, to hold, and act Contrarieties.

B. Tho' this Subject is attended with the utmost Difficulties, yet I find little, or nothing, said to solve 'em; I, for my Part, know not how to deny Mens being acceptable to God, whatever their Opinions may be, after having us'd all the Means God has endow'd 'em with for the Discovery of his Will; and yet I don't know how to admit it: For then, what Religion soever Men are of, if they have duly us'd such Means as God ordain'd for the Discovery of his Will; That, I say, how opposite soever to Christianity, must be the Religion God design'd 'em. And on the other Hand, shou'd I own, that the duly using those Means wou'd have caus'd Men to have been all of one Religion; yet I can't see how That cou'd be the Christian Religion, except It has existed from the Beginning; and all Men, at all Times, have had sufficient Means to discover it. For,

If God was always willing, That All Men should come to the Knowledge of his Truth; and there never was a Time, when God intended Men shou'd have no Religion; or such an imperfect Religion, which cou'd not answer the End of its being instituted by an infinitely wise Legislator; This seems to my bewilded Reason to imply, that there was from the Beginning but One True Religion, which all Men might know was their Duty to embrace; and if This is true, I can't well conceive, how this Character can consist with Christianity; without allowing it, at the same Time, to be as old.
old as the Creation. And yet notwithstanding all these seeming Difficulties, I am confident the Christian Religion is the Only True Religion; but since these Difficulties are of your raising, I may, in Justice, expect that You shou'd solve 'em.

A. This, I must own, is a difficult Point; however, I shall tell you my Sentiments; which, I, far from being a Dogmatizer, am ready to give up, if You can frame any other Hypothesis not liable to the same Objections; or Others equally strong; tho' I may venture to say, that I take mine to be the Only One, which can give any tolerable Satisfaction to your present Doubts. And therefore, I shall attempt to shew You, That Men, if they sincerely endeavour to discover the Will of God, will perceive, that there's a Law of Nature, or Reason; which is so call'd, as being a Law, which is common, or natural, to all rational Creatures; and That this Law, like its Author, is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable; and That the Design of the Gospel was not to add to, or take from this Law; but to free Men from that Load of Superstition, which had been mix'd with it: So that True Christianity is not a Religion of Yesterday, but what God, at the Beginning, dictat'd, and still continues to dictate to Christians, as well as Others. If I am so happy as to succeed in this Attempt, I hope, not only fully to satisfy your Doubts, but greatly to advance the Honour of External Revelation; by shewing the perfect Agreement between That, and Internal Revelation; and by so doing, destroy one of the most successful Attempts that has been made on Religion, by setting the Laws of God at Variance.

But
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But first, I must premise, That in supposing an External Revelation, I take it for granted, that there's sufficient Evidence of a Person being sent from God to publish it; nay, I further own, that this divine Person by living up to what he taught, has set us a noble Example; and that as he was highly exalted for so doing, so we, if we use our best Endeavours, may expect a suitable Reward. This, and every Thing of the same Nature, I freely own, which is not inconsistent with the Law of God being the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd.

B. Your Design, I must own, is highly commendable; but in Order to succeed, you are to prove two Things. First, That the supreme Governor of Mankind has given his Subjects an universal Law, which they, when they come to the Use of Reason, are capable of knowing. Secondly, That the Divine Precepts must be the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd. If you prove these two Points, you will entirely clear up my Doubts; but I almost despair of your doing it, since you seem to me to advance a New Hypothesis.

A. Hear the Evidence, and then judge; but before I produce it, lest the suppos'd Novelty of this Opinion may prejudice you, I shall put you in Mind of what Archbishop Laud says upon a like Occasion: "That when Ex-Laud's Prefis. rors are grown by Age and Continuance to Strength; against Fisher. "they who speak for the Truth, tho' far older, are ordinarily challeng'd for bringing in new Opinions; and "there's no greater Absurdity stirring this Day in Christen- "dome." Now,
By putting me to prove that there is a Law of Nature, you, I suppose, have a Mind to hear what I can say on this Subject; since none that believe there's a God, who governs Mankind, but believe he has given them a Law for the governing their Actions; and that this is imply'd in the very Notion of Governor and governed; and consequently, that the Law by which he governs Men, and his Government commenc'd together, and extends alike to all his Subjects. "Is it not, as Bishop Tillotson observes, "absurd to think, that the Obligation does solely depend "upon the Revelation of God's Will made known to us "in the holy Scriptures; it is plain, Mankind was always "under a Law before God made an external, or extraordi- "nary Revelation; else how could God judge the World? "Or how should they, to whom the Word of God ne- "ver came, be acquitted, or condemned at the last Day; "for where there is no Law, there can neither be Obedi- "ence, nor Transgression.

If, then, it be absurd to suppose, that Men, tho' they liv'd ever so impiously and immorally, cou'd do nothing which God has forbid them; Or if ever so piously and virtuously, cou'd not do any Thing God has commanded them; must there not always have been an universal Law so fully pro- mulgated to Mankind, that they could have no just Plea from their Ignorance not to be try'd by it; and consequently, nothing less than its being founded on the Nature of Things, and the Relation they stand in to God, and one another, visible at all Times to all Mankind, cou'd make it thus uni- versally promulgated. But further to illustrate this Matter, can it be imagin'd, that if God has been so good to all other Animals, as to give them, not in one Country only,
but in all Places whatsoever, sufficient Means to act for their own Preservation, that he has had less Kindness for the immortal Souls of those made after his own Image, and has not given them at one Time as well as another, and at one Place as well as another, sufficient Means to provide for their eternal Happiness? Or,

Can it be suppos'd, an infinitely good and gracious Being, which gives Men Notice by their Senses, what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies, has had less Regard for their immortal Parts, and has not given them at all Times by the Light of their Understanding, sufficient Means to discover what makes for the Good of their Souls; but has necessi\text{tated} them, or any of them, to continue from Age to Age in destructive Ignorance, or Error? To press this Matter further, let me ask you, Whether there's not a clear and distinct Light, that enlightens all Men; and which, the Moment they attend to it, makes them perceive those eternal Truths, which are the Foundation of all our Knowledge; And is it not God himself, who immediately illuminates them? And what better Reason can you assign, why infinite Wisdom should act thus, except it be to give Mankind standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falshood; especially in Matters of the highest Consequence, to their eternal as well as temporal Happiness?

There has, no doubt, been a great Number of traditional Religions succeeding one another; and as far as we know, there is no traditional Religion, which, except in Name, has continu'd the same for any long Time; and tho' there are a great Number of Sects, who go under the same common Denomination, yet they are almost as much divided among themselves, as if they own'd different Religions, and accord-

\text{ingly}
ingly charge one another with erring fundamentally; yet all these agree in acknowledging a Law of Nature, and that they are indispensably oblig'd to obey its Dictates: So that This Light of Nature, like That of the Sun, is universal; and wou'd, did not Men shut the Eyes of their Understanding, or suffer Others to blind them, soon disperse all these Mists and Fogs, which arise from false Traditions or false Interpretations of the true Tradition.
CHAP. II.

That the Religion of Nature consists in observing those Things, which our Reason, by considering the Nature of God and Man, and the Relation we stand in to him and one another, demonstrates to be our Duty; and that those Things are plain; and likewise What they are.

But we may the better know whether the Law, or Religion of Nature is universal, and the Gospel a Republication of It, and not a New Religion; I desire you will give a Definition of the Religion of Nature.

A. By Natural Religion, I understand the Belief of the Existence of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties, which result from the Knowledge, we, by our Reason, have of him, and his Perfections; and of ourselves, and our own Imperfections; and of the Relation we stand in to him, and to our Fellow-Creatures; so that the Religion of Nature takes in every Thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things. Hence Grotius defines the Law of Nature to be Diēlatum rectae rationis, indicans actui alicui, ejus convenientia aut disconvenientia cum ipsa natura ratio
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nali, inesse moralem turpitudinem, aut necessitatem moralem, ac consequenter ab autore naturae Deo talem actum aut vettari aut praecipi,

I suppose you will allow, That 'tis evident by the Light of Nature that there is a God; or in other Words, a Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely happy in himself, who is the Source of all other Beings; and that what Perfections soever the Creatures have, they are wholly deriv'd from him.

B. This, no doubt, has been demonstrated over and over; and I must own, that I can't be more certain of my own Existence, than of the Existence of such a Being.

A. Since then, it is demonstrable there is such a Being, it is equally demonstrable, that the Creatures can neither add to, or take from the Happiness of That Being; and that he could have no Motive in Framing his Creatures, or in giving Laws to such of them as he made capable of knowing his Will, but their own Good.

To imagine he created them at first for his own sake, and has since requir'd Things of them for that Reason, is to suppose he was not perfectly happy in himself before the Creation; and that the Creatures, by either observing, or not observing the Rules prescrib'd them, cou'd add to, or take from his Happiness.

If then, a Being infinitely happy in himself, cou'd not command his Creatures any Thing for his own Good; nor an All-wise Being Things to no End or Purpose; nor an All-good Being any Thing but for their Good; it unavoidably follows, nothing can be a Part of the Divine Law, but what tends to promote the common Interest, and mutual Happiness of his rational Creatures; and every Thing that does so must be a Part of it.
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As God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our Happiness; so he, who can't envy us any Happiness our Nature is capable of, can forbid us those Things only, which tend to our Hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himself, infinitely good and wise; and as God can design nothing by his Laws but our Good, so by being infinitely powerful, he can bring every Thing to pass which he designs for that End.

From the Consideration of these Perfections, we cannot but have the highest Veneration, nay, the greatest Adoration and Love for this supreme Being; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as possible for such Creatures to be, has made our acting for our present, to be the only Means of obtaining our future Happiness; and that we can't sin against him, but by acting against our reasonable Natures: These Reflections, which occur to every One who in the least considers, must give us a wonderful and surprizing Sense of the divine Goodness, fill us with Admiration, Transport and Extacy (of which we daily see among contemplative Persons remarkable Instances) and not only force us to express a never-failing Gratitude in Raptures of the highest Praise and Thanksgiving; but make us strive to imitate him in our extensive Love to our Fellow-Creatures: And Thus copying after the Divine Original, and taking God himself for our Precedent, must make us like unto him, who is all Perfection and all Happiness; and who must have an inexhaustible Love for all, who thus endeavour to imitate him.

The Difference between the supreme Being, infinitely happy in himself, and the Creatures who are not so, is, That
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That all his Actions, in Relation to his Creatures, flow from a pure disinterested Love; whereas the Spring of all the Actions of the Creatures is their own Good: *We love God, because he first lov'd us*; and consequently, our Love to him will be in Proportion to our Sense of his Goodness to us. And therefore, we can't in the least vary from those Sentiments, which the Consideration of the divine Attributes implant in us; but we must in Proportion take off from the Goodness of God, and those Motives we have to love him as we ought.

Our Reason, which gives us a Demonstration of the Divine Perfections, affords us the same concerning the Nature of those Duties God requires; not only with Relation to himself, but to ourselves, and one another: Those we shall discern, if we look into ourselves, and consider our own Natures, and those Circumstances God has plac'd us in with Relation to our Fellow-Creatures; and see what conduces to our mutual Happiness: Of This, our Senses, our Reason, the Experience of Others as well as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient Information.

With relation to ourselves, we can't but know how we are to act; if we consider, that God has endow'd Man with such a Nature, as makes him necessarily desire his own Good; and, therefore, he may be sure, that God, who has bestow'd this Nature on him, cou'd not require any Thing of him in Prejudice of it; but on the contrary, that he shou'd do every Thing which tends to promote the Good of it. The Health of the Body, and the Vigor of the Mind being highly conducing to our Good, we must be sensible we offend our Maker, if we indulge our Senses to the Prejudice of These: And because not only all irregular Passions, all unfriendly Affections carry their own
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Torment with them, and endless Inconveniences attend the Excess of sensual Delights; and all immoderate Desires (human Nature being able to bear but a certain Proportion) disorder both Mind and Body; we can't but know we ought to use great Moderation with Relation to our Passions, or in other Words, govern all our Actions by Reason; That, and our True Interest being inseparable. And in a Word, whoever so regulates his natural Appetites, as will conduce most to the Exercise of his Reason, the Health of his Body, and the Pleasure of his Senses, taken and consider'd together, (since herein his Happiness consists) may be certain he can never offend his Maker; Who, as he governs all Things according to their Natures, can't but expect his rational Creatures shou'd act according to their Natures.

As to what God expects from Man with relation to each other; every One must know his Duty, who considers that the common Parent of Mankind has the whole Species alike under his Protection, and will equally punish him for injuring others, as he would others for injuring him; and consequently, that it is his Duty to deal with them, as he expects they should deal with him in the like Circumstances. How much this is his Duty every One must perceive, who considers himself as a weak Creature, not able to subsist without the Assistance of others, who have it in their Power to retaliate the Usage he gives them: And that he may expect, if he breaks those Rules which are necessary for Mens mutual Happiness, to be treated like a common Enemy, not only by the Persons injur'd, but by all others; who, by the common Ties of Nature, are oblig'd to defend, and assist each other. And not only a Man's own particular Interest, but that of his Children, his Family, and all that's dear to

D  him,
him, obliges him to promote the common Happiness, and
to endeavour to convey the same to Posterity.

All Moralists agree, that human Nature is so consti-
tuted, that Men can't live without Society and mutual As-
sistência; and that God has endow'd them with Reason,
Speech, and other Faculties, evidently fitted to enable them
to assist each other in all Matters of Life; That, therefore,
'tis the Will of God who gives them this Nature, and en-
dows them with these Faculties, that they should employ
them for their common Benefit and mutual Assistance. And
the Philosophers, who saw that all Society would be dissolv'd,
and Men soon become destitute of even the Necessaries of
Life, and be a Prey to one another, if each Man was only
to mind himself, and his own single Interest; and that eve-
ry Thing pointed out the Necessity of mutual Benevolence
among Mankind; and therefore they judg'd, that Men by
their Nature were fram'd to be useful to one another; Ad
De fin. 1. 3. tuendos conservandos; homines hominem naturum esse, says Ci-
cero. And therefore, every Man, for the sake of others as
well as himself, is not to disable his Body or Mind by such
Irregularities, as may make him less serviceable to them.

In short, considering the Variety of Circumstances Men
are under, and these continually changing, as well as being
for the most Part unforeseen; 'tis impossible to have Rules
laid down by any External Revelation for every particu-
lar Case; and therefore, there must be some standing Rule,
discoverable by the Light of Nature, to direct us in all such
Cases. And we can't be more certain that 'tis the Will of
God, that those Effects which flow from Natural Causes
shou'd so flow, than we are that 'tis the Will of God, that
Men shou'd observe whatever the Nature of Things, and
the Relation they have to one another make fit to be ob-
serv'd.
serv'd, shou'd be so observ'd; Or in other Words, we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that whatever Circumstances Men are plac'd in, by the universal Cause of all Things; that 'tis his eternal and immutable Will, by his placing them in these Circumstances, that they act as These require. 'Tis absurd to imagine we are oblig'd to act Thus in some Cases, and not in others; when the Reason for acting Thus in all is the same. This Consideration alone will direct a Man how to act in all Conditions of Life, whether Father, Son, Husband, Servant, Subject, Master, King, &c. Thus we see how the Reason of Things, or the Relation they have to each other, teaches us our Duty in all Cases whatever. And I may add, that the better to cause Men to observe those Rules, which make for their mutual Benefit, infinite Goodness has sown in their Hearts Seeds of Pity, Humanity and Tenderness, which, without much Difficulty, cannot be eradicated; but nothing operates more strongly than that Desire Men have of being in Esteem, Credit, and Reputation with their Fellow Creatures; not to be obtain'd without acting on the Principles of Natural Justice, Equity, Benevolence, &c.

In a Word, As a most beneficent Disposition in the supreme Being is the Source of all his Actions in relation to his Creatures; so he has implanted in Man, whom he has made after his own Image, a Love for his Species; the gratifying of which in doing Acts of Benevolence, Compassion and good Will, produces a Pleasure that never satiates; as on the contrary, Actions of Ill Nature, Envy, Malice, &c, never fail to produce Shame, Confusion, and everlasting Self-Reproach.

And now let any One say, how 'tis possible God could more fully make known his Will to all intelligent Creatures,
tured; than by making every Thing within and without them a Declaration of it, and an Argument for observing it.

Having thus discover'd our Duty, we may be sure it will always be the same; since Inconstancy, as it argues a Defect either of Wisdom or Power, can't belong to a Being infinitely wise and powerful: What unerring Wisdom has once instituted can have no Defects; and as God is entirely free from all Partiality, his Laws must alike extend to all Times and Places.

From these Premises, I think, we may boldly draw this Conclusion, That if Religion consists in the Practice of those Duties, that result from the Relation we stand in to God and Man, our Religion must always be the same. If God is unchangeable, our Duty to him must be so too; if human Nature continues the same, and Men at all Times stand in the same Relation to one another, the Duties which result from those Relations must always be the same: And consequently, our Duty to God and Man must, from the Beginning of the World to the End, always be the same; always alike plain and perspicuous, and can neither be chang'd in Whole or Part; which demonstrates that no Person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other Religion, or give us any Precepts, but what are founded on those Relations. Heaven and Earth shall sooner pass away, than one Tittle of this Eternal Law shall either be abrogated, or alter'd.

To sum up all in few Words, As Nature teaches Men to unite for their mutual Defence, and Government was instituted solely for this End; so to make This more effectual, Religion, which reaches the Thoughts, was wholly ordain'd; it being impossible for God, in governing the World, to propose to himself any other End than the Good of the governed; and consequently, whoever acts what is best for him—
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himself both in a publick, and private Capacity, does all that either God or Man can require. Thus from the Consideration of our own Imperfections, which we continually feel; and the Perfections of our Creator, which we constantly view in all his Works; we may arrive to the Knowledge of our Duty, both to our Creator and Fellow-Creatures. Hence I think, we may define True Religion to consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to do all the Good we can; and thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the End of his Creation.
That the Perfection and Happiness of all rational Beings, supreme as well as subordinate, consists in living up to the Dictates of their Nature.

O make This, (since all our Happiness depends on it) if possible, more plain; The Principle from which all human Actions flow is the Desire of Happiness; and God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted this Principle, This only innate Principle in Mankind, if he had not given them Reason to discern what Actions make for, and against their Happiness.

B. Wherein do you take the Happiness of rational Creatures to consist? Without knowing That, this Controversy can't be determin'd; and when 'tis known, our Dispute must soon be ended.

A. The Happiness of all Beings whatever consists in the Perfection of their Nature; and the Nature of a rational Being is most perfect, when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all its Actions by the Rules of right Reason; for then it arrives to the most perfect, and consequently the happiest State a rational Nature can aspire to; and every Deviation from the Rules of right Reason being an Imperfection, must carry with it a proportionable Unhappiness; and a Man's Happiness and Duty must consist
sift in the same Things, since no One can be oblig'd to do any Thing that does not some Way or other contribute to his Happiness; and consequently according to the Sense Men have of their own Happiness, and of the Means which will naturally procure it, they will assuredly attain the Knowledge of their respective Duties.

B. If we know wherein the Happiness of God, who is necessarily happy, consists, we might judge wherein consists the Happiness of Man made after God's own Image; and whether Happiness, or Misery are the necessary Consequence of his Actions.

A. Because this is a Point of the highest Consequence, I shall speak my Sentiments (that they may the better pass with you) in the Words of the judicious Dr. Scot, who says, "That which renders God so infinitely happy in himself, is not so much the Almighty Power he has to defend himself from foreign Hurts and Injuries, as the exact Agreement of all his Actions with the All-comprehending Reason of his own Mind. God loves not himself meerly because he is himself, but because he is in all Respects morally good, and his Will and Power perfectly compliant with the infallible Dictates of his own Reason: Hence arises his infinite Complacency in himself, that there's nothing in him but what his own Reason perfectly approves; no Inclinations in his Will, or Nature, but what are exactly agreeable to the fairest Ideas of his own Mind.

If the Perfection, and consequently the Happiness of God, consists in the Purity and Rectitude of his Nature, we, as far as we can arrive to a like Purity and Rectitude, must be so far necessarily happy; since by living according to the Rules of right Reason, we more and more implant in
in us the moral Perfections of God, from which his Happiness is inseparable. We then, if I may so say, live the Life of God; that is, we, in our Place and Station, live after the same Manner, and by the same Rules as he does in his; and we do what God himself would do were he in our Place; and there would be no other Difference between his Life and ours, but what arises from our different States and Relations; since the same Rules would determine our Wills as determine his Will; and by our repeated Acts of Virtue, we should be continually making nearer and nearer Approaches to the most perfect, and the most happy Being. By this Conduct, we, as the Scriptures assure us, should be made Partakers of the Divine Nature; be born of God, and be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect; and can That be without being as happy as we are perfect? Hence we may contemplate the great Dignity of our Rational Nature, since our Reason for Kind, tho' not for Degree, is of the same Nature with that of God's; nay, 'tis our Reason which makes us the Image of God himself, and is the common Bond which unites Heaven and Earth; the Creatures, and the Creator; and if our Happiness is limited, 'tis because our Reason is so: 'Tis God alone, who has an unlimited Reason and Happiness.

The excellent Author just now mention'd says, "The best Thing we can receive from God is Himself, and Himself we do receive in our strict Compliance with the eternal Laws of Goodness; which Laws being transcrib'd from the Nature of God, from his eternal Righteousness and Goodness, we do, by obeying them, derive God's Nature into our own; so that while we write after the Copy of his Laws, we write out the Perfections of his Being; and his Laws being the Seal on which he has
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"engraven his Nature, we, in obeying them, take Impref-
"sion from them, and stamp his blessed Nature on our
"own." Which, certainly, must make us necessarily hap-
py, as a contrary Conduct wou'd make us unhappy. And,
I think, I may venture to say, that cou'd we suppose God
himself to act otherwise, he wou'd then be as unhappy as
he now is-happy; and his Omnipotency cou'd not hinder
him from being continually expos'd to the Reproach of his
own Infallible Reason.

From these Premises, I think, we may conclude, that
Men, according as they do, or do not partake of the Na-
ture of God, must unavoidably be either happy, or mis-
erable: And herein appears the great Wisdom of God, in
making Mens Misery and Happiness the necessary and in-
separable Consequence of their Actions; and that rati-
onal Actions carry with them their own Reward, and ir-
rational their own Punishment: This, I think, can't be
deny'd, as long as there are some Actions naturally be-
neficial to us, and others as hurtful; and that there's no
Virtue, but what has some Good inseparably annex'd to
it; and no Vice, but what as necessarily carries with it
some Evil; and if our rational Nature is to be the same
in the next Life, as it is in this, our Actions must pro-
duce Effects of the same Kind, and that too in a much higher
Degree.

In this Life, 'tis true, we can't be perfectly happy; as
subject to Diseases and Disasters: We are imperfect our-
selves, and have none to converse with but imperfect Cre-
atures; and yet if we act according to the Dictates of right
Reason, we shall receive, even here, true inward Comfort
and Satisfaction; and hereafter, when we are freed
from those Imperfections, compleat Happiness: On the con-
trary,
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Marry, the Man who abandons his Reason, besides the Misery of all Sorts an irrational Conduct will bring on him, must feel in his Mind, Pain, and Anguish even in this Life; and in the Life to come, when there are no sensual Things to divert his Thoughts, insupportable Grief and Misery.

Tho' human Law-givers are forc'd to have Recourse to Punishments, which are not connected with the Things they forbid; yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus straiten'd, but may make one the necessary Consequence of the other: And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil have their Foundation in the essential Difference of Things, and their Nature is fix'd and immovable; And consequently, our Happiness depends on the intrinsic Nature of the one, and our Misery on the intrinsic Nature of the other.

As God, whose infinite Wisdom sets him above being deceiv'd, or influenc'd by any wrong Affections, acts in constant Conformity to the Reason and Nature of Things; and 'tis a Contradiction to his Nature for him to do any Thing that is not Fit and Reasonable; so he wou'd have fram'd our Nature in Contradiction to his own, if he had oblig'd us to act otherwise: No, God can never give us Commands repugnant to his own Nature, or require us to do what he himself abhors to do. The End for which God has given us Reason, is to compare Things, and the Relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the Fitness and Unfitness of Actions; and cou'd not our Reason judge soundly in all such Matters, it cou'd not have answer'd the End for which infinite Wisdom and Goodness bestow'd that excellent Gift; and for which we can't enough adore the Goodness of God.
Had God, from Time to Time, spoke to all Mankind in their several Languages, and his Words had miraculously convey'd the same Ideas to all Persons; yet he cou'd not speak more plainly than he has done by the Things themselves, and the Relation which Reason shews there is between them: Nay, since 'tis impossible in any Book, or Books, that a particular Rule cou'd be giv'n for every Case, we must even then have had Recourse to the Light of Nature to teach us our Duty in most Cases; especially considering the numberless Circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, may make the same Actions, according as Men are differently affected by them, either good or bad: And I may add, that most of the particular Rules laid down in the Gospel for our Direction, are spoken after such figurative a Manner, that except we judge of their Meaning, not merely by the Letter, but by what the Law of Nature antecedently declares to be our Duty, they are apt to lead us wrong: And if Precepts relating to Morality, are deliver'd after an obscure Manner, when they might have been deliver'd otherwise; what Reason can you assign for its being so, but that infinite Wisdom meant to refer us to That Law for the explaining them. Sufficient Instances of this Nature I shall give you hereafter, tho' I must own, I can't carry this Point so far as a learned Divine, who represents the Scriptures more obscure (which One wou'd think impossible) than even the Fathers. He tells us, "That a certain Author (viz. Flaccus Illyricus) has furnish'd us with one and fifty Reasons for the Obscurity of the Scriptures; adding, "I think, I may truly say that the Writings of the Prophets and Apostles abound with Tropes and Metaphors, Types and Allegories, Parables and dark Speeches; and "
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"are as much, nay, much more unintelligible in many " Places, than the Writings of the Ancients." 'Tis well
this Author, who talks of People being stark Bible-mad stopp'd here; and did not with a celebrated Wit cry, The truly illuminated Books are the darkest of all.

The Writer above-mention'd supposes it impossible, that God's Will thou'd be fully reveal'd by Books; " Except,
" says he, it might be said perhaps without a Figure, that even the World itself could not contain the Books which " should be written;" But with Submission to this Re-verend Person, I ca'n't help thinking, but that, (such is the divine Goodness) God's Will is so clearly, and fully mani-fested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it.

This can't be deny'd, if the Book of Nature shews us in Characters legible by the whole World, the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and the Du-ties resulting from thence; for then it must teach us the whole of our Duty, since it wou'd be unjust and tyrannical in any Being, to require more of others than the Relation they stand in to him makes it their Duty to pay; it being that Relation alone which gives him his just Power and Au-thority. We are encompass'd with many artificial Rela-tions, such as Governor and governed, Master and Servant, Husband and Wife, &c. and the End of these Relations teaches us what they require; and they being enter'd in-to for the sake of each others Assistance, either Party is injur'd by the others not observing what these Relations de-mand, or by exacting more than the End of entring into them requires.

Tho'

T. H. O.
Chap. 3. Christianity as old as the Creation.

Tho' the Relation we stand in to God, is not artificial, as most are amongst Men, who want each others Assistance; but is natural at least on our Part: yet This does not hinder, but that we may know by Reason the End he had in being related to us as Creator and Governor; and what he requires of his Creatures and Subjects: This the divine Nature which contains in itself all Perfection, and all Happiness, plainly points out to us. And if we are once certain of the End of God's entering into this Relation with Man, we may be as certain from his Wisdom and Goodness, and all his Divine Perfections, that he will require no more of us than the End he had in entering into this Relation requires.

If it would be unjust and tyrannical in an earthly Governor, to exact Things of his Subjects, that do not contribute to the End for which this Relation between them was enter'd into; can we suppose a Governor of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, who has always in his Mind the End for which he governs Mankind, will act the Tyrant, and put them under severe Penalties for not observing such Things as have no Relation to the End for which he created, and governs them?

There's no Relation among Men without a mutual Obligation arising from it; Parents owe a Duty to Children as well as Children to Parents; but are not we, in a stricter Sense, the Children of God, and Parents only Instruments in his Hands? since 'tis God, who from Nothing brings us into Being, frames us after the Manner that best pleases him, imprints on us what Faculties, Inclinations, Desires and Passions he thinks fit: And is not God from his innate Goodness and Equity, under an Obligation to treat us more kindly than Earthly Parents do their best-beloved Children,
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who beget them without designing it? Whereas God, whose Actions are govern'd by infinite Goodness, could have no Motive to bring us into Being (which of itself is no Blessing) but our Good; and for the same Reason preserves us in Being; nor can so kind and tender a Parent play the Tyrant, and impose Commands on us, which do not flow from the Relations we stand in to him, and to one another.

If we consider what our Reason will inform us, of the Nature of our great Creator and Governor, we can't fail of knowing our Duty; for as Dr. Scott justly observes,

If you will serve the great King of the World in such Ways as are pleasing and acceptable to him, you must

study his Nature, and inform yourselves, which Way his infinite Perfections incline, that you may know how to comport yourselves towards him, and to render him such Services as are agreeable to his Nature; for there's no Rule in the World, but only That of his Nature, by which you can certainly conclude what will please him. --- So that in all our Enquiries what is pleasing to God, our last Appeal must be to his Nature, which is the great Standard of Good and Evil; by which we are to measure what is pleasing and displeasing to him.

If then, with this judicious Author, you allow, that we are to measure what is pleasing and displeasing to God, (which takes in the whole of Religion) from what our Reason teaches concerning his Nature, you allow all I contend for.

In short, if the Relations between Things, and the Fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole Rule of God's Actions, must not God be an arbitrary Being? and then what a miserable Condition will Mankind be in! Since an arbitrary Will might change every Moment, and those Things which
which entitl'd Men to God's Favour to Day, might make them incur his Displeasure to Morrow: Nay, he might at the same Time have a secret Will opposite to his reveal'd Will; or have different Wills for every different Person; or might reveal his arbitrary Commands so obscurely, as to cause the utmost Confusion; but if God only commands what the Nature of Things shew to be fit, 'tis scarce possible, that Men (tho' now endlely divided upon the Account of their different Traditions) should mistake their Duty; since a Mind that's attentive can as easily distinguish fit from unfit, as the Eye can Beauty from Deformity, or the Ear Harmony from Discord; and if no Commands can alter the Nature of Things, or make that fit which is in itself unfit, external Revelation must attend the Nature and Relation of Things, and can only speak what those speak. As for Instance, 'tis not in our Power, tho' ever so often commanded, to love the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary Being acting out of Humour and Caprice; nor could any Commands, supposing such possible, oblige us not to love him, while we believe him a kind and beneficent Being; so that as long as we have right Notions of God, we can't but love, and adore him as we ought.

Thus, I think, I have fully prov'd from the Nature of God and Man, and the Relations we stand in to him and one another, that the Divine Precepts can't vary; and that these Relations which are the permanent Voice of God, by which he speaks to all Mankind, do, at all Times, infallibly point out to us our Duty in all the various Circumstances of Life.

Should Revelation require less than these Relations require, wou'd it not be an imperfect Rule? And if it enjoyns more, wou'd it not argue the Author of it to be
be of a tyrannical Nature, imposing on his Subjects, and under most severe Penalties, unnecessary Things; and likewise shew a Design, not of being belov'd; but hated and dreaded? And therefore, those who see the Consequences of Things, describe the Christian Religion as requiring such Things only, as considering the Relations we stand in to God and one another, are apparently for our Good.

The most accurate Dr. Barrow gives this Character of the Christian Religion, "That its Precepts are no other than such as Physicians prescribe for the Health of our Bodies; as Politicians would allow to be needful for the Peace of the State; as Epicurean Philosophers recommend for the Tranquility of our Minds, and Pleasures of our Lives; such as Reason dictates, and daily shews conducive to our Welfare in all Respects; which consequently, were there no Law enacting them, we shou'd in Wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose them on ourselves; confessing them to be fit Matters of Law, as most advantageous and requisite to the Good, general and particular, of Mankind.

That great and good Man Dr. Tillotson says, "That All the Precepts of Christianity are reasonable and wise, requiring such Duties as are suitable to the Light of Nature, and do approve themselves to the best Reason of Mankind; such as have their Foundation in the Nature of God, and are an Imitation of the divine Excellencies; such as tend to the Perfection of human Nature, and to raise the Minds of Men to the highest Pitch of Goodness and Virtue. They command nothing that's unnecessary, they omit nothing that may tend to the Glory of God, or the Welfare of Men, nor do they restrain us in any Thing, but what is contrary to the re-
gular Inclinations of Nature, or to our Reason, and true
Interest; they forbid us nothing but what is base and
unworthy to serve our Humours and Passions, to make
ourselves Fools and Beasts. — In a Word, nothing but
what tends to our private Harm, or Prejudice; or to pub-
lick Disorder and Confusion."

The late Dean of Canterbury, in a Sermon preach'd in
Defence of Christianity, says, "What can be a more pow-
erful Incentive to Obedience, than for a rational Creature
clearly to discern the Equity, the Necessity, the Benefit,
the Decency and Beauty of every Action he is call'd to do,
and thence to be duly sensible how gracious a Master he
serves; One that is so far from loading him with fruit-
less, arbitrary, and tyrannical Impositions, that each Com-
mand abstrached from his Command who issues it, is able
to recommend itself; and nothing requir'd but what ev-
ery wife Man wou'd choose of his own Accord; and can-
not, without being his own Enemy, wish to be exempted
from." And this Character of Christianity he makes to
be essential to its being from God, and therefore, must
make it the same with Natural Religion, which has this
Character impress'd on it.

"There was none of the Doctrines of our Saviour
"(says the late Archbishop of York) calculated for the Gra-
tification of Mens idle Curiosities, the busying and amu-
sing them with airy and useless Speculations; much less
were they intended for an Exercise of our Credulity, or
a Trial how far we cou'd bring our Reason to submit to
our Faith; But as on the one Hand they were plain
and simple, and such as by their Agreeableness to the rati-
onal Faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend them-
selves to our Belief; so on the other Hand they had an
im-
"immediate Relation to Practice, and were the genuine
"Principles and Foundation, upon which all human and
"divine Virtues were naturally to be superstrucled." Does
not every One see, that if the Religion of Nature had been
put instead of Christianity, these Descriptions wou’d have
exactly agreed with it.

The judicious Dr. Scot affirms; "God never imposes
Laws on us pro Imperio, as arbitrary Tests and Trials
of our Obedience. —— The great Design of them, says
be, is to do us Good, and direct our Actions to our own
Interest. —— This, if we firmly believe, will infinitely
encourage our Obedience; for when I am sure God com-
mands me nothing but what my own Health, Ease, and
Happiness requires; and that every Law of his is both a
necessary and sovereign Prescription against the Diseases
of my Nature, and he could not prescribe less than he
has, without being defective in his Care of my Reco-
very and Happiness; with what Prudence and Modesty

Nay, the most considerable Men, even among the
Papists, do not scruple to maintain there’s nothing in Reli-
gion but what is moral. The Divines of Port Royal for

Pref. in Nouv. Testamen.

insist say, "All the Precepts, and all the Mysteries that
are express’d in so many different Ways in the holy Vo-
lumes, do all center in this one Commandment of loving
God with all our Heart, and in loving our Neighbours as
ourselves: For the Scripture (it is St. Austin who says it)
forbids but one only Thing, which is Concupiscence, or
the Love of the Creature; as it commands but one
only Thing, which is Charity, and the Love of God:
Upon this double Precept is founded the whole System
of the Christian Religion; and it is unto this, say they,
ac-
Chap. 3. Christianity as old as the Creation:

"according to the Expression of Jesus Christ, that all the ancient Law and the Prophets have Reference; and we may add also, All the Mysteries, and all the Precepts of the New Law: For Love, says St. Paul, is the Fulfilling of the Law:" And these Divines likewise cite a remarkable Passage of St. Austin on this Subject; viz. "He that knows how to love God, and to regulate his Life by that Love, knows all that the Scripture propounds to be known:" They also might have quoted a known Saying of this Father, Omnia peccata sunt in universum contra Rationem & Naturae Legem. And I might add the Authority of a greater Man, and a Papist too, who says, "Religion adds nothing to natural Probity, but the Consola
tion of doing that for Love and Obedience to our heaven-
gion, p. 258.

"ly Father, which Reason itself requires us do in Favour of Virtue." And the famous Pere Quesnelle says on Acts 2. 21. Le vrai culte n'est plus attaché à un Peuple, Le Christianisme est une Religion universelle.

B. Do Divines always give this Character of Christianity, do they never distinguish it from the Religion of Nature, by supposing it contains certain arbitrary Precepts?

A. When they consider how repugnant 'tis to the Nature of God to give any arbitrary Commands, then indeed the Force of Truth obliges them to declare there's nothing in Religion but what tends to the Good of Mankind; but if at any Time they talk otherwise, 'tis for the sake of such Things as either directly or indirectly serve their Interest. But to remove all Scruples I shall more fully prove,
CHAP. IV.

That not only the Matter of all God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd to them are for the Good of Mankind; even of those who suffer for the Breach of them.

B. **HOU'D** I allow you, that the Natural Knowledge we have of God is the Foundation of all Religion, and that Arguing from the Divine Attributes is a most certain Way of Reasoning, yet is not God's Glory one of his divine Attributes? And does not the wisest of Men say, that God made all Things for himself, and the Wicked for the Day of Evil; and consequently God's Glory, rather than the Good of Man, occasion'd the Almighty to create Man, and to give him Laws?

A. As to this Text, I shall answer you from Archbishop Tillotson, that "If by God's making all Things for himself, be meant, that he aim'd at and intended the Manifestation of his Wisdom, Power, and Goodness in the Creation of the World, 'tis most true, that in this Sense be made all Things for himself; but if we understand it so, as if the Goodness of his Nature did not move him thereto, but that he had some Design to serve, Ends and
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"Necessities of his own; upon his Creatures, this is far from him; but it's very probable, that neither of these are the Meaning of the Text, which may be render'd with much better Sense, and nearer to the Hebrew thus; "God has ordain'd every Thing to that which is fit for it, and the Wicked hath be ordain'd for the Day of Evil; "that is, the Wisdom of God hath fitted one Thing to another; Punishment to Sin, the Evil Day to the Evil Doers." This is the Sense that Grotius, and most of the best Commentators put on the Text. And here let me add, that if there are innumerable Places as capable of different Interpretations, even with Relation to God and his Attributes, this sure, will be no Argument not to adhere to what the Light of Nature teaches us in this Matter; since where Texts may be taken in different Senses, Things are as much left to be determin'd by our Reason, as if there were no such Texts. And when we meet with Expressions of God's doing any Thing for his own Glory, they can only mean, that such is the transcendent Excellency of his Nature; such the inexpressible Marks of his Wisdom and Power in all his Works, that he cou'd not have given greater had he design'd nothing but his own Glory. And when we impute the Glory of all we do to him, we thereby signify, that we have no Power, but what we derive from him; and that we desire to acknowledge him the Author of whatever is praiseworthy in us.

B. Tho' it be allow'd, That God fram'd his Laws, and consequently, the Sanctions that make them Laws, for the Good of Man; yet a due Regard to his own Honour, the Dignity of his Laws and Government, will oblige him to punish those, who violate his Laws, as for an Injury done to him-
himself, distinct from the Harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures.

A. As no Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Maker, or imagines he can do God an Injury; so God does not make Laws for one End, and require the observing them for another, that being inconsistent with the Dignity of the divine Legislator, his Laws and Government; but as it was for the sake of Man that he gave him Laws, so he executes them purely for the same Reason; since upon his own Account, he can't be in the least affected, whether his Laws be, or be not observ'd; and consequently in punishing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a Party, much less an injur'd Party, who wants Satisfaction, or Reparation of Honour: And indeed, to suppose it, is highly to dishonour him, since God, as he never can be injur'd, so he can never want Reparation; and he, who is infinitely satisfy'd in himself, can gain no Addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws: nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduc'd to a Condition of wanting Satisfaction, or Reparation of Honour, or any of those Things, which, depending on the Opinion of Others, are main Ingredients in human Happiness; and yet even among Men none ought to be punish'd, (since what is past can't be help'd) but to prevent a future Breach of the Law; and all Laws being design'd for the Good of the governed, "The greatest Monarch is not to punish the Breach of his Laws any otherwise, than the most petty State:" And tho' all own, it would be Tyranny in an earthly Governor to multiply Punishments on Pretence of vindicating the Honour of the Legislator; or as the Breach of Law is an Injury done to him, and such like; yet some are not ashamed to impute such Tyranny to God, and thereby take off from that Esteem and Love Men must have for him, did they be-
believe he only punish'd when, and no further than their Good requir'd.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent Creatures, in seeking Worship and Honour for his own sake; nay, do we not cloath him, who has neither Parts nor Passions, with the worst of our Infirmities, if we represent him as an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful and revengeful Being.

If we dare consult our Reason, it will tell us that Jealousy in point of Honour and Power, Love of Fame and Glory can only belong to limited Creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from an unlimited, absolutely perfect Being, as Anger, Revenge, and such like Passions; which would make the Deity resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent Part of our Nature; rather than the manly, noble, and generous.

Cou'd God strictly speaking, be made angry, provok'd, or griev'd by the Conduct of us wretched Mortals, he wou'd not enjoy a Moment's Quiet; but must be much more miserable than the most unhappy of his Creatures. Or,

Had God any Comfort, or Satisfaction to gain from the Thoughts and Actions of his Creatures, he wou'd never have been without an Infinity of them jointly contributing to this End.

If Religion in general, and every Part of it was not useful to Mankind, there wou'd be no Reason why they shou'd know it more than other Animals; who, tho' they have wonderful Talents (in many of which they exceed Men) given them by God for preserving themselves and their Species, yet are utter Strangers to Religion, as a Thing wholly useless to them.
THE Sum of what I have been saying is fully express'd by Job in these Words, If thou finnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy Transgressions be multiply'd, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he at thy Hands? Thy Wickedness may hurt a Man as thou art, and thy Righteousness profit the Son of Man.

2 Esdr. 8. 34. Or, as Esdras says, What is Man that thou shouldest take Displeasure at him? Or what is a corruptible Generation, that thou shouldest be so bitter towards it?

Our greatest Felicity consists in having such an impartial and disinterested Judge as well as Legislator, that whether he punishtes, or rewards, he acts alike for our God; That being the End of all his Laws, and consequently of the Penalties as well as Rewards which make them Laws; whereas your common Systems of Divinity represent him full of Wrath and Fury, ready to glut himself with Revenge for the Injuries he has suffer'd by the Breach of his Laws.

B. Is not God's Justice as well as his Mercy a divine Attribute, and will not That as much oblige him to punish the Breakers of his Laws, as if he had been, as he is sometimes represented, full of Anger, Wrath, and Revenge?

A. Tho' Justice and Mercy can't at the same Time be exercis'd in one and the same Instance on the same Subject; yet your System Writers, left they shou'd limit these two Attributes in God, extend them alike to all Persons, which is making him neither just, nor merciful; because these Attributes drawing contrary Ways must hinder each other's Effect.

B. I must confess, I do not see how the same Act can be an Act both of Justice and Mercy in relation to the same Person; or how it can be said that God does Justice on a Sinner, when he shews Mercy to him; and yet we must
must suppose the Justice as well as Mercy of God to be infinite.

A. The Justice by which God is righteous in all his actions, and the Mercy by which he is good or beneficent are infinite, and eternally inherent in the divine Nature; but these oblige not God either to punish, or pardon any further than his infinite Wisdom sees fit; and such Punishing and Pardoning are transient Acts, the Effects of his Will, not Properties belonging to his Nature. Justice and Mercy among Men relate to different Subjects: When the Magistrate punishes a Criminal, 'tis an Act of Justice to the Publick; and when he pardons him 'tis an Act of Mercy to the Criminal, tho' an Act of Injustice to the Publick; except in such Circumstances, where he has Ground to believe that Pardoning him may be no Disadvantage to the Publick; whose Interest it is not to lose a useful Member.

The greatest Difference in this Case between God and Man is, that the most powerful Monarch on Earth is of the same Nature with his Subjects, and his Good involv'd in the Good of the whole, and by the Breach of his Laws may be injur'd; and as a Party injur'd may exact Reparation and Satisfaction: But This without Blasphemy can't be said of God, whose Nature is infinitely superior to That of Man; and who, as he was infinitely happy in himself before there was any Creature to adore him, or be obedient to his Will; so he must still be such, tho' none of them did obey his Laws, or acknowledge his Being; and therefore, in doing Acts of Justice he can't, like the Monarchs of this World, propose any Security to himself, but acts purely for the Good of his Creatures; and the Effects of his Justice (they never extending to Annihilation) must not only be for the Good of Others, but even of the Persons punish'd; because God, whole
whose Love infinitely exceeds that of mortal Parents, chastises his Children, (and all Mankind are alike his Offspring) because he loves them; and designs their Amendment; and the Reason why God in Scripture is said to be Love, must be because all his Acts, by what Name soever you call them, are Acts of pure, impartial, and disinterested Love.

All Punishment for Punishment's sake is meer Cruelty and Malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate any Thing he has made, or be subject to such Weakness or Impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of Spite, Wrath, Revenge, or any Self-Interest; and consequently, whatever Punishment he inflicts, must be a Mark of his Love, in not suffering his Creatures to remain in that miserable State, which is inseparable from Sin and Wickedness.

As God's infinite Goodness appears in the Sanctions as well as Matter of his Laws, so his infinite Wisdom knows how to adjust the Punishment to the Offence; that it may be exactly fitted to produce the desir'd Amendment.

B. Does not your supposing that God has no other Motive in executing his Laws, than he had in making them; viz. the Good of his Creatures; and that all Punishment must bear an exact Proportion to the Offence it is design'd to amend, strike at the absolute Eternity of Hell-Torments? since there's no Proportion between temporary Injuries done to all Men, and eternal Misery of but one Man; nor can everlasting Torment work Amendment.

A. I shall at present refer you to Dr. Burnet, de Statu mortuorum, and only say with Archbishop Tillotson, "The Right that God hath in his Creatures is founded in the Benefits he hath conferr'd on them, and the Obligation they have to him on that Account. Now there's none, who
who because he has done a Benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a Right to do a greater Evil than the Good he has done amounts to; and I think it next to Madness to doubt, whether extreme, and eternal Misery be not a greater Evil than simple Being is a Good." But at a proper Time I shall consider what may be said from Scripture as well as Reason, for the Doctrine of the absolute Eternity of Torments; and what will be the Condition of those who dye before they are capable of undergoing a Tryal, or knowing any Thing of Religion. A Subject, which, I think, has scarce been consider'd by any One.
CHAP. V.

That God requires nothing for his own sake; no, not the Worship we are to render him, nor the Faith we are to have in him.

B. Arguing from the Nature of God, that every Thing, consequently Faith in him, and even the Worship and Service we render to him, is wholly for our own sake, will hardly go down with the Bulk of Mankind, who imagine, they by those Acts do him some real Service.

A. If they think so, 'tis a Sign they have not been well instructed; the most eminent of our Divines would teach them, That Prayer itself, God knowing before-hand what we will ask, chiefly becomes a Duty, as it raises in us a due Contemplation of the divine Attributes, and an Acknowledgement of his great and constant Goodness, and serves to keep up a constant Sense of our Dependance on him; and as it disposes us to imitate those Perfections we adore in him, in being kind and beneficent to one another. There are few so gross as to imagine, we can direct infinite Wisdom in the Dispensation of Providence, or persuade him to alter those Laws he contriv'd before; the Foundation of the World for putting Things in a regular Course.

"'Tis,
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"Tis, says Archbishop Tillotson, a great Condescension and Goodness in him, to accept our imperfect Praises, and ignorant Admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to fully his great and glorious Name by taking it in our Mouths; and were it not for our Advantage and Happiness to own and acknowledge his Benefits, for any real Happiness and Glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one Thought of him; and were it not for his Goodness might despise the Praises of his Creatures, with infinitely more Reason than wise Men do the Applause of Fools."

"To imagine, as Dr. Scot observes, that God needs our Services, and requires them to serve his own Interest, is to blaspheme his All-sufficiency, and suppose him a poor indigent Being, who for Want of perfect Satisfaction within himself, is forc'd to roam abroad; and raise Taxes on his Creatures, to enrich and supply himself: So that whatsoever some high-flown Enthusiasts may pretend, that 'tis fordid and mercenary to serve God for our Good, I am sure, to serve him for his Good is profane and blasphemous."

As able a Divine as this, or perhaps any other Age has produc'd, observes, that "Nothing can be more false, or contrary to the Nature of the Gospel, than to fancy God in part-design'd to shew he was Master, by enjoining some Commands, which have no Relation to the Good of Man-kind; Religion was reveal'd for us, and not for God; who, absolutely speaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor the Worship we pay him, but has manifested himself to us, only to make us happy." And, therefore, if from Ex-
Excess of Devotion, a Man neglects the Duties of civil Life, he is so far from doing a Thing acceptable to God, that he mistakes the End of Religion, which is to render him as perfect as may be in all moral Duties whatever.

If any Command was ever given for the sake of God, it must certainly be That relating to the Institution of the Sabbath; and yet we find it said, The Sabbath is made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath: So true is it in Divinity as well as Politicks, that The Good of the People is the supreme Law.

In short, the Worship God requires, is either for his own sake, which supposes his Happiness some Way or other depends on it; or else (except he requires Things to no Purpose) for the sake of Men, to raise and keep in their Minds the Contemplation of an infinitely good Being, and of his Laws, all founded on a disinterested Love to the whole Race of Mankind. To imagine the Worship of God is ordain'd on any other Account, not only destroys one of the greatest Motives of Mens doing Good to one another; but supposes God not sufficient for, or infinitely happy in himself; but subject to the Passions of ambitious and vain-glorious Mortals.

The Generality of Christians not only believe, that in worshipping God they do him real Service, but think he is extremly uneasy, if publick Worship is not perform'd in such a Manner, and with such Rites and Ceremonies; and being endlesly divided about these Trifles, think they make their Court to Heaven, and highly oblige an omnipotent Being, in destroying those formidable Enemies of God, who presume, without their Leave, to worship him after that Manner they judge agreeable to his Will. And,
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There are no Measures, tho' ever so destructive, but what They, who do not consider the End of God's Laws, may be brought into; as all History sufficiently proves. The Jews not only thought that doing the greatest Good on their Sabbath, was profaning the Day; but were so superstitious as to think, that all Self-defence was then unlawful; and therefore durst not lift up their Hands against their Enemies, who butcher'd them as they pleas'd: And many of the primitive Fathers thought the Gospel forbid all Self-defence; and herein they are follow'd by a modern Sect, who are their strict Imitators in most Things.

'Tis no Wonder, if some Ecclesiastics have not been very forward to teach People, that what Worship God requires of them, is for their own Sakes; since then they cou'd not on Pretence of that Worship, have claim'd such Powers and Privileges, as are inconsistent with the common Good; and People might then think it their Duty so to regulate Matters as that their Priests, upon the whole, considering the Charge of maintaining them, and other Incidents, shou'd do more Good than Hurt; which can never happen, till Men are taught 'tis their Duty to do Good to all, notwithstanding their widest Differences as to Worship, or any other Matter of meer Religion; and 'tis to the Honour of our Clergy at present, that so many of them now endeavour to infuse such human and benevolent Principles into a People, who not long since, thought they shew'd a sufficient Zeal for Religion, in hating Those their Priests hated, without knowing wherefore; and by their Pulpit Invectives, thought it their Duty to pull down Houses of religious Worship, and were ready at the Direction of their impious Leaders, to have perpetrated worse Crimes.

B. THERE'S
B. There's one Difficulty, which to me seems insuperable, how to make the Faith requir'd by the Religion of Nature and of the Gospel, to have the same Views, and tend to the same End.

A. If Faith in God himself, no more than in any other Act of Religion, is requir'd for God's sake, but our own; can Faith in One sent by God be requir'd for any other End? Especially considering, that no Person is ever the more known to Posterity, because his Name is transmitted to them; when we say, Caesar conquer'd Pompey, we having no Idea of either can only mean, Some-body conquer'd Some-body; and have we more distinct Ideas of Jesus and Pilate? And tho' we had a personal Idea of the former, he cou'd receive no Advantage or Disadvantage by what we thought of him. And if Faith in him was requir'd for a Cause antecedent to his being so sent, founded in his and our Nature, and the Relation we always stood in to him; wou'd not the eternal Reason of Things have made it manifest? That which concern'd all, must be knowable by all, for which Reason the Apostle says, That which may be known of God (and none can know That which may not be known) was manifest in the Gentiles. And,

The End of Christ's Coming seems not to teach Men new Duties, but (Repentance being the first Thing preach'd by him and his Apostles both to Jews and Gentiles) to repent of the Breach of known Duties. And Jesus does not say, He was sent to all Israel, but to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel; and that the Son of Man is come

Mat. 15. 24. 18. 11. to save that which was lost: And his Parable about the lost Sheep, suppos'd All were not lost. And when it was objected to him, that he kept Company with Sinners, he owns
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owns the Charge, and says, The whole need no Physician, Mat. 9. 12; but they that are sick; which wou'd have been an improper Answer, if he thought that All stood in Need of him, and his spiritual Physick. And to confirm this, he adds, I am not come to call the righteous, but Sinners to Repentance; Ib. Ver. 13; and that There's more Joy in Heaven for one Sinner that repents, than ninety nine just Persons that need no Repentance. Which is dividing Mankind into two Parts, the whole or righteous, and the sick or Sinners; and that his Business was intirely with the latter. The not observing this Distinction has been the Occasion of many uncharitable and gross Mistakes; and 'tis somewhat strange, that Jesus, who best knew how far his Commission extended, shou'd not be credited in this Matter; especially considering that in Religion there are no Nostrums, or Secrets, but all may know what God requires of all; and there is but one universal Remedy for all sick Persons, Repentance and Amendment. And if God, who is no Respeeter of Persons, will judge the World in Righteousness; and they that in every Nation fear him, and work Righteousness shall be accepted of him; they, certainly, are whole, and need no Physician, who do of themselves what will make them acceptable to him; living as those whom Christ came to reform were taught to live: Is it not absurd to suppose, that till then none had sufficient Means given them to answer the End for which all were created?

The Catholick Epistle of St. Barnabas will inform you of the Sentiments of the Ancients on this Head. This great Apostle (as translated by Dr. Wake) says, "That Jesus, when he chose his Apostles, which were afterwards to publish his Gospel, took Men who had been very great Sinners; that thereby he might plainly shew, that He came not to call
the righteous, but Sinners to Repentance. The Words are fuller in the Original, ἰδας ὑπερ πάσας ἐμαρτινὰς ἀνομω-
τίγης.

B. This may be a forg'd Passage.

A. Origen owns it to be genuine, for when Celsus (I will
give you his Words in the Latin Translation) says, Ἰησοῦν αὐ-
cris decem undecimve famosis hominibus, publicanis nautisque
nequissimis, cum his ulro citrōque fugisse, corrogantem cibos
sordidē ac turpiter. Origen says, Extat sane in Barnabæ
Catholicæ Epistola scriptum, Ἰησοῦν ad Apostolicam functio-
nem elegisse homines omni iniquitate iniquiores. And it may
be said in Support of St. Barnabas, that the Apostles first be-
came Jesus's Disciples upon temporal Motives; and the Be-
 lief of Christ's temporal Kingdom was so firmly rooted in
them, that Jesus neither during his Life, nor even after his
Resurrection was able to remove it. At the last Supper there
was a Strife amongst them, Who should be accounted the
greatest? "The meanest (as Bishop Parker expresses it)
hoped at least to have been made Lord Mayor of Caper-
"naum." And even at his Ascension the only Question his

Disciples ask'd was, Lord, wilt thou at this Time restore
again the Kingdom to Israel?

But to take away all Subterfuges, what can be more re-
quir'd than those Qualifications as will make Jesus in the
last Day declare, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the
Kingdom prepared for you from the Beginning of the World?
And what are those Qualifications, but living up to the
Law of Reason, in exercising Acts of Benevolence, Good-
ness, &c.? That this was the Unum necessarium is plain
from his Answer, Depart from me ye that work Iniquity,
made to those who had omitted these Things, tho' they
pleaded, They had prophesied in his Name, and in his Name
cau
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cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works. St. Paul in the first Chapter to the Romans is very large, in shewing that the Gentiles cou’d not plead Ignorance of their Duty, either to God or Man, and as finning against Knowledge were inexcusable; and persuing the same Subject in the second, he says, that God who is no Respeeter of Persons will deal with every One both Jew and Gentile according to their Deeds; and those by which they are to be judg’d are either moral or immoral; and had there been any Thing else requir’d by the written Law, it cou’d not be said that the Gentiles, who were not ignorant of their Duty either to God or Man, did by Nature the Things contained in the Law.

And does not St. Paul, in another Place, put our future State on the same Foot, in supposing we shall be dealt with at the last Day according to what we have done in the Body, whether good or bad. In short, if the Tree is to be known by its Fruit, and it brings forth good Fruit, the Means by which this good Fruit is produc’d are not material; but if it does not, no Means whatever can hinder it from being bewn down, and cast into the Fire. “The grand deciding Question (says Dr. South) at the last Day will be, not what you have said, or what you have believ’d; but what you have done more than others. God is pleas’d to vouch—

But to go to the Bottom of this Matter, Faith consider’d in itself can neither be a Virtue, or a Vice; because Men can no otherwise believe than as Things appear to them: Nay, can there be an higher Affront to God than to suppose, he requires Men to judge otherwise than the Faculties he has given them enable them to do? Or what can be more absurd than to imagine, that God will shew his Favour to one for believing what he could not
not but believe; and his Displeasure to another for not believing, what he could not believe; and therefore Faith is only to be esteem'd by the Works it produces; for the strongest Faith may be worse than no Faith at all. The Devils themselves, who are held the most wicked Beings in the Universe believe, and tremble. Happy had it been for Christendom, if Zeal for, what the prevailing Parties call'd, The Orthodox Faith, had made none but themselves to tremble.

Dr. Whitby expresses himself very accurately on this Point, "Belief, or Disbelief can neither be a Virtue, or a Crime in any One, who uses the best Means in his Power of being inform'd. If a Proposition is evident, we cannot avoid believing it; and where is the Merit or Piety of a necessary Assent? If it is not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it: And where is the Crime of not performing Impossibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true?" What worse Opinion can we have of the divine Goodness, than to imagine a mean Denial of our Reason, or a wretched Affectation of believing any Point too hard for our Understanding, can entitle us to the Favour of God.

If Charity, which comprehends doing all possible Good to our Fellow-Creature, is to be destroy'd for the sake of Faith; or if Incapacities, Fines, Imprisonments, Rods, Gibbets, Racks, and Fire, are Marks of Charity, the Christian World has outdone all Mankind in Acts of Charity; but the Description St. Paul gives of Charity, is so far from requiring us to make others suffer, that Itself suffers long, seeks not her own, bears all Things, endures all Things; and strictly enjoins us so to do.

Here
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Here is the Practice of the Christian World on the Side of Faith, sacrificing Charity, and all that's valuable to it; and on the other Side, Christ and his Apostles preferring Charity before it. St. Paul, speaking of himself, says, \textit{I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge; And tho' I have all Faith, and could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing: Or tho' I give my Body to be burnt (which shews the highest Act of Faith) and have not Charity, it profiteth nothing.}

And in another Place he says, \textit{Above all Things put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection.} And again, \textit{The End of the Commandment is Charity; and Love is the Fulfilling of the Law.} And, \textit{If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own House (which is but one Species of Charity) he has denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel.}

And St. Peter likewise speaks as highly of it in saying, \textit{Above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves, for Charity shall cover a Multitude of Sins; which can't be said of Faith, because That without Charity profiteth nothing; in not answering the End for which it was given.} And St. James calls Love the Royal Law. And St. John says, \textit{If any Man says I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Liar.}

And is not he likewise a Liar, who shews all the Marks of Hatred to his Brother, and yet pretends to love him, and makes those very Marks an Argument of his Love. In \textit{He-Gal. 5. 6. Stus Christ}, says the Apostle Paul, neither Circumcision, nor Uncircumcision availeth any Thing, but Faith which worketh by Love. \textit{For all the Law is fulfilled in one Word, even — Ver. 14: in this, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.}

And Christ, in saying, \textit{By this shall all Men know ye are my Disciples, if ye love one another, supposes Mens loving one another so essential to Christianity, as by that Token alone all}
all Men may know who are his Disciples; and if they who thus love one another are of Course his Disciples, whose Disciples then are They, who, as all Men know, make People hate, and harass one another; and pretend Christ's Commission for so doing?

Origen speaking of the Faith of Christians, cou'd not (was there any Thing peculiar in their Faith) have said, 'Tis the Conformity of our Faith with the common innate Notions of all Mankind, that has given it Entrance into the Minds of candid and ingenuous Hearers. And, Our Divines (since the Liberty they enjoy has enabl'd them to think, and speak their Thoughts more freely than formerly) when they write in Defence of Christianity, endeavour to shew that the Faith the Scripture requires, is conformable to what Origen calls, The common, and innate Notions of Mankind. I do not find, that the Dean of Sarum is censur'd for affirming in Defence of Christianity, that The Scripture Notion of Faith is very plain and obvious, viz. not a speculative and philosophical, but a religious and practical Faith; and 'tis built on this Principle, That God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him; That religious Faith is a full Conviction of Mind, that an eternal, immense Being, infinitely wise, just, and good, not only actually exists, but is the Governor of the World; prescribes Laws to the Consciences, and to the Actions of Men; takes Notice of their Compliance with, or Transgression of them; and will certainly reward, or punish them, according as their Works have been. To live under this Sense and Expectation, is to live a Life of Faith, and is co-incident with a Life of Virtue. All the Species, or particular Instances of Faith may be reduc'd to this, as so many Branches
“springing from it; And to explain them in any other Sense, as if Faith and Reason were oppos'd to each other, and Religion and Virtue two different Things, is to blind Mens Understandings, and to confound the plainest, and most numerous Texts of Scripture.

Another learned Divine, in Defence of the Christian Religion, says, “If it should happen, that we cannot so

tisfactorily evince the Certainty of the Scripture-History

goingest scrupulous, nice, and sceptical Wits, yet we find ourselves oblig'd to the Belief and Practice of what is really the Christian Religion; because 'tis nothing else, as to the Faith and Morals of it, but Natural Religion.

The great Grotius, in a Discourse own'd to be the best that was ever writ in Defence of Christianity, lays it down as a Maxim, that “'Tis absolutely repugnant to the Goodness of God, that those, who without respect to worldly Advantage, seek after the Way which leads to eternal Happiness; imploring withal the divine Assistance, and submitting themselves entirely to his Providence, should not be able to find it.” And if this is too evident to be deny'd, can there be any Thing either in relation to Faith or Manners in the Way that leads to eternal Happiness, but may be found at all Times and Places of every One, who diligently searches after it.

And an eminent Divine, who is not look'd on to have altogether so extensive a Charity as Grotius, yet says, “I think we may pronounce safely in this Matter, That the Goodness and Mercy of God is such, that he never deserts a sincere Person, nor suffers any one that shall live (even according to these Measures of Sincerity) up to what he knows, to perish for Want of any Knowledge necessary; and what is more, sufficient to save him.” Which
Which supposes no Faith, or Knowledge necessary to Salvation, but what All are capable of acquiring by Virtue of that Light, which lighteth every Man that cometh into the World. And our Saviour himself says, Seek, and ye shall find. By this you may see what Faith is requir'd, and for what End.

If Man, as our Divines maintain against Hobbs, is a social Creature, who naturally loves his own Species, and is full of Pity, Tenderness, and Benevolence; and if Reason, which is the proper Nature of Man, can never lead Men to any Thing but universal Love and Kindness, and there be no Part of Natural Religion, or any Faith it requires, but highly tends to improve this kind and benign Temper; how comes it to pass, that what is taught for Religion in so many Places of Christendom, has transform'd this mild and gentle Creature into fierce and cruel; and made him act with Rage and Fury against those who never did, or intended him the least Harm? Is not this chiefly owing to such a Faith as works not by Love; and such a Zeal as, not being according to Knowledge, has destroy'd all good Works; and is utterly inconsistent with the End of all Religion. But no Wonder, if Men, who most uncharitably damn one another for such Matters of Faith as they dare not trust Reason to judge of, shou'd hate, and persecute each other on the same Account.

The Epicureans, tho' they had exalted Notions of their Gods, yet because they asserted it beneath their Dignity to concern themselves with human Affairs, were at all Times censur'd as Atheists; which shews that 'twas accounted much the same to believe no Gods, as to believe them useless to Mankind: But certainly, believing the Deity to be indolent, can't be so bad as believing him so cruel, as to oblige
oblige Christians to persecute, ruin, and destroy even their Brethren, for Things too, no Ways contributing to the Good of Mankind; since this is downright Demonism: And yet in what Age of the Church, wou’d not those conscientious People that chanc’d to be undermost, have thought themselves happy, if the Men in Power had not had a worfe Notion of the Deity than That of Indolence.
CHAPTER VI.

That the Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect Religion; and that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its Perfection; and that True Religion, whether internally or externally revealed, must be the same.

HAVING prov'd, That God requires nothing for his own sake; I shall now, the Way being thus prepar'd, shew you, That the Religion of Nature is absolutely perfect; and that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its Perfection: And in Order to it let me ask you, Why you believe the Gospel a Law of absolute Perfection, incapable of any Addition, Diminution, or Alteration?

B. BECAUSE 'tis the last Law of God's giving.

A. WAS it not such in itself, That cou'd not make it so; since the Law given to the Jews was for many Ages the Only External Law: And yet, I suppose, you grant that this abrogated Law was far from deserving such a Character; but were there any Thing in this Argument, it makes wholly
wholly for the Law of Nature, since That is not only the
first, but the last Law of God’s giving; if That can be
said to be last, which is eternal: A Law, by which God
governs his own Actions; and by which he expects all the
rational World shou’d govern Theirs. And therefore, not-
withstanding the Promulgation of the Gospel, he continues
daily to implant it in the Minds of all Men, Christians
as well as Others; and consequently, ’tis as necessary for
them as for Others; as necessary since, as before the Coming
of Christ: And I may add too, not only necessary to be ob-
serv’d in this World, and ten Thousand more, were there so
many; but in Heaven itself, and that too for ever.

B. shou’d I grant that my Argument, from the Gospel’s
being the last Law of God’s giving, does not fully prove its
absolute Perfection; yet it will undeniably follow from the
great Agreement there is between That and the Law of Na-
ture, it neither forbidding what That requires, nor requiring
what That forbids; and in a Word, containing nothing in
it unworthy, but every Thing worthy, of an absolutely-per-
fec Law-giver.

A. In saying This, you own the Law of Nature to be
the Standard of Perfection; and that by It we must judge
antecedently to any traditional Religion what is, or is not
a Law absolutely perfect, and worthy of such a Being for its
Legislatur.

B. Indeed, it must be own’d, that Divines as well as
Others, make the same Concessions in relation to Natural
Religion, which Dr. Prideaux does in his celebrated Letter
to the Deists at the End of Mahomet’s Life: “Let what is
written in all the Books of the New Testament be try’d
by That which is the Touch-stone of all Religions; I
mean that Religion of Nature and Reason, which God
has
written in the Hearts of every one of us from the first
Creation; and if it varies from it in any one Particular,
if it prescribes any one Thing, which may in the minutest
Circumstances thereof be contrary to its Righteousness, if
will then acknowledge this to be an Argument against us;
strong enough to overthrow the whole Cause, and make
all Things else that can be said for it totally ineffectual
for its Support.

A. I desire no more than to be allow'd, That there's a
Religion of Nature and Reason written in the Hearts of every One of us from the first Creation; by which all Man-
kind must judge of the Truth of any instituted Religion whatever; and if it varies from the Religion of Nature and Reason in any one Particular, nay, in the minutest Circum-
stance, That alone is an Argument, which makes all Things else that can be said for its Support totally ineffectual. If so, must not Natural Religion and external Revelation, like two Tallies, exactly answer one another; without any other Difference between them, but as to the Manner of their being deliver'd? And how can it be otherwise? Can Laws be imperfect, where a Legislator is absolutely perfect? Can Time discover any Thing to him, which he did not foresee from Eternity? And as his Wisdom is always the same, so is his Goodness; and consequently from the Consideration of both these his Laws must always be the same. —— Is it not from the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God, that you suppose the Gospel a most perfect Law, incapable of being repeal'd; or alter'd, or of having Additions; and must not you own the Law of Nature as perfect a Law, except you will say, that God did not arrive to the Perfection of Wisdom and Goodness till about seventeen Hundred Years since.

To
To plead, That the Gospel is incapable of any Additions, because the Will of God is immutable, and his Law too perfect to need them, is an Argument, was Christianity a new Religion, which destroys itself; since from the Time it commenc’d, you must own God is mutable; and that such Additions have been made to the All-perfect Laws of infinite Wisdom, as constitute a New Religion. The Reason why the Law of Nature is immutable, is, because it is founded on the unalterable Reason of Things; but if God is an arbitrary Being, and can command Things meerly from Will and Pleasure; some Things to Day, and others to Morrow; there is nothing either in the Nature of God, or in the Things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his Mind. If he once commanded Things without Reason, there can be no Reason why he may not endlely change such Commands.

I think, no Man has more fully done Justice to the Law of Nature, than a Divine of that Church which requires so many Things contrary to that Law; I mean the celebrated Charron, in his Treatise of Wisdom, whose Authority is certainly not the less for being translated by the late Dean of Canterbury: He says, “The Law of Nature, by which I mean Universal Reason and Equity, is the Candle of our Maker, lighted up in every Breast, to guide, and shine perpetually. This is the Dictate of God himself, he is the King, and this the Fundamental Law of the Universe: a Ray and Beam of the divine Nature, which flows from, and has a necessary Connexion and Dependance upon that eternal and immutable Law, which the Almighty prescribes to his own Actions. A Man, who proceeds on this Principle is his own Rule; for he acts in Agreement with the noblest, and most valuable Part of
Christianity as old as the Creation. VOL. I.

"his Nature: This Man's Honesty is essential to, and inseparable from him, not precarious and uncertain, and owing merely to Chance and Occasion; for this Light and Law is born with, and bred in us; a Piece of our Frame and Constitution; and from thence obtains the Name of Nature, and the Law of Nature: Such a Man, by Consequence, will be a good Man constantly, and at all Times, his Virtue will be uniform, and every Place, every Emergency will find him the same; for this Law of Nature is perpetual, the Obligation of it is lasting and inviolable; the Equity and Reason of it are eternal, written in large and indelible Characters, no Accident can deface them, no Length of Time waste, or wear them out.

— These first Principles, which are the Ground of all moral Institutions, admit of no Change, no Increase, no Abatement, no Fits, no Starts, no Ebbings and Flowings.

— Why then, vain Man, dost thou trouble thyself to seek abroad for some Law or Rule to Mankind? What can Books, or Masters tell thee, which thou might'st not tell thyself? What can Study, or Travel shew, which, without being at the Expence of so much Pains, thou might'st not see at Home, by descending into thy own Conscience, and hearkening attentively to its own Admonitions?

"To what Purpose is all this Labour and Cost? The toilsome Tumbling over of Codes and Institutes?

The two Tables of Moses, the twelve Tables of the Greeks, the Law written in the Heart of them who had no Law, and in short all the Rules of Equity and good Laws, that have any where been enacted, and obtained in the World, are nothing but Copies and Transcripts produc'd in open Court, and publish'd from that Original, which thou keepest
"keepest close within thee; and yet all the While pretend-
est to know nothing of the Matter, stifling and suppres-
sing as much as in thee lieth the Brightness of that Light,
which shines within thee: As this invisible Fountain with-
in is more exuberant and plenteous, so it is more lively,
pure, and strong, than any of the Streams deriv'd from
it; of which we need but this single Testimony, That
when any Disputes arise about the right Meaning of any
positive Law, the constant, and best Method of under-
standing the Equity and true Intent of it, is by running
back to its Head, and observing what is most agreeable
to the Law of Nature; This is the Test and Touch, This
is the Level, and the Truth, by which the rest are to be
judged.

And in Truth all Laws, whether the Law of Nations, or
Those of particular Countries, are only the Law of Na-
ture adjusted, and accommodated to Circumstances; nor can
Religion, even in relation to the Worship of God, as it
is a reasonable Service, be any Thing, but what necessarily
flows from the Consideration of God, and the Creatures.
'Twas this made the great Mr. Selden say, in an Expression
somewhat homely, "That Men look after Religion, as the Table-Talk;
Butcher did after his Knife, when he had it in his Mouth."

The Religion of Nature is so entirely calculated for the
Good of human Society, that tho' a Man, hurry'd with the
Violence of his Passions, breaks it himself, yet he wou'd
have all Others most strictly observe it; and accordingly all
Legislators punish the Breach of it: Whereas no Man re-
jects any positive Institution himself, but is willing that all
others shou'd do so too; which plainly shews, Men do not ap-
prehend it to be for the general Good of Mankind. And the
contending Parties in Religion, with equal Confidence, cry,
"That
"That if our Religion be not true, God must be wanting to Mankind, in what concerns their eternal Happiness; he must be wanting to himself, and to his own Attributes of Goodness, Justice, and Truth: It's repugnant to the very Notion of a God, to let Men be ignorant in a Matter of such Importance without any Help or Remedy." This Reasoning, if true, necessarily infers some universal Law knowable at all Times; and can't be apply'd to any partial Religion unknown to the World for many Ages; and, as not being discoverable by Reason, still unknown to the greatest Part of it.

In a Word, if the highest internal Excellence, the greatest Plainness and Simplicity, Unanimity, Universality, Antiquity, nay, Eternity, can recommend a Law; all These, 'tis own'd do, in an eminent Degree, belong to the Law of Nature. A Law, which does not depend on the uncertain Meaning of Words and Phrases in dead Languages, much less on Types, Metaphors, Allegories, Parables, or on the Skill or Honesty of weak or designing Transcribers (not to mention Translators,) for many Ages together; but on the immutable Relation of Things always visible to the whole World: And therefore Dr. Scot justly says, "Moral Obligations are not founded like positive Ones upon mutable Circumstances (which suppose they can only oblige in certain Circumstances) but upon firm and everlasting Reasons; upon Reasons that to all Eternity will carry with them the same Force and Necessity as long as we are Creatures of an infinitely perfect Creator, it will be as much our Duty as 'tis now, to submit our Will and Affections to our Reason; and as long as we are related to other reasonable Creatures, it will be as much our Duty as now to be kind, just, and peaceable in all our Intercourses with them: So
"that These are such Duties as no Will can dispense with, 
no Reason abrogate, no Circumstances disannul; but as 
long as God is what he is, and we are what we are, they 
muft, and will oblige us.

I could, from many other Considerations, shew you the absolute Perfection of Natural Religion; for Instance, muft we not, except we speak without any Meaning, or have no true Meaning of the Word God, intend by it a Being of all Perfections, free from all those Defects, which belong even to the most perfect Creatures? And muft we not have an Idea of these Perfections, before we can know whether there is any Being who has enjoy'd them from Eternity; and muft we not know there is such a Being from our Reason, before we can come to this Question, Whether be has made any External Revelation? Nay, Examining into this Question wou'd be to very little Purpose, except we cou'd know whether this Being is bound by his external Word, and had not either at the Time of giving it a secret Will inconsistent with his reveal'd Will? Or has not since chang'd his Will? This can't be known from any external Revelation, tho' it express'd itself ever so plainly; because the Question being, Whether God is oblig'd to do, as be in it says he will do; This must be resolv'd antecedently by the Light of Nature, which muft discover to us the Veracity of God, and the Immutability of his Will; and the fame Reasons which will prove he cou'd not change his Will since he made an external Revelation, will prove his Will was always unchangeable, and at all Times the same; whether internally, or externally reveal'd: Nor cou'd we take a Step towards proving the Veracity of God, or the Immutability of his Will; or indeed, any of his Perfections besides Power, without knowing that the Will of God is always determin'd by the Nature and Reason
of Things; Otherwise Falshood and Mutability might be the Will of God, and there cou'd be no such Thing in Nature as Good and Evil, but an arbitrary Will wou'd govern all Things.

Were we not capable by our Reason of distinguishing Good from Evil, or knowing from the Consideration of the invariable Perfections of God, what the divine Goodness cou'd command, or forbid his Creatures antecedently to any external Revelation, we cou'd not distinguish the true instituted Religion from the many false Ones: Or if by Accident we stumbl'd on it, avoid running into many Absurdities in the Interpretation of it, thro' the Difficulties that must attend a Book writ in a dead Language, and so many Ages since; and where thro' the vast Variety of Readings we might mistake the true Reading; and tho' we were certain of the Letter, even the Letter killeth.

If Man had not natural Abilities to distinguish between Good and Evil, or to know what is pleasing, or displeasing to God; how cou'd we say he was a moral Agent, or even an accountable Creature?

Did we not allow that Men, by the Light of Nature, are capable of forming a sound Judgment in Matters of Religion, they may be so impos'd on by controverted, or mis-interpreted, not to say forg'd Texts, as to admit several Objects of divine Worship in their Practice, while in their Words they own but One; or, in Order to advance a supernatural Charity, destroy all natural Humanity; and believe our Love to God may be best shewn by our Hatred to our Fellow-Creatures; and introduce such abominable Notions, as may make Religion, instead of a Benefit, become a Mischief to Mankind.

Whereas
Chap. 6. Christianity as old as the Creation.

 Whereas, if we allow the Light of Nature sufficient to enable us to judge rightly in these Matters, and consequently to distinguish Truth from Falsity, we must own, since there can be no Disagreement in Truth, that there's an exact Conformity between internal and external Revelation, with no other Difference but as to the Manner of their being reveal'd: Or in other Words, that the Gospel, since 'tis impossible for Men at the same Time to be under different Obligations, can't command those Things which the Law of Nature forbids, or forbid what That commands; nor can any Thing be a Part of Religion by one Law, which by the other is Superstition; nor can External Revelation make That the Will of God, which the Light of Nature continually represents as unworthy of having God for its Author.

The judicious Writer of the Rational Catechism lately reprint'd says, "That one of the most universal Causes of the great Differences among Men in Matters of Religion, is, that they have not examin'd Things to the Bottom; they have fail'd in their Foundation-Work; they have too much slighted that Philosophy which is the Natural Religion of all Men; and which being natural, must needs be Universal and Eternal: They have forsaken the Rule of right Reason, which is only capable to produce true Symmetry in their intellectual Buildings; and they have apply'd themselves without any Rule to the Interpretation of Words and Phrases, which being easily susceptible of various Sences, have produc'd as many different Irregularities.

Tho' all Parties alike pretend to aim at Truth, yet none of them, I think, inform us what Truth is, or wherein it consists: Now if Truth in general, implies an Agreement of
of our Ideas with the Things themselves, Religious Truth, or True Religion must consist in the Agreement of our Ideas with those Things which are the Subjects of our religious Inquiry; *viz.* The Nature of God and Man; and false Religion must consist in having Ideas that are not agreeable to, or do not truly represent those Subjects; and this Agreement we call Truth in respect to Theory, is what we term, in relation to Action, fit, just, good, or reasonable. Thus God is frequently styl'd in Scripture the *God of Truth*, because his Ideas of Things, and the Things themselves exactly correspond; and all his Actions are agreeable to the Relation Things have to one another: And when our Actions are such, we do all that's fit, just, and reasonable, all that God or Man can require; and from hence too it follows, that Iniquity is the same in Action, as Falsity is in Theory.
CHAP. VII.

That Natural and Reveal'd Religion having the same End, their Precepts must be the same.

B. ALLOWING that the Natural Knowledge we have of God, ourselves, and our Fellow Creatures, is the Foundation of all Religion, may not external Revelation, building on this Foundation, erect a larger and nobler Edifice, by extending it to such Things as the Light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting any Thing it teaches?

A. I thought I had obviated this Objection, by proving that the Religion of Nature was so perfect, that nothing cou'd be added to it; and that the Truth of all Revelation was to be judg'd of by its Agreement with it: However, since this Objection is the most plausible of any you have yet made; I reply, That if our Natural Notions of the divine Perfections demonstrate, that God will require nothing of his Creatures but what tends to their Good; whatsoever is of this Kind, is a Superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature: Or, in other Words, what the Reason, or Nature of the Things themselves plainly point out to us; and for all other Matters, which have no such Tendency, you
you must seek another Foundation, another Nature very
different from the divine, to build Your Hay and Stubble
upon. And,

If it be evident from the Light of Nature, what are those;
Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures;
and that neither God nor Man, without acting tyrannically,
can require more than Those require; can external Reveal-
lation any more than internal exceed these Bounds?

If original Revelation comprehends every Thing obli-
gatory on the Account of its Excellency; that is, every Thing
which tends to the Honour of God, or the Good of Man;
and These are the only Ends of Traditional Religion; no
arbitrary, or merely positive Precepts, as not tending to the
Honour of God, or the Good of Man, can belong either to
Natural, or Reveal'd Religion.

By the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel; the Honour
of God, and the Good of Man, being the two Grand, or
General Commandments; all particular Precepts must be
comprehended under these Two, and belong alike to the
Law of Nature as well as the Gospel; and what does not,
can belong to neither. Thus any particular Precept, if by
Change of Circumstances it ceases to contribute to the Ho-
nour of God, or the Good of Man, much more if it become
prejudicial to either, must lose its obliging Force.

There must be some Rule, or Rules, which bind with-
out Exception, *because every Exception to a Rule is built on
some Rule or other*; and as there can't be Rules, so there can't
be Exceptions *ad infinitum*; and I suppose, you will not
deny, but that these two Grand Rules, or Commandments,
the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, are obligatory
without Exception. And yet These would be to little Pur-
pose, cou'd not Reason tell Men how to apply them in all
Conditions, and Circumstances of Life. B. Sup-
B. Supposing no particular Precepts can oblige, if they chance to clash with either of those Commandments, yet what is to be done if these Two interfere with one another; must the Good of Man, or the Honour of God take Place?

A. These two Grand Laws are in Effect the same, since what promotes the Honour of God necessarily promotes the Good of Man: The more we love and honour God, the more we shall imitate him in our extensive Love to our Fellow-Creatures; who are equally the Children of God. The greater our Veneration is for our Maker, the more it will excite us to copy those Perfections of Goodness and Benevolence we adore in him; so that the Duty of a truly-religious Person, and of a good Subject and Citizen are the same with relation to God and Man; for the more he honours God, the more zealous will he be to act the Patriot; and the more he does That, the more he honours God; because the happier Men are, the more Reason they have to honour That God, who made 'em so. The Way to glorify your Father which is in Heaven, is to let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works. And herein is my Father glorify'd, that ye bear much Fruit. And indeed, nothing can be plainer from Scripture, than that these two great Duties of the Love of God, and our Neighbour, include each other.

If, says the Apostle, a Man say I love God, and hateb his Brother, he is a Liar. And, If we love one another, God dwelleth in us; and the Love of God is perfected in us. Again, Let us love one another; every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loves not, knoweth not God. But who hath this World's Goods, and seeth his Brother have need, and shutteth up his Bowels of Compassion from him; how dwelleth the Love of God in him? And it was this Consideration, that made that great Emperor and Philosopher
Iosopher Marcus Antoninus say, "Thou wilt never do any Thing purely humane in a right Manner, unless Thou knowest the Relation it bears to Things divine; nor any Thing divine, unless Thou knowest all the Ties it has to Things humane.

In a Word, As Man is by Nature qualify'd to answer all the Purposes of a social Life, and to act a Part agreeable to Reason, so in doing This he gives Glory to his Maker, by fulfilling the End of his Creation; but if he goes contrary to the Light of Nature in acting an unsociable and hurtful Part, he reflects Dishonour on his Creator by defeating, as far as in him lies, the Design of God in making him a social Creature. But,

Because Bigots represent these two Grand Obligations as frequently clashing; and oppose Things which are for the Good of Man, on Pretence that the Honour of God will either directly, or indirectly suffer by it; and on this Pretence have frequently done such Mischiefs to their Fellow-Creatures, as to give Occasion for that Proverbial Saying, In Nomine Domini incipit omne malum: Give me Leave to say, That we can no otherwise honour God, since that consists in having the most exalted Ideas of him, than by supposing him benevolent in the most universal and impartial Manner; and consequently, to imagine he can command any Thing inconsistent with this universal Benevolence, is highly to dishonour him; 'tis to destroy his impartial Goodness, and make his Power and Wisdom degenerate into Cruelty and Craft.

Tho' we have receiv'd our All from God, we can give him nothing, nor do him the least Kindness, much less return Kindness for Kindness; and therefore, the only Way we have to shew our real Gratitude to our great Creator and
and Benefactor, is to be as useful as we can to his Creatures, whom we ought to love as ourselves; and if there can now be a Sin against the Holy Ghost, I shou’d not scruple to say, It is making Religion the Means of destroying the End of all Religion, and rendering the Creature miserable on Pretence of doing Honour to the Creator; who, as he has impress’d on Bodies, in Order to preserve the Natural World, a Tendency to each other; so he has implanted in Minds, the better to support the Moral World, a Tendency to be kind, and beneficent to one another. And so deep is the Impression of Benevolence, that we can’t but applaud a Person who does brave and generous Actions, even tho’ we suffer by them; and as much condemn him who acts basely and treacherously, tho’ we are ever so great Gainers.

"Is there then (says a Noble Author) a natural Beauty of Figures; and is there not as natural One of Actions? No sooner the Eye open upon Figures, the Ear to Sounds than straight the Beautiful results, and Grace and Harmony are known, and acknowledg’d. No sooner are Actions view’d, no sooner the human Affections and Passions discern’d (and they are most of them as soon discern’d as felt) than straight an inward Eye distinguishes, and sees the fair and shapely, the Amiable and Admira...
A: An execrable Superstition has in many Christian Countries, in a Manner, extinguish'd these kind Sentiments, and even all Humanity and Pity; insomuch that the tender Sex can rejoice to hear the Shrieks, and see the Agonies of Men expiring under the most cruel Tortures; and there's scarce any Place, so much does this cursed Bigotry prevail, where we do not almost daily see too much Reason to cry,

Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum.

The Noble Author now quoted justly observes, "If there be a Religion that teaches the Adoration and Love of a God, whose Character it is to be captious, and of high Resentment, subject to Wrath and Anger, furious, revengeful, and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the Offence; and if there be added to the Character of this God, a fraudulent Disposition, encouraging Deceit and Treachery among Men; favourable to a few, tho' for slight Causes, and cruel to the rest; 'tis evident that such a Religion as this being strongly enforc'd, must of Necessity raise even an Approbation and Respect towards the Vices of this Kind, and breed a suitable Disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful Temper. For even Irregularities and Enormities of a heinous Kind must in many Cases appear illustrious to one, who considers them in a Being admir'd and contemplated with the highest Honour and Veneration. — Whene'er, therefore, a Religion teaches the Love and Admiration of a Deity, that has any apparent Character of Ill; it teaches at the same Time a Love and Admiration of that Ill, and causes that to be taken for good and amiable, which is itself horrid and detestable."
ARCHBISHOP Tillotson, than whom none better understood human Nature, says, that "According as Mens No- 181. &
"tions of God are, such will their Religion be; if they have gross and false Conceptions of God, their Reli-
"gion will be absurd and superstitious: If Men fancy God to be an ill-natur'd Being, arm'd with infinite Power,
"who takes Delight in the Misery and Ruin of his Creatures, and is ready to take all Advantages against them,
"they may fear him, but they will hate him; and they will be apt to be such towards one another, as they
"fancy God to be towards them; for all Religion doth naturally incline Men to imitate him whom they wor-
"ship.

DR. Scot, to root out all such injurious Notions as de-
"rogate from the Goodness of God, very justly observes, that "God being infinitely good in his own Nature, it is impossible we shou'd conceive him to be better than he is; and therefore every false Notion we entertain of his Goodness must detract from it; and so much as we detract from his Goodness, so much we detract from the principal Reason and Motive of our loving him.

AND indeed, Power and Knowledge of themselves can't engage our Love; if they cou'd, we shou'd love the Devil in Proportion to his Power and Knowledge; 'tis Goodness alone which can beget Confidence, Love, and Veneration; and there's none of those Questions, whether relating to God or Man, but what may be easily determined, by considering which Side of the Question carries with it the greatest Goodness; since the same Light of Nature, which shews us there is such a good Being, shews us also what such Goodness expects. And did Men consider how repugnant 'tis to his Goodness, to require any Thing of them

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them which they had no Reason to obey, but because they had no Power to disobey; they must abhor the Notion of all arbitrary Commands.

And therefore, I shall not scruple to affirm, That He who steadfastly adheres to what the Light of Nature teaches him concerning the divine Goodness, as he will avoid the comfortless Prospect of the Atheist, the perpetual Anxiety of the superstitious, the wild Perturbation of the Enthusiast, and the pernicious Fury of the Bigot; so he can’t fail of the True Religion, happily seated in the Middle between these Extremes. And, as such a Person can’t but love God as he ought, so in Imitation of the divine Goodness, which influences all his Actions, he will contribute his utmost to the Good of Others; and his Love and Kindness will be as extensive as human Nature; and going on rational and evident Principles, which must give him entire Satisfaction, he will act a steady uniform Part. And what can be wanting to a Man, who has this heavenly, this god-like Disposition, which renders him happy in himself; and as far as it is in his Power, makes the whole World so too.

And since ‘tis not easy to part with a Subject, which One can scarce think of without Rapture; I must say, that Men can never have true Sentiments of the Goodness of the divine Legislator, or esteem his Laws as they ought, till they are convinced he requires nothing of them but what is for their Good; and that they can’t but be miserable as long as they swerve from Rules so essential to their Happiness; and that the longer they do so, the more difficult will it be to acquire a contrary Habit. These Notions early inculcated, will cause Men with Joy to obey the divine Laws, and make them in Reality love God as well as be belov’d by him; who has the chief Regard to the Heart, and above all Things
Chap. 7. Christianity as old as the Creation.

Things require the Purity of the Mind; and that Men shou’d act, not out of a Principle of slavish Fear, but from perfect Love void of all Fear.

Plutarch speaking of Religion, as it stood in the Heathen Church, and in his own Time, represents it as full of Satisfaction, Hope, Joy, and Delight; and says, “It is plain, and evident from most demonstrable Testimonies, that neither the Societies, nor publick Meetings in the Temples, nor any other diverting Parties, Sights, or Entertainments are more delightful, or rejoicing, than what we ourselves behold, and practice in the Church-Worship. — Our Disposition and Temper is not on this Occasion, as if we were in the Presence of worldly Potentates, dread Sovereigns and despotic Princes; nor are we here found meanly humbling ourselves, crouching in Fear and Awe, and full of Anxiety and Confusion, as wou’d be natural to us in such a Case? but where the Divinity is esteem’d the nearest, and most immediately present, there Horrors and Amazement are the furthest banish’d; there the Heart, we find, gives the freest Way to Pleasure, to Entertainment —— and this even to Excess.” And,

Christians in addressing to the divine Majesty, must be fill’d with inexpressible Joy and Delight, did they consider the true Notion of God; “Who, as Archbishop Tilston says, would appear to be so lovely a Being, so full of Goodness and all desirable Perfections, that even those who are of so irregular Understanding, as not to believe there is a God, yet could not refrain from wishing with all their Hearts there was One —— Who takes particular Care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good. —— Who understands all our Wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest Streights. — Is it

not
not every Man's Interest, that there should be such a Go-
vernor of the World as really designs our Happiness, and
has omitted nothing necessary to it; as governs us for our
Advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for
our Good; and yet will infinitely reward us for doing of
That which is best for ourselves, that will punish any
Man that shall go about to injure us, or to deal otherwise
with us than himself in like Cases would be dealt withal.
— We have Reason to believe God to be such a Being,
if he be at all.

B. Are not the last Words too bold in supposing there
could be no God, were he not such as he describes him?

A. With Submission, I think not, since there can be
nothing in God but what is God-like; he either must be
perfectly good, or not be at all. It would be well, if all
who in Words give this Character of the Deity, were con-
sistent with themselves, and did not impute such Actions
to him, as make him resemble the worst of Beings, and so run
into downright Demonism. And let me add, Men of good
Sense, and who mean well, will naturally fall into the same
Sentiments; a Shaftesbury will say the same as a Tillotson.

"If there be, says that Noble Author, a general Mind;
it can have no particular Interest: But the general Good,
and the Good of the Whole, and its own private Good,
must of Necessity be one and the same. It can intend
nothing besides, nor aim at any Thing beyond, nor be
provok'd to any Thing contrary. So that we have only
to consider, whether there be really such a Thing as a
Mind that has Relation to the Whole, or not. For, if un-
happily there be no Mind, we may comfort ourselves,
however, that Nature has no Malice: If there be really a
Mind we may rest satisfy'd, that it is the best naturl'd one
in
in the World. The last Case, one would imagine, shou'd
be the most comfortable; and the Notion of a common
Parent less frightful than that of forlorn Nature, and
a fatherless World. Tho' as Religion stands amongst us,
there are many good People who wou'd have less Fear in
being thus expos'd; and wou'd be easier, perhaps, in their
Minds, if they were assur'd they had only mere Chance to
trust to. For no Body trembles to think there shou'd be
no God; but rather, that there shou'd be one. This how-
ever wou'd be otherwise, if Deity were thought as kindly
of as Humanity; and we cou'd be persuad'd to believe,
that if there really was a God, the greatest Goodness must
of Necessity belong to him, without any of those Defects
of Passion, those Meannesses and Imperfections, which we
acknowledge such in ourselves; which, as good Men, we
endeavour all we can to be superior to, and which, we
find, we every Day conquer as we grow better.

In Recapitulating what I have said of the Agreement of
Natural and Reveal'd Religion, I can't do it more fully than
in the Words of Dr. Sherlock (now Bishop of Bangor) who,
in a Sermon for Propagating the Gospel (where we may ex-
pect every Thing which recommends it) says, that "The
Religion of the Gospel is the true Original Religion of
Reason and Nature. — That the Doctrine of Repen-
tance, with which the Gospel set out in the World, had
Reference to the Law of Reason and Nature, against which
Men had every where offended; and since Repentance in-
fers the Necessity of a future Reformation, and a Return
to that Duty and Obedience, from which, by Transgres-
sion we are fallen; the Consequence is manifestly This,
that the Gospel was a Republication of the Law of Nature,
and its Precepts declarative of that Original Religion, which
was as old as the Creation."
Christianity as old as the Creation. VOL. I.

"This, continues he, will appear, by considering the Nature of the Thing itself. The Notions of Good and Evil are eternally and unalterably the same; which Notions are the Rules and Measures of all moral Actions, and are consequently necessary, and constituent Parts of Religion:

And therefore, if the Religion of Nature in her primitive State was pure and uncorrupt, which will not, I presume, be deny'd, tho' there was sufficient Reason for a Republication of it, because of the great Ignorance and Superstition which had grown upon the World; yet there cou'd be no Reason for any Alteration of it: For tho' the World was the worse for abusing the Religion of Nature, and might want to be reform'd by a divine Instrucor; yet the Religion of Nature was not the worse for being abus'd, but still retain'd its first Purity and Simplicity. The Duties of Religion, consider'd as the Rules of Action, flow from the Relation we bear to God, and to one another; and Religion must ever be the same, as long as these Relations continue unalter'd: If our first Parent was the Creature of God, so are we; and whatever Service and Duty he ow'd in Virtue of this Dependance, the same is due from us; nor can this Relation be ever made the Ground of different Duties in his Case, and ours: If therefore, Nature rightly instructed him at first how to serve his Maker, our Obligations being the same with his, our Rule must be the same also. The Case is the same with respect to the Duties owing from Man to Man; and it would be as reasonable to suppose, that the three Angles of a Triangle should be equal to two right Ones in one Age, and unequal in another, as to suppose, that the Duties of Religion should differ in one Age from what they were in another; the Habitudes and Relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

"That
"That the Case is in Fact what I have represented it
to be, might be shewn from the particular Laws of the
Gospel, and their Dependance on the Maxims and Prin-
ciples of Natural Religion. —— I will content myself
with one general Proof, which reaches to every Part of
the Christian Doctrine. —— If the Law and the Prophets
hang on these two grand Commandments, viz. The Love
of God, and the Love of our Neighbour; then the Doc-
trine of our Saviour, which is the Perfection of the Law
and the Prophets, must hang on them likewise: Now, if
you will allow, that the Love of God, and the Love of
our Neighbour are Fundamentals in the Law of Reason
and Nature (as undoubtedly they are) you must also al-
low, that whatever may be deduc'd from them by rati-
onal Consequence, must be a Precept of the Law of Na-
ture: Whatever, therefore, hangs on these two Com-
mandments, must necessarily be a Part of Natural Reli-
gion; and that all the Law and the Prophets do so hang,
and consequently, the Doctrine of the Gospel, which is
the Perfection of them; you have 'had our Saviour's ex-
press Testimony. Since then it appears (as I think)
that the Religion of the Gospel is the True Original Reli-
gion of Reason and Nature; —— That it has, as such, a
Claim to be receiv'd independent of those Miracles, which
were wrought for its Confirmation, will be admitted by
all, who allow the Force and Obligation of Natural Re-
ligion; and can be deny'd by none who know, or under-
stand themselves. The Principles of Religion are inter-
woven with the very Frame and Make of our Minds, and
we may as well run from ourselves, as from the Sense of
the Obligations we are under.

M B. But
B. But does not this Right Reverend Prelate in this Sermon affirm, that there are Doctrines in Christianity, which, tho' not different, yet are distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature?

A. There's nothing more common with learned Authors, than Distinctions without any Difference; yet the Bishop very cautiously words what he says, "That the Doctrines of Christianity, tho' not different, are distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature;" but he does not say they are distinct from those Doctrines, which flow from the Principles of Reason and Nature: And what he immediately adds, that "Our Saviour came into the World to supply the Defects, not of Religion, which continu'd in its Purity and Perfection, but of Nature;" plainly shews, that he thinks nothing could be added by our Saviour, to a Law that had no Defects; and that the Defects of Nature could only be supply'd, by obliging People to live up to this Natural Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection.

This is doing Justice to Reveal'd as well as Natural Religion, and shews the Author of both to be at all Times equally Wise, Good, and Beneficent; and the Bishop ought to be valu'd for speaking thus plainly: O fæc. omnia dixisset.

And to this Right Reverend Father, I may add the Authority of the late Most Reverend Archbishop Sharp, who says, "That Religion (taking that Word as it signifies that universal Duty we owe to God, and by which we are to recommend ourselves to his Favour) is not for variable, uncertain, and arbitrary a Matter, as some Men do perhaps suppose it; but is a constant, fixed, permanent, immutable Thing. The same now that it was in
the Days of the Old Law; and the same then that it
was in the Days before the Law was given; and the
same both then and now that it shall be a thousand
Years hence, if the World should last so long. True
Religion, and that which is from God, was, and is,
and ever will be the same in Substance in all Coun-
tries, and in all Nations, and among all Sorts and Con-
ditions of Men whatsoever; and the Sum of it is, To
love the Lord our God with all our Hearts, and with
all our Minds, and with all our Strength; and next to
that, To love our Neighbour as ourselves. This was the
Religion that the Patriarchs, and all the pious Men of
Old lived in, and by which they obtained God’s Favour
and Acceptance; when as yet there was no reveal’d insti-
tuated Religion in the World. —— That this is the Sum
of the Christian Religion, no Man can in the least doubt
that has ever read the New Testament. —— In our Sa-
vour’s Institution there is hardly any one Thing recom-
mended to us, that doth not directly relate to this Mat-
ter; that is not either an Instance wherein we are to ex-
press our Love to God, and our Neighbour; or a Means
whereby we may be furthered in the practising of those Du-
ties; or an Argument, and Motive, and Encouragement to
excite us to the practising of them. It is the Design of al-
his Doctrines to give us right Notions of God, and our
Neighbour; to teach us how excellent, how good God is
in himself, and how kind, how gracious to us; and there-
fore, what infinite Reason we have to love, and serve him;
and to love and serve all Mankind (who are our Neigh-
bours) for his sake. ——

We have an easy, and a true Notion of that Religion
which is from God, and we can never be at a Loss to find

out
"out in what it doth consist; it is not a thing to be altered at pleasure; both the law of nature, and the law of God; both the natural dispensation under which all men are born, and the reveal'd dispensation as we have either in the Old or New Testament, do sufficiently instruct us in the main heads of it. Nay, I dare be bold to say, so long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transform'd into another sort of creatures than what God made them at first; it is impossible that there should be any true religion, but what may be summed up in these two things; to love God, and our neighbour."
That the not adhering to those Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God, has been the Occasion of all Superstition, and all those innumerable Mischiefs, that Mankind, on the Account of Religion, have done either to themselves, or one another.

Having in general shewn the Absurdity of not being govern'd by the Reason of Things in all Matters of Religion, I shall now in particular, shew the fatal Consequences of not adhering to those Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God.

Chariton, tho' a Priest of that Church which abounds with Superstition, the most pernicious as well as absurd, seems to have a right Notion of Superstition as well as justly to abhor it, in saying, that "Superstition, and most other Errors and Defects in Religion, are, generally speaking, owing chiefly to Want of becoming, and right Apprehensions of God; We degrade, and bring him down to us; We compare, and judge him by ourselves; We cloath him with"
with our Infirmities, and then proportion, and fit our Fancy accordingly. — What horrid Prophanation and Blasphemy is this!

'Tis to this Absurdity of debasing God, and cloathing him with our Infirmities, and judging of him by ourselves, that the Mediatorie Gods amongst the Heathen owe their Right. Had they believ'd a supreme Being was every where, and at all Times knew their Thoughts, they cou'd never have taken such a round-about Way of addressing him; who not only knew what they desir'd, but their real Wants, and what would relieve them better than any Mediatorie Beings whatever.

B. They address'd to Mediatorie Beings, to shew their greater Respect to the supreme Being; and their own Unworthiness to approach him.

A. This shews what unworthy Notions they had of the supreme Being; since it wou'd be an Affront even to a Temporal Prince, if he was present, and heard every Thing you said, not to address to him, but to another, to let the Prince know what you wanted from him.

The Heathen must think, if they thought at all, that those Mediatorie Gods cou'd either suggest to the supreme God some Reasons he before was ignorant of; or that by their Importunities they cou'd prevail on his Weakness, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do.

This Heathen Notion, as it suppos'd the supreme God either ignorant or weak; so it made the Mediatorie Gods to have a greater Kindness for, and Readiness to do Good to Mankind; and that their Sollicitations made him better-natur'd than otherwise he wou'd be: This of Course took off their Love from the Supreme, and plac'd it on those mediatorie Gods, upon whose powerful Intercessions they so much
much depended. However, these Heathens, allowing One, and but One Most High God, did not so far derogate from the Honour of the One True God, as to pretend that the most distinguished among their several Mediators was equal to him; Equality and Mediation being as inconsistent as Equality and Supremacy. And they would have made their Religion an errant Jumble, if they had worshipp’d these Gods sometimes as Mediators only; sometimes as sovereign Disposers of Things; and sometimes as both together.

Had the Heathen believ’d God to have been a purely-spiritual, invisible Being, they could never have suppos’d him visible to Mortals; or have thought that an unlimited Being could appear under the limited Form of a Man, or other Animal; or that an Omnipresent Being could any more be present in one Place, or Creature, than another; or that such a Being could be confin’d to a small Spot of Earth, while another equally omnipresent was in Heaven, and a Third descending from thence; &c. Or that one God could be sent on the Errand of another God, after the Manner that God Mercury was by God Jupiter; tho’ there was nothing too absurd for the Heathen to believe, after they had destroy’d the Unity of God; except it was, that Jupiter and Mercury, the Sender and the Sent were the same God.

The primitive Fathers bitterly inveigh’d against these heathenish Notions: Justin Martyr for Instants says, Iustin. Oper. "None, who have the least Sense, will dare to affirm, that p. 207. Ed. the Maker and Father of the Universe did appear in a 1593. small Spot of Earth; the God of the Universe can nei. p. 356, E. ther ascend, nor descend, nor come into any Place. Tertullian says; "He would not believe the sovereign God des. cap. 16. cended into the Womb of a Woman; tho’ even the Scrip- ture itself should say it. ’Tis impossible; says Eusebius, that:"

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that the Eyes of Mortals should ever see the supreme God; viz. Him, who is above all Things, and whose Essence is unbegotten and immutable. Again, 'Tis absurd, and contrary to all Reason, that the unbegotten and immutable Nature of the Almighty God should take the Form of a Man; or that the Scripture should forge such like Falsities." Minutius Felix in his Apology says, that The Deity can't dye, nor can any Thing which is born be a God: That only is divine, which has neither Beginning nor End; If the Gods get Children, they would get them immortal: We must conclude those Gods to be Men, of whose Birth and Burial we are fully satisfy'd. Thus the Fathers expos'd the Pagan Polytheism.

A great deal more, as you may well imagine, might be said on this Head; but now I shall briefly consider what pernicious Effects the having wrong and unnatural Conceptions of the Deity, has occasion'd among Men with relation to themselves, and one another.

If we take a general View of those Mischiefs Mankind have at all Times practis'd on a religious Account, either upon themselves or others; we shall find them owing to their entertaining such Notions of God, as are entirely inconsistent with his Nature; and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, would inform them of the Design and End of the Laws of God.

Had not Numbers in all Ages thought, that God delighted in the Pain and Misery of his Creatures; they could never have imagin'd, that the best Way to render them acceptable to him, was by tormenting themselves with immoderate Watchings, Fastings, Penances, and Mortifications of all Sorts; and the greater the more pleasing: And even at present there are among Christians, Mahometans, and Pagers,
Chap. 8.  Christianity as old as the Creation.

gans, Numbers of Men who devote themselves to Exercises full of Pain and corporal Sufferings, and either wound, or mangle their own Persons, or find other Ways of tormenting themselves; and indeed, the Superstitious every where think, the less Mercy they shew to their Bodies, the more Mercy God will shew to their Souls.

Many of the primitive Christians, instead of flying, as the Gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to Execution, but provok'd their Judges to do them that Favour. And under Trajan, all the Christians in a City in Asia came in a Body to the Proconsul, and offer'd themselves to the Slaughter; which made him cry, O! ye unhappy People, if ye have a Mind to dye, have ye not Halter's and Precipices enough to end c. 5. p. 11. your Lives; but ye must come here for Executioners. And this was a general Practice under the Antonini; and Mar-See Mar. Antonini. cus Antoninus severely reflects on the Obstancy of the Chi- 

trians, in thus running headlong to Death. And St. Cyprian labours to comfort those who might be so unhappy, by the ceasing of the then Persecution, to miss the Crown of Mar-

tyrdom; tho' one wou'd think there were but few who wanted this Consolation; since he says, Many of the Clergy, and the far greater Part of the Laity apostatiz'd. But when by the Empire's becoming Christian, the Crown of Martyrdom was no longer to be obtain'd by the prevailing Party of Christians, then exercising Cruelties on themselves was esteem'd the next best Thing; and many Devotees put monstrous Hardships on themselves, while others chose Poverty, Rags, and Nastiness; or else retir'd to Caves, Deserts, and other solitary Places to sigh away their miserable Lives: And Ecclesiastic Histories are full of Miracles done by such Madmen as Simeon Stylites, who had no other Dwelling than a Pillar, on which he spent the best Part of his Life; and
'twas owing to these superstitious Notions, that such Numbers of Monasteries and Nunneries were soon founded to the great Oppression and Depopulation of the Christian World; not but that the impudent Forgeries of Athanasius, and other such like Saints about Miracles done by Monks, help'd to increase this Superstition; whilst the Prelates, tho' they encourag'd those Severites on others, were far from practising any on themselves.

Had such Notions been adher'd to concerning the divine Goodness, as the Light of Nature dictates, the Egyptians, and some other Pagan Nations cou'd never have thought that Cutting off the Foreskin (not to be perform'd without great Pain and Hazard) cou'd have been esteem'd a religious Duty acceptable to a good and gracious God; who makes nothing in vain, much less what requires the cutting off, even with extrem Danger as well as Anguish. Had Nature requir'd such an Operation, Nature, being always the same, wou'd still have requir'd it.

This Institution, as is prov'd by Marsbam, and Others, seems to be owing to the Egyptians, who thought all to be profane who us'd it not; and it was after Abraham had been in Egypt, that Circumcision was instituted; in Order, 'tis likely, to recommend his Posterity to the Egyptians, on whom they were for some Ages to depend; and what makes this the more probable, is, that 'twas not till after the Lord had order'd Moses into Egypt, that the Lord met him by the Way in the Inn, and sought to kill him for not circumcising his Son: And upon Joshua's circumcising the Israelites (Circumcision not being observ'd during their Stay in the Wilderness, when they had no Communication with Egypt) the Lord himself says, This Day have I rolled away the Reproach of Egypt from off you.
The Heathen World must have very gross Conceptions, not only of their inferior Gods, but of the Father of Gods and Men; when they imagined him of so cruel a Nature, as to be delighted with the butchering of innocent Animals; and that the Stench of burnt Flesh shou’d be such a sweet-smelling Savour in his Nostrils, as to atone for the Wickedness of Men; and wicked, no doubt, they were, when they had such an Atonement at hand. So that the Harmless were burnt to save the Hurtful; and Men, the less innocent they grew, the more they destroy’d the innocent Beasts.

Non Bove maivato Caelstia Numina gaudent;
Sed, quae praebenda est, & fine Fide,
Ovid. Epist. p. 89.
Ep. 20. v. 181.

If the Pagans believ’d Beasts were not given them for Food, why did they eat them? Or, if they thought they were, why did they ungratefully throw back the Gifts of God on the Donor? Or, why did they not drown, or bury them, rather than make such a Stench in burning them, as many Times by the Number of Sacrifices, might infect the very Air?

’Tis probable, that the Heathen Priests who had with their Gods, and reserv’d the best Bits for themselves, had the chief Hand in this as well as in all other gainful Superstitions; while the deluded People, who many Times suffer’d by the Scarcity of Provisions, caus’d by the great Number of Sacrifices, were at vast Expence in maintaining these holy Butchers, whose very Trade inspir’d them with Cruelty.

And ’tis probable, this absurd Notion prevail’d like all other Absurdities by Degrees, and at first Sacrifices were
only religious Feasts, either in Commemoration of some National Benefit; where after God, their great Benefactor, was celebrated, they commemorated their particular Benefactors; or else Feasts were made on a private Account by the Master of a Family, upon shearing his Sheep, gathering in the Fruits of the Earth, &c. where those that assisted him were entertained, and joyfully join’d in giving Thanks to the Author of those Blessings, without destroying, or burning any Part of the Creature given for their Use; and the Master of the Family was, no doubt, Master of the Ceremonies at his own Feast: But this simple Method not pleasing certain Persons, who were resolv’d to have the best Share in all those religious Feasts, they persuaded the People that it was necessary some Part of the Flesh of Animals was to be burnt to feed the hungry Nostrils of the Deity, delighted with the sweet Savour of burnt Flesh; and the better Part to be reserv’d unburnt for themselves, to whom the Slaying of the Animals, and the offering them up was appropriated. 'Tis then no Wonder the Number of the Gods multiply’d, since the more Gods, the more Sacrifices, and the Priests had better Fare; and that they might not want plentiful Feastings, the People were made to believe, that they cou’d learn their Fortunes from the Intrails of the Beasts they sacrific’d; and this Method continues to this Day in those Places, where they have not found out an easier, and better Way of cheating the People.

B. You seem to be of the Sentiments of the Poet, who says,

Natural Religion was easy first, and plain;
Tales made it Mystery, Offerings made it Gain;
Sacrifices and Showes were at length prepar’d,
The Priests eat roast Meat, and the People star’d.

A. The
Chap. 8. Christianity as old as the Creation.

A. The Pagans sacrificing of Beasts was not so bad in itself, as what it soon occasion’d, human Sacrifices; which, Men being of greater Value than Beasts, were believ’d to be more acceptable; and Parents, stifling all natural Affections, offer’d up their own Children, as the most precious Gifts they cou’d bestow on the Gods; except offering up their own Lives, and sacrificing themselves: And as this Sacrifice was thought most meritorious, so the more excellent the Persons, the more agreeable the Sacrifice; and there are even at this Day, a Number of superstitious People in India, who out of great Devotion throw themselves under the Wheels of those heavy Chariots, which carry the Images of their Gods, and are crush’d to Death; and Others, out of the same mistaken Zeal, cut off their Flesh, and mangle their Limbs till they fall down dead; which makes the People rejoice at their Sufferings, and reverence them as most holy Martyrs; concluding that nothing but the Truth of their Religion cou’d enable them to shew such terrible Marks of Zeal on themselves, and become voluntary Martyrs.

B. I pity those deluded People, and wonder how Men can persuade themselves, that the Mercy of Heaven can be purchas’d by such Barbarities, as human Nature left to itself wou’d start at.

A. That the Priests were every where for human Sacrifices is no Wonder; since They had the appointing the Men, whom the Gods did the great Honour to accept for Burnt-Offerings: And indeed, after People once gave themselves up to believe in their Priests, there was nothing too absurd to be receiv’d as divine. When the Ethiopians, for Instance, were once persuad’d that their Priests were intimately acquainted with the Will of the Gods, it was too late
late to dispute any Orders they pretended to bring from
them; and therefore, their Kings as well as private Persons,
well-knowing that the Commands of the Immortal Gods
were not to be disputed by Mortals, most religiously executed
themselves as soon as the Pleasure of the Gods was signi-
fy'd to them by those sacred Messengers of their Will;
and this blind Devotion might have continu'd till now,
had not an Infidel Prince, bred up in the profane Philo-
osophy of the Greeks, put a Stop to it by surprizing, and de-
stroying at once all those holy Impostors.

We learn from Bernier and Others, that it has been an
immemorial Custom in India, for the Women (so great
a Power has Superstition even over that fearful Sex) to burn
themselves with their dead Husbands, adorn'd with all the
incorruptible Riches they cou'd procure on their own Ac-
count; or that the Folly of Others wou'd send by them to
their dead Friends: These their Priests secure to themselves,
by telling the credulous People that the Ashes of the dead,
and all burnt with them, are too sacred to be touch'd by any
but themselves.

B. Th'o' human Sacrifices obtain'd among the Heathen,
yet sure the Levitical Law did not approve, or countenance
any such Practices.

A. Authors are divided, and they who maintain the
affirmative say, that the Levitical Law distinguishes between
ordinary Vows, and those Vows where any Thing is devo-
ted to the Lord; and this they pretend is plain from Levit.
27. where after many surprizing Things about common
Vows, by which the Things themselves, or Money in lieu of
them, were to be given to the Priests; at Ver. 28. it comes
to Things devoted, and says, Notwithstanding, no devoted
Thing that a Man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that
be
be hath, both of Men and Beasts, and of the Field of his Possession, shall be sold or redeem’d; every Thing devoted is most holy unto the Lord. And what is meant by being most holy unto the Lord, is explain’d in the next Verse, None devoted, which shall be devoted of Man shall be redeem’d; but shall surely be put to Death. And they say it was before declar’d, that whatever was the Lord’s, as the First-born of Man and Beast, was to be slain; if God did not order its Redemption. The First-born of Man was to be redeem’d; and that of an Ass, if not redeem’d by a Lamb, was to have its Neck broke; and the Captives taken in War, which fell to the Lord’s Share; there being no Order for redeeming, were, as is own’d by all, to be slain.

The Prophet Micah reckons the putting every devoted Thing to Death among the Jewish Institutions, in saying, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and how myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-Offerings, with Calves of a Year old? Will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or with ten Thousand of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression; the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Here the sacrificing of a Man’s own Children is mention’d equally with the sacrificing of Beasts, which is allow’d to be a Jewish Institution; how absurdly must the Prophet be suppos’d to have argu’d, after he hath preferr’d Justice and Mercy to a Thing commanded by God, if he shou’d go on to prefer it before a Thing abhorr’d by God!
If there could be any Doubt in this Matter, Jephthah’s Vow would clear it up; for this Jewish Hero made the Vow when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and after making it he wrought a great Deliverance for Israel: The Words of the Vow are, Whatsoever (or rather Whosoever) cometh forth of the Doors of my House to meet me, when I return in Peace from the Children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s; and I will offer it up to him for a Burnt-Offering. A Vow made by such an extraordinary Person, and upon such an extraordinary Occasion, looks as tho’ something extraordinarily pleasing to God, was design’d by that Vow; which, tho’ domestic Animals might have been sacrific’d, must relate to Persons capable of acting with Design; viz. of coming out of his House to meet him after the Victory; which to his great Grief his only Child did. Had there been any Way of dispensing with this solemn Vow, he, since he had two Month’s Time to consider, would, no doubt, have found it out; but he says, I have opened my Mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back; and he did with her according to his Vow. And his Daughter, worthy of a better Fate, was willing her Father should execute his cruel Vow, only regretting that she dy’d without being a Mother in Israel; for that Reason she was yearly mourn’d by the Daughters of Israel.

St. Jerome, as well as the Author of the Questions to the Orthodox, thinks that Jephthah’s Piety in sacrificing his Daughter, was the Reason of St. Paul’s numbring him among the just Persons. And,

Bishop Smalridge, in his Sermon about Jephthah’s Vow, says, “That all the Fathers, as well as our own Homilies, own that he sacrific’d his Daughter.
Chap. 8. Christianity as old as the Creation.

The Jews cou'd not think it absolutely unlawful for a Father to sacrifice an innocent Child; since Abraham was highly extoll'd for being ready to sacrifice his only Son, and that too without the least Expostulation; tho' he was inportunate with God to save an inhospitable, idolatrous, and incestuous City.

No Wonder that a single Person in the Power of another might be devoted to God, since free, and independent Nations were so devoted; and it was by virtue of such a Vow, which Israel vowed unto the Lord, that the Canaanites, who had never done Israel the least Injury, Men, Wo-Numb. 21. 2, 3. men, and Children were to be utterly destroy'd.

Had the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who rec-kons Jeptha among the Jewish Heroes, thought the Jews abhor'd all human Sacrifices, he wou'd not, at least, without some Apology for the Lawfulness of human Sacrifices, have declar'd one such Sacrifice, where the same Person was both Sacrificer and Sacrifice, to have been of infinite Value, in saying, that Christ offer'd up himself; and that Heb. 7. 27. put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself; and endeavours to shew the Hebrews, that the Blood of the Beasts that were sacrific'd, was of no Value in Comparison of the Blood of Ver. 13. Christ, who, thro' the eternal Spirit, offer'd up himself with-Ver. 14. out Spot to God.

B. Admitting the Jewish Law allow'd human Sacrifices, yet the Christian Religion, sure, forbids (since Christ, according to the Apostle, sacrific'd himself) all human Sacrifices.

A. If putting innocent, and conscientious Men to Death on Account of Religion, may be call'd sacrificing them, there have been more human Sacrifices than ever were before in the World, and those too not offer'd up to God, but
to the Devil, by burning their Bodies, and sentencing their 
Souls to Hell; and even at this Day the Papists to persuade 
the Spectators, that those they condemn to the Flames im-
mediately go to Hell, dress them up in a San Benito, or a 
Coat painted all over with Flames and Devils; and then 
take their Leave of each Sufferer with this charitable Ex-
pression, *Jam animam tuam tradimus Diabolo.*

_B. I must own, this Bigotry, which has had such terrible 
Effects among Christians, was little felt, or known in the Pa-
gan World._

_A. Is not this cursed Bigotry owing to the most unwor-
thy Notions Bigots have entertain’d of the divine Perfections, 
imagineing they do Service to the Creator, by hurting, and 
destroying his Creatures? The fiery Zeal of such Wretches 
is capable of any Mischief: Most other Men, tho’ ever so 
wicked, have some Remains of Pity and Humanity, some 
Checks of Conscience, and tho’ ever so much provok’d, 
Time will affwage their Anger; but the Bigot feels not the 
least Remorse, nor can Time abate his Fury; and he is so 
far from having any Pity, that he glories in the cruellest 
Actions, and thinks the more hellish Facts he commits, the 
more he merits Heaven; and very often gets the Reputa-
tion of a Saint for acting the Part of a Devil. So that his 
Notions of God and Religion, serve only to make him infini-
tely a worse Man, than if he had been without any Belief; 
for then he cou’d have no Motives from the next World for 
doing Mischief; nor wou’d his Disbelief strip him of his 
Humanity, or hinder him, if he judg’d rightly of his own 
Interest, from acting so by his Fellow-Creatures, as, taking 
in the whole of his Life, was best for him to do._

_B. You represent Bigotry more odious than it is, in 
making it worse than Atheism itself._

_A. As_
A. As Bigotry is the worst Sort of Superstition, so you
know the Philosophers in general suppose Superstition to be
worse than Atheism itself. Plutarch, in particular, makes
it his Business in his Tract of Disdemonymy, or Superstition, to
prove that Atheism, tho' an Opinion false, and even stu-
pid, yet is far less hurtful to Men than Superstition; and
reflects less Dishonour on the Deity itself: For he inter-
prets Disdemonymy, to be the continual Dread of a Deity
no less mischievous than powerful; which is the most odious
Character that can belong to any intellectual Being, and
has given Birth to those shocking Notions, and dismal Rites
in divine Worship, that have either run Men into Atheism,
and expos'd Religion itself to Ridicule and Contempt; or
made Mankind the Dupe of designing knaves, and taught
fierce Bigots to exercise, and then sanctify the most inhu-
man Barbarities.

"The Atheist, says he, knows no God at all; the Su-
perstitious none but what is monstrous and terrible; mis-
taking for dreadful, what is most kind and beneficent;
for tyrannical, what is truly paternal; for mischievously
inclin'd, what is full of providential Care; nay, for a
Being brutally savage and fierce, what is meer Goodness
itself. Shall then, adds he, the Atheist be counted im-
pious, and not this superstitious Person much more so?
I, for my part, had rather Men should say there is no
such Person as Plutarch, than that he is a Man incon-
stant, fickle, prone to Anger, ready to revenge himself
upon the slightest Occasion, and full of Indignation for
meer Trifles, &c. And yet this is no more than what the
superstitious think of the Deity; whom of Consequence
they must as well hate as fear: They worship, indeed, and
adore him; and so do Men even those very Tyrants they
would
wou'd be glad of an Opportunity to destroy. The Atheist
contributes not in the least to Superstition; but Supersti-
tion having given out for hideous an Idea of the Deity;
some have been frighted into the utter Disbelief of any
such Being; because they think it much better, nay,
more reasonable, that there should be no Deity, than one
whom they see more Reason to hate, and abominate;
than to love; honour, and reverence. Thus inconsider-
rate Men, shock'd at the Deformity of Superstition, run
directly into its opposite Extrem Atheism, heedlessly skip-
ing over true Piety, that is the Golden Mean between
both." So much for this Philosopher of the Gentiles, I
shall now quote a noble Christian Philosopher, who says,
Atheism leaves a Man to Sense, to Philosophy, to natural
Pity, to Laws, to Reputation; all which may be Guides
to an outward moral Virtue, tho' Religion were not: But
Superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute
Monarchy in the Minds of Men. Therefore Atheism did
never perturb States; for it makes Men wary of them-
seves, as looking no further: And we see the Times in-
clining to Atheism (as the Time of Augustus Caesar)
were civil Times. But Superstition hath been the Confu-
sion of many States, and bringeth in a new Primum Mo-
bile, that ravisheth all the Spheres of Government."

I grant that next to a real Bigot, an Atheist in Masque-
rade may do most Mischiefe; but then it is by hiding the
Atheist, and personating the Bigot; and under Colour of
promoting Religion, advancing Priest-craft. And there
are no small Number of these Atheists, if what the famous
Scaliger says is true, Quicumque Jesuitæ vel Ecclesiæstici Ro-
mae in honoribus vivunt, Athei sunt. And Men must have a
great deal of Charity to think better of any Protestant, whose
pre-
pretended Zeal carries him, contrary to the Principles of his Religion, into persecuting Measures.

Had the Heathen distinguish'd themselves by Creeds made out of Spite to one another, and mutually persecuted each other about the Worship of their Gods, they wou'd soon have made the Number of their Votaries as few as the Gods they worshipp'd; but we don't find (except in Egypt that Mother-land of Superstition) they ever quarrell'd about their Gods; tho' their Gods sometimes quarrell'd, and fought about their Votaries: No, it was a Maxim with them, Deorum injuria, Diis curae.

By the universal Liberty that was allow'd amongst the Ancients, "Matters (as a noble Author observes) were so ballanc'd, that Reason had fair Play; Learning, and Science flourish'd; wonderful was the Harmony and Temper, which arose from these Contrarieties. Thus Superstition, and Enthusiasm were mildly treated; and being let alone, they never rag'd to that Degree as to occasion Bloodshed, Wars, Persecutions, and Devastations; but a new Sort of Policy, has made us leap the Bounds of natural Humanity, and out of a super-natural Charity, has taught us the Way of plaguing one another most devoutly. It has rais'd an Antipathy, that no temporal Interest could ever do, and entail'd on us a mutual Hatred to all Eternity. And savage Zeal, with meek and pious Semblance, works dreadful Massacre; and for Heaven's-sake (horrid Pretence) makes desolate the Earth.

And as this noble Author observes, "The Zeal, &c., Characterist. (or the Jupiter of Strangers) was, among the Ancients, one of the solemn Characters of Divinity, the peculiar Attribute of the supreme Deity; benign to Man-kind, and recommending universal Love, mutual Kind-
ness and Benignity between the remotest, and most unlike of human Race. Such was the ancient Heathen Charity, and pious Duty towards the whole of Mankind; both those of different Nations and different Worship.

But, good God! how different a Character do Bigots give us of the Deity, making him an unjust, cruel, and inconsistent Being; requiring all Men to judge for themselves, and act according to their Consciences; and yet authorising some among them to judge for others, and to punish them for not acting according to the Consciences of those Judges, tho' ever so much against their own.

These Bigots thought they were authoris'd to punish all those that differ with them in their religious Worship, as God's Enemies; but had they consider'd, that God alone could discern Mens Hearts, and alone discover whether any, by conscientiously offering him a wrong Worship, cou'd become his Enemies; and that infinite Wisdom best knew how to proportion the Punishment to the Fault, as well as infinite Power how to inflict it; they wou'd, surely, have left it to God to judge for himself, in a Cause which immediately related to himself; and where they were not so much as Parties concern'd, and as likely to be mistaken as those they wou'd punish. Can one, without Horror, think of Mens breaking through all the Rules of doing as they wou'd be done unto, in Order to set themselves up for Standards of Truth for God as well as Man? Do not these impious Wretches suppose, that God is not able to judge for himself; at least, not able to execute his own Judgment? And that therefore, he has Recourse, forsooth, to their superior Knowledge or Power; and they are to revenge his Injuries, root out his Enemies, and restore his lost Honour, tho' with the Destruction of the better Part of Mankind? But,

To
To do the Propagators of these blasphemous Notions Justice, they do not throw this Load of Scandal on the Law of Nature; or so much as pretend from thence to authorize their execrable Principles; but endeavour to support them by Traditional Religion; especially by misinterpreted Texts from the Old Testament; and thereby make, not only Natural and Reveall’d Religion, but the Old and New Testament (the latter of which requires doing Good both to Jews and Gentiles) contradict each other. But to return,

If what the Light of Nature teaches us concerning the divine Perfections, when duly attended to, is not only sufficient to hinder us from falling into Superstition of any Kind whatever; but, as I have already shown, demonstrates what God, from his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, can, or cannot command; how is it possible that the Law of Nature and Grace can differ? How can it be conceiv’d, that God’s Laws, whether internally, or externally reveal’d, are not at all Times the same, when the Author of them is, and has been immutably the same for ever.
CHAP. IX.

Human Happiness being the ultimate Design and End of all Traditional, as well as Original Revelation, they must both prescribe the same Means; since those Means, which at one time promote human Happiness, equally promote it at all times.

B. HOU'D I grant you, that Natural and Reveall'd Religion, as they have the same Author, must have the same Ends; and that the ultimate End of all God's Laws, and consequently, of all Religion, is human Happiness; yet there are several Things to be consider'd as subordinate Ends: And here, may not Original and Traditional Religion differ? since 'tis allow'd by all, that how immutable foever these subordinate Ends are, yet the Means to promote these Ends are various and mutable.

A. Your allowing these Means to be various and mutable, supposes no such Means so prescrib'd in the Gospel; but that, agreeably to the Law of Nature, they are to be vary'd as best suits that End for which they were ordain'd: To imagine the contrary, is to make Things, dependent on Circumstances, independent; Things that are proper only
only under some Circumstances, necessary under all Circumstances; nay, to make Ends mutable, and Means immutable; and that these are to continue the same, tho' by Change of Circumstances they become prejudicial; nay, destructive to the End for which alone they were ordain'd. The more necessary any End is, there's the more Reason for People to be left at Liberty to consider in the vast Variety of Circumstances, and those too perpetually changing, what Means may be most proper for obtaining that End; since these having no Worth in themselves, can only be valu'd according as they more or less conduce to the Purpose they were intended for; and where God does not interpose, it is incumbent on human Discretion, chiefly ordain'd for this End, to make such Alterations as the Reason of Things requires.

Did not God always employ the most fit and most suitable Means, he wou'd act contrary to the Rules prescrib'd him by his own unerring Reason; and so he wou'd, did he not leave Men at Liberty to use such Means, as their Reason given for that Purpose, told them was fittest to be done, in all those Circumstances in which he had plac'd them; because That wou'd be requiring of them a Conduct contrary to his own; and consequently, a Conduct highly irrational: And therefore to alter One's Conduct, as Circumstances alter, is not only an Act of the greatest Prudence and Judgment, but is consistent with the greatest Steadiness.

As far as Divine Wisdom excels human, so far the divine Laws must excel human Laws in Clearness and Per Spi-cuity; as well as other Perfections. Whatever is confus'd and perplex'd, can never come from the clear Fountain of all Knowledge; nor That which is obscure from the Father of inexhaustible Light; and as far as you suppose God's Laws
Laws are not plain to any Part of Mankind, so far you de-rogate from the Perfection of those Laws, and the Wisdom, and the Goodness of the divine Legislator; who, since he has the framing of the Understanding of those to whom he dictates his Laws, can't but adapt one to the other: But how can we say, that infinite Wisdom speaks plainly to Mankind thro' all Generations, except we allow that his Commands extend not beyond moral Things; and that in all Matters of a mutable Nature, which can only be consider'd as Means, he obliges them to act according as they judge most proper for bringing about those Ends.

Upon any other Hypothecis, human Laws have vastly the Advantage of the divine: as being publish'd in the Language the Subjects understand, in a plain simple Style, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolical, or other forc'd Way of Expression: and if Time discovers any Inconvenience, or any unforeseen Difficulties want to be clear'd up, the Legislature is ready at Hand; or if in the mean Time, any Doubts about interpreting the Laws arise, there are standing Judges (accountable to the Legislature) in whose Determinations People are to acquiesce. But Mankind are not to expect, that the divine Legislator will, from Time to Time, make any Change in his Laws, and communicate them to all Nations in the Languages they understand: nor can there be any Judges with a Power to oblige People by their Determinations; because such a Power being without any Appeal, is the same as a Power to make divine Laws; and consequently, the only Tribunal God has erected here on Earth (distinct from that he has meditately appointed by Men for their mutual Defence) is every Man's own Conscience; which, as it can't but tell him, that God is the Author of all Things, so it must inform him, that what-
whenever he finds himself oblig'd to do by the Circumstances he is in, he is oblig'd by God himself; who has disposed Things in that Order, and plac'd him in those Circumstances. 'Tis for want of observing this Rule, that the divine Writings are render'd so obscure; and the Infinitely of Sermons, Notes, Comments and Paraphrases, which pretend to speak plainer than God himself, have encreas'd this Obscurity. If whatever tends to the Honour of God, and Good of Man, is evident from the Light of Nature, whence comes all this Uncertainty, Perplexity, Doubts and Difficulties? Is it not chiefly owing to the denying People that Liberty, which God, out of his infinite Goodness, has allow'd them, by the Law of Nature, and hindring them from judging for themselves of the Means, which best tend to promote this End; and imposing on them, by the Terrors of temporal and eternal Punishment, such needless Speculations and useless Observances, as can't be consider'd either as Means or Ends?

B. You know that Divines, tho' they can't deny what you say to be true in general; yet they think there's an Exception as to Church-Matters, and that here Men are not permitted to use such Means as they themselves think best; but such only as those, who set up to be their Spiritual Governors, shall appoint.

A. Nothing can be more absurd, than to suppose God has taken this Power from the People, who have an Interest to preserve Religion in its Purity (every Deviation from it being to their Prejudice) and plac'd it uncontrollably in the Hands of Men, who, having an Interest in corrupting it, do, generally speaking, so manage Matters, as if Religion was the Means, and their Power the End for which it was instituted. We do not find, that the Mahometan Clergy...
Christianity as old as the Creation. 

gy cause any Confusion or Disorder among the Musselmen; and the Pagan Priests are scarce taken Notice of in Story, so little Mischief did they do; while all Church-History is full of the vilest, and most pernicious Things perpetrated by Christian Priests. The Christian Morals, you must own, are too pure and plain to cause this Difference; what then can it be imputed to, but that independent Power, which those Priests usurp'd; which, tho' they claim'd it as deriv'd from Heaven for promoting godly Discipline, has occasion'd general Disorder and Confusion? Endless have been the Quarrels ambitious Priests have had with Princes upon the Account of this Power, to the Stopping of Justice, and Subversion of almost all Civil Polity: Nor have the Ecclesiasticks been less embroil'd among themselves, each Set striving to engross a Power which can belong to no Mortal. And the Bishops, when they had no others to contend with, have ever contended among themselves about Superiority, the Rights of their Sees, and the Limits of their Jurisdictions; and when their Choice depended on the People, they frequently, especially in their Contentions about the greater Sees, run Things on to Blood and Slaughter: And I appeal to their own Historians, whether the Ecclesiasticks ever scrupul'd any Method to obtain this Power; and whenever they got it, whether an insupportable Tyranny over Body and Mind, with the utter Ruin of Religion, was not the Consequence? And whether it had not, where exercis'd to the Height, more fatal Effects than all the Superstition of the Gentiles? Look the World round, you shall every where find Men more or less miserable, as they have been more or less debarr'd the Right of acting according to the best of their Understanding in Matters relating to Religion.

While
While every Church, or Congregation of Christians, as in the Apostolical Days, chose, and maintain'd their own Ministers, and order'd among themselves whatever requir'd a special Determination no Inconveniences happen'd; but as soon as this simple and natural Method was broke, and the Clergy were form'd into a closely-united Body, with that Subordination and Dependance they had on one another; the Christian World was enslav'd; and Religion forc'd to give Way to destructive Superstition.

Which cou'd never have happen'd, if the Christians had observ'd these general Rules, obligatory by the Light of Nature, as well as the Gospel; and which are alike given to every Christian; and oblige one as well as another; such as; "Doing all Things for the Honour of God, for Edification, for Order, for Decency; for fleeing false Teachers; Seducers, Deceivers; for avoiding Scandal, and offending weak Brethren, &c." And here since Every One must judge for himself, and can't make over this Right to any other, must not all Church-Matters be managed by common Consent?

In a Word, If we consider the infinite Variety of Circumstances; the different Manners and Customs that prevail in different Places; the Prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and superstitious; and the Designs of ambitious Men; there's nothing of a mutable Nature; if once esteem'd immutably fix'd by God, but must sometimes become prejudicial to the End 'twas intended to promote; especially in a Religion design'd to extend over the whole World, as well as to last to the End of it. There are but two Ways of avoiding this Inconvenience; either to suppose that the Founder of this Religion will, from Time to Time, himself ordain such Alterations in Things of a mutable Nature,
ture, as those Circumstances, which are different in different Places, do require; or else, that he has left the Parties concern'd, to act in all Places according to Discretion in such mutable Matters.

B. You labour this Point; but there are few of your Sentiment.

A. If you mean Ecclesiasticks, perhaps, you are in the right; tho' I'm sure, I have the Church of England on my Side, if judicious Hooker may be allow'd to understand its Constitution, as well as the Nature of Ecclesiastical Polity. He, in the Tenth Section of his Third Book, maintains this Proposition, that "Neither God being the Author of Laws, nor his committing them to Scripture, nor the Continuance of the End for which they were instituted, is Reason sufficient to prove they are unchangeable." Where he admirably well distinguishes between Things in their own Nature immutable, and Matters of outward Order and Polity, which he supposes daily changeable; and says, "The Nature of every Law must be judg'd by the End for which it was made; and by the Aptness of the Thing therein prescrib'd to the same End. — When a Thing does cease to be available to the End which gave it Being, the Continuance of it must appear superfluous. — That which the Necessity of some special Time doth cause to be enjoin'd, binds no longer than that Time; but does afterwards become free. Laws, tho' both ordain'd of God himself, and the Ends for which they were ordain'd continuing, may notwithstanding cease, if by Alteration of Time, or Persons, they are found insufficient to attain to that End. In which respect why may we not presume, that God doth even call for such a Change or Alteration, as the very Nature of the Things themselves doth make nece-
necessary? — God never ordain'd any Thing which could be better'd, yet many Things he hath, that have been chang'd, and that for the better; that which succeedeth as better now, when Change is requir'd, had been worse, when that which is now chang'd was instituted.

In this Case, Men do not presume to change God's Ordinance, but yield thereunto, requiring itself to be chang'd." And he applies this Reasoning honestly in saying, "The best Way for us were to hold, even as they do, that in the Scripture there must needs be found some particular Form of Church-Polity, which God has instituted, and which, for that very Cause belongeth to all Churches, to all Times; but with any such partial Eye to respect ourselves, and by Cunning to make those Things seem the truest, which are the fittest to serve our Purpose, is a Thing we neither like, nor mean to follow." And let me add, that most, if not all our Divines from the Reformation till the Time of the Laudean Faction, were in the same Sentiments; and from the Mutability of such Things as are Means to an End, prov'd there cou'd be no particular Form of Church-Polity establish'd by divine Authority: And they argu'd from the Example of good King Hezekiah, who, without Regard to the salutiferous Virtue the Brazen Serpent once had, broke it to Pieces when perverted to a superstitious Use. And,

All, who believe Means in their own Nature are mutable, must, if consistent with themselves, agree with Mr. Hooker: This is so very apparent, that nothing but Interest can make any One talk otherwise; therefore, I shall only quote the late Dean of Canterbury, who, in a Sermon preach'd Before the University of Cambridge, and publish'd at their Request, says, "That the very Temper, " and
and Composition of the Scripture is such, as necessarily
refers us to some other Rule; for this is a System of
mix'd, and very different Duties, some of eternal and uni-
versal Obligation; Others occasional and particular, li-
mited to Times and Circumstances; and when these Oc-
casions and Circumstances ceas'd, the Matter of the Com-
mand was lost; and the whole Reason and Force of it
funk of Course: Now those Things being oftentimes de-
deliver'd promiscuously, and in general Terms, Men muft
of Necessity have Recourse to some other Rule to di-
stinguish, and guide them in making the just Difference
between the one, and the other Sort:"

AND what other Rule is there, by which we can di-
stinguish rightly in this important Matter, but what arises
from the Things themselves; those which have an innate
Worth and Goodness are of an eternal and universal Obli-
gation; Others, which have no such Worth, can be consider'd
only as Means occasionally accommodated to particular
Times, Places, Persons, and Circumstances; which, of
Course, must cease to oblige, when they cease to conduce
to the End for which they were appointed; or Others be-
come more conducive: And this will more fully appear, if
we consider, as the above-mention'd Author observes, that

"The Circumstances of human Life are infinite, and de-
pend on a Multitude of Accidents not to be foreseen;
and consequently not to be provided against. Hence
Laws must run in general Terms, and sometimes the In-
tent of the Law is best fulfill'd by running contrary to the
Letter; and therefore, Reason and Honesty must guide
us to the Fitness of the Thing, and a great Scope must be
left to Equity and Discretion." And surely, we must
not suppose, that Reason, Honesty, Equity, and Discretion
will
will teach us one Thing, and the Traditional Law another; especially considering that in all God's Laws, 'tis the Reason of the Law that makes it Law.

B. By the Reasoning of such Divines, I can't perceive the Use of any occasional Commands, since they suppose these can't oblige People longer than they judge it fit to observe them; otherwise there cou'd be no Difference between occasional and eternal Precepts; and what they judge fit and proper to be done, they are oblig'd to do without any occasional Commands; so that according to them, whether there are, or are not any occasional Commands, human Discretion is left at Liberty to judge what is fit, or not fit to be observ'd; which, I think, is supposing all such Commands needless; yet the Authors you quote suppose, contrary to your Hypothesis, there have been such Commands; particularly in relation to the Jewish State.

A. The Jews, taking the Story to be literally true, being upon their coming out of Egypt a free People, had a Right by the Law of Nature to choose what Government and Governor they pleas'd; and God wou'd not act so inconsistent a Part, as to deprive them of any of these Rights he had given them by the Law of Nature; and therefore did not take upon him the civil Administration of their Affairs, till he had obtain'd their express Consent; so that here he acted not as Governor of the Universe, but by a Power deriv'd from the People by Virtue of the Horeb Covenant; and the Presumption is, that where there is no such Contract, God will not exercise such a Power; especially considering that tho' the Jews rejected God himself from reigning over them, and were for choosing a new King, yet he bids Samuel thrice in the same &c. Chapter to hearken to the Voice of the People; but of this, and all other Arguments of this Nature, more fully hereafter.
B. The Reasons you have given do not fully satisfy me, but that some Things may be requir'd by God as Governor of the Universe, which are meerly positive; nay, that Rites, and Ceremonies, Signs, or Symbols might be arbitrarily enjoin'd, and so intermix'd with Matters of Morality, as to bind the Consciences of all Men at all Times; and therefore, if you please, we will review this Point.

A. With all my Heart; for this alone is the Point that must decide this Question, Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion do really differ? As for Natural Religion, that, as you well know, takes in all those Duties which flow from the Reason and Nature of Things, and the Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures; and consequently was there an instituted Religion which differs from That of Nature, its Precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, but depending on meer Will and Pleasure; otherwise it wou'd be the same with Natural Religion: And tho' 'tis difficult to prove a Negative, yet, I think, I can fully shew you, by adding other Reasons to those already mention'd, that God, the great Governor of the Universe, can't give Mankind any such Precepts; and consequently, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion only differ in the Manner of their being deliver'd.
CHAP. X.

God does not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily; but leaves those Things, that can only be considered as Means (and as such are in their own Nature mutable) to human Discretion, to determine as it thinks most conducing to those Things, which are in their own Nature obligatory.

In Order to settle this Point, 'tis necessary to see how far this Natural Law extends; it not only commands that Evil Doers should be punished, but that Men, according to the different Circumstances they are under, should take the most proper Methods for doing it, and vary as Exigences require; so it not only requires that Justice should be done Men as to their several Claims, but that the readiest, and most effectual Way of doing it should be taken; and the same may be said of all other Instances of this Nature. If God interposes further, and prescribes a particular Way of doing those Things, from which Men at no Time, or upon no Account ought to vary; he not only interposes unnecessarily, but to the Prejudice of the End for which he thus interposes. And as to Matters rela-
relating to the Worship of God, it is the Voice of Nature that God shou’d be publickly worshipp’d; and that Men shou’d do this in the most convenient Way, by appointing amongst themselves Time, Place, Persons, and all other Things which require special Determination: And, certainly, there’s as much Reason that Things of this Nature shou’d be left to human Discretion, as any other whatever; considering the different Conditions and Circumstances which Christians may be under, and the Handle designing Men might otherwise take, to impose upon weak Persons what they please, on Pretence of divine Right.

This being premis’d, the sole Question is, Whether God, who, for many Ages, did not command, or forbid any Thing, but what was moral or immoral; nor yet does so to the greatest Part of Mankind, has, in some Places and in some Cases, broke into the Rule of his own Conduct, and issu’d out certain Commands which have no Foundation in Reason; by obliging Men to observe such Things as wou’d not oblige were they not impos’d; or if the Imposition was taken off, wou’d immediately return to their primitive Indifference?

To suppose then, such Commands, is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding’sake; and that too under the severest Penalties? Can such Commands be the Effects of infinite Wisdom and Goodness? Or, if there be no Reason, why a Thing shou’d be done at all; or if to be done, why it shou’d be done rather this Way than that Way; or why Men shou’d not vary Means, as they judge most conducive to the End, for whose sake alone they were design’d? Can there be any Cause, why a Being, which never acts unnecessarily; and whose Commands are all the Effects of infinite Wisdom, shou’d interpose? ’Tis so far from
from being necessary for God to interpose in such Cases as these, that it only serves for a Handle to human Imposition; for there's nothing so indifferent, but may, if believ'd to have Divinity stamp'd upon it, be perverted by designing Men to the vilest Purposes; and in Truth, there's nothing of this Nature introduc'd into Religion; but what, I am afraid, has been some Time or other so perverted.

One wou'd think it a Thing wholly indifferent, who sprinkl'd an Infant, or from whose Hands we receiv'd the Sacramental Bread and Wine, as long as the Rules of Decency and Order were observ'd; yet has there not been a Set of Men, who, on Pretence of a divine Right to do those Things, have made the Christian World believe, they have a discretionary Power to bestow, or with-hold the Means of Salvation; and, by Virtue of this Claim, have over-aw'd them into slavish Obedience, and a blind Submission.

There's no Good or Hurt in drawing two Lines cross one another, and yet what have not Priests made the poor People believe they cou'd do by Virtue of it; as Curing Diseases, Driving away Devils, and doing an Infinity of other Miracles? And in short, they have made it one of the chief Engines of their Craft, for the better carrying on of which, they persuad'd the People to adore the Cross, miraculously found after it had been bury'd about three hundred Years; and the Wood of it has since so wonderfully encreas'd, as to be able to make innumerable Crosses, whereof each Bit contain'd the Virtue of the whole.

Confession of Sins to honest and judicious Persons, might be of Service; by the prudent Advice they gave how to avoid the like Sins for the future; but the Popish Priests claiming a Power by divine Right to absolve People upon Confession, have been let into the Secrets of all Persons, and
by Virtue of it have govern'd all Things; and have made
the Sins of the People, not to be pardon'd but on their Terms,
the Harvest of the Priests.

Among the Jews, the Anointing with Oil was look'd on
as very medicinal, and generally us'd in Sickness; they
pray'd, and anointed the Sick in Hopes of a Recovery: But
tho' the Anointing in these colder Climates is thought of no
Use in Sickness, yet the Papists have built a most superstiti-
ous Practice on it, which, for the greater Reverence, they
call the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; and which their
Priests are not to administer as long as there's Hopes of
Recovery.

What can be more indifferent, or harmless, consider'd
in themselves, than the Ceremonies of Oiling the Heads of
Kings, and Laying Hands on the Heads of Elders or Presby-
ters; and yet what absurd Pretences have not Priests, who
have the Art of turning the most indifferent Things to a su-
perstitious Use, drawn from thence to the Prejudice of both
Church and State.

It was an ancient Custom among the Hebrews, when
they pray'd for a Blessing on any Person, to lay Hands on
him: Thus Jacob laid his Hands on the Sons of Joseph, and
Moses on Joshua. And among the primitive Christians,
when any Congregation chose their Minister, they pray'd
that he might duly execute that Office, to which they had
ordain'd him; and in praying, he that was the Mouth of
the Congregation (the whole Assembly not being able con-
veniently to do it) laid his Hands on him.

This gave a Rise to the Clergy to pretend, that their
Laying on of Hands upon a Man, was necessary to qualify him
for the Ministry; they by that Act having given him the
Holy Ghost, and an indelible Character with certain spiritual
Powers;
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Powers; so that the People must either be without Ministers, or take one they had thus ordain'd, however unqualify'd they might think him.

It's a Thing indifferent in itself, whether Men meet to pray in this, or that Place; but the Christians out of a superstitious Reverence to the Reliques of the Martyrs, usually praying at their Tombs, came by Degrees, as their Reverence for them increas'd, to offer their Prayers to them; which was a great Change from their praying for them among the other dead, as was in the first Ages a general Practice; and which, some of our High-church Priests are zealous for restoring, and pretend we have better Proof for its being a Catholick Doctrine, than for the Authority of several Books of Scripture.

The primitive Christians frequently consulting their Clergy in relation to Marriages, gave them a Handle to set up for Judges by divine Right in all matrimonial Causes; and many prohibited Degrees as well as spiritual Relations, such as God-fathers and God-mothers, &c. were introduc'd, to give the Clergy frequent Opportunities to grant, at their own Price, Dispensations; by which Means the Succession and Inheritance not only of private Estates, but of Principalities and Kingdoms, in a great Measure depended on them: And as an Appendix to this spiritual Usurpation, they hook'd in the Cognizance of all carnal Causes, Incontinence in single as well as married Persons. Thus you see, how easily Mankind may be abus'd, where 'tis believ'd, that Religion can require any Thing inconsistent with the Rights and Liberties God has allow'd them by the Law of Nature; and how dangerous 'tis to trust any Thing with Men, who pretend a divine Right to whatever they can lay Hands on. To give an Instance how severally this divine Right was exerted by the
the Pope, as Head of the Church: "Robert, King of
France, having marry'd a Lady of the House of Burgundy,
a Match very advantageous to the State, and tho' he had
the Consent of his Bishops, yet he, and the whole King-
dom were excommunicated by the Pope, because this
Lady was in the fourth Degree of Consanguinity, and the
King had been God-father to her Child by a former Hus-
band; which so distress'd the poor King, that all his Ser-
vants, except three or four, deserted him; and no One
wou'd touch the Victuals which came from his Table,
which were, therefore, thrown to the Dogs.

I shall give one Instance more, Men are oblig'd to avoid
as much as conveniently they can the infectious Conversation
of immoral Persons; and it was, no Doubt, at first a Duty
in a special Manner, for Christians, compass'd round with
Pagans, to observe this Rule in relation to their own Body,
and agree to shun any such Person as One who had his Fa-
ther's Wife; and tho' this is no more than what is daily
done in private Societies, and was easily practis'd amongst
Christians when they were but few; yet because the Mini-
ster might collect the Votes, and declare the Opinion of the
Assembly, the Clergy by Degrees not only excluded the Con-
gregation from this their natural Right; but claim'd, as
giv'n them by Heaven, a Power to excommunicate whom
they please, even their own Sovereign; and that too for
Things relating to their own Interest: And they forbid not
only their own Congregations, but all Christians, on Peril
of their Salvation, to avoid all Commerce with the Excom-
unicated, and ordain'd, that if he did not in forty Days
give the Church Satisfaction, the Magistrate was bound to im-
prison him, and confiscate his Estate: And the Princes, in-
stead of resenting these Incroachments on their Power, had
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so little Sense as to pass this into a Law; not imagining this Treatment wou'd reach them; but they soon felt, that the Church claim'd the same Power over them as over other Christians; looking on all to be alike subject to their spiritual Power. And accordingly Kings were often excommunicated, their Subjects absolv'd of their Oaths of Allegiance, and their Dominions given to more orthodox Princes to be held of the Church; which, no doubt, was in a flourishing Condition, when the, as often as her Interest requir'd it, absolv'd Princes of their Oaths to their Subjects, and Subjects of theirs to their Sovereigns; and by Virtue of her Spiritual Power, dispos'd, as she thought fit, of Mens Estates, Honours, and even Lives. What has been may be! And in all Probability wou'd be, were the Clergy as united among themselves as formerly.

In a Word, there's nothing in itself so indifferent, either as to Matter or Manner; but if it be engraven into Religion, and monopoliz'd by the Priests, may endanger the Substance of it: This has been plainly shewn by those Divines, who, at the Reformation, and since, have argu'd against all Impositions; they have prov'd that most of the Corruptions of Popery began at some Rites, which seem'd at first very innocent; but were afterwards abus'd to Superstition and Idolatry, and swell'd up to that Bulk, as to oppress, and stifle True Religion with their Number and Weight. And, indeed, there's no Sect, but complains how superstitiously Rites and Ceremonies are us'd by all, except themselves; and since I am defending the Liberties given by God to Mankind, and which, without Ingratitude to the Donor, as well as Injury to ourselves, we can't give up; I do not doubt you will hear me with Patience, because if I prove my Point, I shall, it may be hoped, in some Measure...
put an End to those otherwise endless Disputes, which divide, and distract the Christian World.

Whatever is in itself indifferent, whether as to Matter or Manner, must be so to an All-wise Being, who judges of Things as they are; and for the same Reason that he commands Things which are good, and forbids those which are evil, he leaves Men at Liberty in all Things indifferent; and 'tis in These only, that our Liberty of acting as we please consists.

Things, which are of no Value in themselves, can be no Motives to an All-wise Being to punish us; or to clog our Happiness with any such needless Observances: And consequently, Men, as far as they affect our future Happiness, or any Part of it, to depend on such Things, do so far derogate from the Wisdom and Goodness of God; and from those Motives we have to love, and honour him. The arbitrary Commands of a Tyrant may be obey'd out of Fear, but just and rational Laws alone can move the Affection of rational Creatures.

Is it reasonable to believe, an All-wise and Gracious Being is so fond of indifferent Things, that he subjects his Children to suffer even in this Life on their Account? And yet you must own, if he has made these the Subject of his Commands, they ought to suffer every Thing rather than not observe them; but if God will not have Men punish'd in this World, and much les in the next, upon the Account of Things indifferent; they can never be the Subject of his Commands.

Tho' a judicious Author supposes a Form of divine Worship in itself indifferent, may be requir'd by God for the sake of Peace and Unity; yet at the same Time he contends, that, "God does not expect we shou'd comply with That Form,"
Form; if it brings Misery on ourselves, or Confusion to the Publick; because that wou'd be preferring a Thing in itself indifferent to the Happiness of our Lives, and the Peace of the Publick; and that to suppose the contrary, wou'd be breaking in upon the spotless Character of our heavenly Father, by representing him not as a Wise and Good, but a peevish and ill-natur'd Being; who takes an unreasonable Resentment at the prudent Conduct of his Children." But will not This as strongly infer, that God cou'd not command the Observing such Things, which, if observ'd, wou'd destroy his moral Character; and which, instead of preserving Peace and Unity, wou'd bring Misery on private Persons, and Confusion on the Publick; whereas these Blessings of Peace and Unity can never be obtain'd by a forc'd Conformity, nor by any other Method than allowing People their natural Liberty in all such Matters. And,

If Religion consists in imitating the Perfections of God, what Perfection of God do the superstitious imitate, when they contend, as pro Aris & Focis, for Forms, Rites, and Ceremonies?

If in Heaven there's no Room for arbitrary Precepts, to incumber that moral Goodness which is the sole Business of the Bless'd above; what cou'd hinder us, did we but make That too our only Concern here, from enjoying a Sort of Heaven on Earth, free from all tyrannical Impositions, and endless Quarrels about indifferent Things?

In a Word, If there's nothing in a Religion which comes from God, but what is most excellent; what Room can there be for indifferent Things? Can such Things as have no Worth or Excellency, contribute to the Worth, or Excellency of Religion? If they cou'd, the more they a-bounded, the more excellent wou'd Religion be; which yet
is so far from being true; even in the Opinion of those who contend for such Things, that even they, when they are to shew the Excellency of the Christian Religion, recommend it for having but few of those Things; which is supposing it loses of its Excellency in Proportion to what it has of this Nature; and that they have a higher and more honourable Conception of it, who believe it has no such Mixture to spoil its Beauty, and destroy its Simplicity; but that, like its Author, 'tis wholly spiritual, and as such, worthy its divine Original.

One would think these Men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, tho' they recommend the Christian Religion, as purely spiritual, in Opposition to the carnal Religion of the Jews; yet at the same Time contend, it has some Ordinances as little spiritual as any the Jews had; and put a greater Stress upon 'em, than ever the Jews did on any of theirs.

If God's Works shew infinite Wisdom, there's no Reason to imagine but his Laws do the same; but then they must be moral Laws, for these alone can speak his Wisdom as plainly to all Mankind as his Works do: They both alike have the Character of infinite Wisdom impress'd on them, and both alike discover their divine Original.

In all, God's Laws are of a Piece, must they not all be built on the eternal Reason of Things? Nay, if That be sufficient to determine him in one Case, it must be so in all; but on the contrary, if God acts arbitrarily in any one Instance, he must, or at least may, do so in all; since no foreign Cause, nothing but his Nature, could make him act so. But God forbid we shou'd imagine, that any of his Laws have not impress'd on them the same Character of the highest Wisdom and Goodness, that is impress'd on the whole Frame of Nature, and on every Part of it.

'Tis
Tis impossible Men shou’d have any just Idea of the Perfections of God, who think that the Dictates of infinite Wisdom do not carry their own Evidence with them; or are not by their own innate Worth discoverable to all Mankind. Were it not so, how cou’d they be distinguish’d from the uncertain Opinions of weak and fallible Men; not to say the Whimsies and Reveries of crack’d-brain’d Enthusiasts? How shocking is it to hear Divines cry, that “Certain Things,” were they not to be ador’d as Mysteries, ought to be ex- ploded as Absurdities.

If we suppose any arbitrary Commands in the Gospel, we place Christians in a worse Condition than those under no Law but that of Nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest Part of Mankind, who are to be judg’d by the Law they know, and not by the Law they do not know, are, on this Supposition, in a better Condition as to the next World than Christians; because they do not hazard the Favour of God by any Mistakes, or Omissions in such Matters.

To suppose some Men, who, tho’ they exactly obey the Law of Nature, may yet be punish’d, even eternally, for not obeying another Law besides; wou’d be to make God deal infinitely less mercifully with them, than with those that have no other Law: And yet in this miserable Case are all Christians involv’d, if the Gospel requires such Things as the Law of Nature does not; and that too under the severest Penalties. And I may add, that even as to temporal Happiness, they who think Original and Traditional Revelation don’t differ, are in the better State; since they must delight in their Duty, as having nothing requir’d of them, but what they most evidently see tends to their Good; and consequently are free (no small Happiness) from all panick Fears; while they,
who believe there are Things meerly positive in Religion, of which Reason affords no Light how they are to be perform'd, or even what they are, must lye under endless Doubts and Fears; and according to the Measure of their Superstition, be wrought upon by designing Men to hate, damn, and persecute one another about such Observances, as we see is actually done every where by the different Sects; who are so absurd as to believe a God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness can give his Creatures arbitrary Commands.

When Men are at a Loss to know from the Nature and Reason of Things, what to believe, and what to practice, and see every where endless Divisions; they must be in continual Dread of such an arbitrary Being, as their unmanly and irrational Fears represent God to be. Plutarch makes this Difference between the Atheist and Superstitious; "One believes no Deity, the Other wishes there was none; if he believes, 'tis against his Will; mistrust he dares not, or call his Thoughts in Question; but could he, with Security, at once throw off that oppressive Fear, which, like the Rock of Tantalus, impends, and presses over him, he would with equal Joy spurn his enslaving Thoughts, and embrace the Atheist's State and Opinion, as the happiest Deliverance. Atheists are free of Superstition, but the superstitious are in Will and Inclination Atheists, tho' impotent in Thought, and unable to believe of the divine Being as they willingly would." And I am afraid, this now is the Case with most of these superstitious Persons, who represent God as a most cruel Being, damning Men to Eternity, even for mistaken Opinions; or about such Things too as have no Foundation in Reason. And perhaps, the endeavouring to drown all Thoughts of such a tyrannical Deity, is no small Occasion of that gross Immorality, which does
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does everywhere prevail, and must ever do so where Super-

Tis Mens not being govern'd by the Reason of Things, which makes them divided about Trifles; and lay the ut-
moost Stress on such Things as wise Men wou'd be ashamed of. Tis on the Account of These, that the different Sects
set the highest Value on themselves, and think they are the
peculiar Favourites of Heaven; while they condemn all
others for Opinions and Practices not more senseless, than
those themselves look on as Essentials. And were it not in
so serious a Matter, it wou'd be diverting to see how they
damn one another, for placing Religion in whimsical No-
tions, and fantastical Rites and Ceremonies, without making
the least Reflection on what they themselves are doing.

What Reason has a Papist, for Instance, to laugh at an
Indian, who thinks it contributes to his future Happiness to
dye with a Cow's Tail in his Hands, while he lays as great
a Stress on rubbing a dying Man with Oil. Has not the In-
dian as much Right to moralize this Action of his, and shew
its Significancy; as the Papist any of his mystick Rites, or
Hocus Pocus Tricks? which have as little Foundation in the
Nature or Reason of Things.

Suppose One came from the furthermost Parts of the
Earth, vouching it as a divine Revelation, that the Nails
of our Children are, at a certain Time, to be par'd by cer-
tain Persons with certain Ceremonies, in Order to make them
capable of Salvation; and that such as dy'd before their
Nails were thus par'd, remain'd for ever in a very wretched
State; wou'd not every One here, without examining into
this Man's Mission, or without Regard to those spiritual
Things signify'd under Paring of Nails, reject this Belief as
unworthy of having God for its Author. And yet as absurd
as this may appear to us, the superstitious Mahometans think they are oblig'd to have their Nails par'd during their Sickness, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

They must be very little acquainted with the Nature of a spiritual Religion, who think it can any Ways consist in not going to Rest when Men are sleepy; not eating, when they are hungry; or abstaining from, or using certain Meats and Drinks at stated Times; and in Washings, Sprinklings, and Lustrations by Blood or Water; and yet these Things were in so high a Repute with most of the Pagans, that they thought they 'would atone for the greatest Immoralitys.

Ab nimium faciles, qui tristia crimina caedis
Flumine Tolle posse putetis aqua.

The Taurobolia, or the Bedawbing: a Man in a Pit, all over with the Blood of a Bull, which fell on him thorow Holes made in the Plank on which the Beast was slain, was believ'd to wash away all his Sins, and he, happy Man, re-generated to Eternity, provided that once in twenty Years he renewed this mystical Regeneration; and not only great Persons, but whole Cities might perform this religious Ceremony by Deputation, and receive the Benefit. A short Account of this you meet with in Fontenelle's History of Oracles taken from Prudentius.

Th'o' the Heathen Priests made the People believe they cou'd be clean from their Sins by Sacrifices, and other external Things, yet it was as themselves had the Application of them; they were the Persons to whom the Gods had committed the Religious Rubbing Brushes; th'o' the Men of Sense among the Pagans were not thus to be impos'd on; which made Tully say,
Anima labes nec diuturnitatem evanescere, nec amnibus ullis De Leg. 1. 2. elui potest.

Laetantius seems to be of another Opinion, in saying, Institut. 1. 8. c. 26. n. 9.

"Give us One that is unjust, foolish, and a Sinner; and in one Instant he shall be just, prudent, and innocent; with one Laver all his Wickedness shall be wash'd away.

In a Word, while Priests of what Denomination soever pretend Authority to absolve Sinners, and the People are so void of Sense as to rely on their Absolution; Natural Religion, which puts the whole Stress on internal Penitence and true Virtue in the Soul, will be despis'd; as allowing no Succedaneum, no Commuting, or Compounding with Heaven. And, indeed, all such commuting, or compounding Powers, wherever they are suppos'd to be lodg'd, serve as a Bank of Credit for the Transgressors; and are a mighty Incitement to all Manner of Villany. And in former Days, the great Men, after having oppress'd and plunder'd People, thought to compound with Heaven, by letting the Clergy share in the Spoil; and 'tis on this Notion so many Albiges and Monasteries have been founded; and the superstitious, as long as they are persuaded there is any Virtue in Externals, will, as we see by constant Experience, chiefly depend on such Things. And I may add,

This Doctrine, that one Man may not only merit for himself by doing more than God requires of him; but that the Merit of such Actions may be transfer'd to another, who has done less than God requires of him, has been a great Incitement to Wickedness; and those who have acted a most immoral Part during their whole Lives, have believ'd they might comfortably rely on it; nothing being thought too hard forMerit and Mediation.
There are none, I think, now so absurd, as in Words to maintain, that there's the least Variableness in God, much less that he is an arbitrary Being, commanding Things for Commanding-fake; yet are not they, who assert there are meerly positive Things in the Christian Religion, guilty of this Absurdity; in supposing that God, who had the Goodness for a long Time, not to confine Mankind to any indifferent Things; yet at length chang'd his Mind, and repented of this great Goodness; and arbitrarily depriv'd, they will not say, all Mankind, but no small Number of this Liberty; and requir'd of them the Belief of certain useless Speculations, and the Practice of certain indifferent Things on the severest Penalties? And when they lament that the Christian World, even from the earliest Days, has been in perpetual Broils about such Things, do they not suppose that God can give arbitrary Commands, and that those Commands are involv'd in great Obscurity? Whereas, if merely positive Things were requir'd, those, not being like Matters of Morality, discoverable by their own Light, wou'd be made as plain as infinite Wisdom could render them; and to prevent their being perverted to serve ill Purposes, we shou'd have been punctually told When, How, and by Whom, those arbitrary Things shou'd be apply'd, as well as that they were to be obligatory for ever.

B. If God has reveal'd any Thing in a Way liable to be mistaken, he can't be displeas'd with sincere People for mistaking it.

A. That's very true; but certainly the End of God's giving any Precepts, was not to deliver them so obscurely that People might be faultless if they mistook; but to make 'em so plain that they could not well mistake: And this is agreeable to infinite Wisdom directed by infinite Goodness, which,
certainly, will give us equal Degrees of Evidence for religious Truths, which so much concern us, as it has done for Truths of less Importance.

For my Part, I can't help being of the Sentiments of a learned Divine, who, after having prov'd at large, that Morality is capable of Demonstration, concludes with saying, "I shall only here repeat, that Man being a reasonable Agent, Reason is the Law and Rule of his Actions; there's Par. 2. B. 1, c. 11, no Truth in Mathematicks more clear, and incontrovertable than This. Now 'tis as easy for him, when he examines his Actions by this Rule, to see whether they agree together, as to know when two Lines are compar'd, whether they are of the same, or a different Length. — Why should Demonstration then be confin'd only to Numbers and Figures? — Nay, if we argue from the Importance of Morality, it will be found much more agreeable to the Goodness of God, who gave us our intellectual Faculties, that the Truths which are of the greatest Concern to us, should, if we make a due Use of those Faculties, admit of the greatest Evidence." I think, I need only add, that was there any Thing but Morality necessary to constitute true Religion, we might be certain that the Goodness of God wou'd give us a Demonstration for it, equal to that he has given us for Morality. But,

If there are now Things which are not moral in Religion, does not That suppose a Charge of Mind in God; and then where will you stop? For if Changeableness was not a Perfection, it wou'd not be in him; and if all his Perfections are infinite, must not This be so too? And is it not as reasonable to suppose, he may command some indifferent Things to Day, and others to Morrow; or some in this Part of the World, and some in another; as at first to
command moral, and then super-add indifferent Things? If indifferent Things can contribute to the Perfection of Revelation, there may be endless Revelations; and the last always more perfect, as having new indifferent Things: It was not about Things of a moral Nature, that there were such Divisions in the primitive Times, and that Montanism spread itself over a great Part of the Christian World; the Followers of Montanus, as Eusebius writes, boasting that he was the Paraclet, and that Priscilla and Maximilla his Companions were his Prophetesses? And Tertullian, as is own'd by the Translator of his Apology, says, "That the Law, and the Prophets were to be look'd on as the Infancy; and the Gospel, as it were, the Youth; but that there was no compleat Perfection to be found, but in the Instruction of the Holy Ghost, who spake by Montanus:" But to make some Apology for his laps'd Father, he says, "The Arch-Heretick Montanus supported the Character of a most holy, mortify'd, and extraordinary Person for a considerable Time; the World rung with the Visions and Prophecies of him, and his two Damfels; and the Face of Severity and Saintship consecrated their Reveries, and made real Possession pass for Inspiration. The Churches of Phrygia, and afterwards other Churches, divided upon the Account of these new Revelations; and even the very Bishop of Rome himself for some Time espous'd the Vanity, and made much of the Impostor." And had he continu'd to do so, it might, perhaps, have obtain'd; since we find the Christians in the primitive Times came entirely into a more gross Imposture, and had Faith for the most palpable Forgery of the Sybiline Oracles being writ by real Prophetesses under divine Inspirations. And the whole Christian World: for more than the two first Centuries.
Chap. 10. Christianity as old as the Creation.

ries believ’d the Millenarian Heresy, as it is now call’d; for which, indeed, they pretended other Proofs than the divine Authority of the Sybils. And there has scarce been an Age since, but where some such Attempt has been made, and That of Popery, which is the grossest Attempt on the Credulity of Mankind succeeded; tho’ the Monks in the twelfth Century were not satisfy’d even with that; and therefore, endeavour’d to introduce a new Gospel, call’d Evangelium eternum; or the Gospel of the Holy Ghost; and affirm’d, that this Gospel of the Spirit excell’d That of Christ’s; as much as the Light of the Sun does that of the Moon.

In short, to this Belief, that there may be Things in Religion not founded on Nature and Reason, and that these may be reserv’d for this, or that Period of Time, are owing all the Visions and Reveries among the Papists, and other Enthusiastick Christians; and upon this absurd Notion is founded the most spreading Religion of Mahomet, who pretend’d to be the Paraclet promis’d by Jesus to compleat, and perfect all Things: And,

In a Word, to this Belief are owing all the false Revelations that ever were in the World; and except we allow there are certain Tests flowing from the Nature of Things, whereby the meanest Capacities may distinguish Truth from Falseness, we shall for ever be liable to be impos’d on by Mad-men as well as Impostors.

If God can command some Things arbitrarily, we can’t be certain, but that he may command all Things so; for tho’ some Commands should relate to Things in their own Nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary Being commands them for this Reason; and, consequently, since an arbitrary Will may change each
Moment, we can never be certain of the Will of such a Being. And,

To suppose that God by the Law of Nature leaves Men at Liberty in all indifferent Things, and yet by a positive Law restrains this Liberty in certain Parts and Ages of the World; is to suppose God determines one Way by immediate, and another Way by mediate Revelation; both Laws too subsisting at the same Time.

B. We say that the Law of Nature, however immutable as to Good and Evil, has enjoin'd nothing in relation to indifferent Things; so that there's a large Field, in which all Legislators, human as well as divine, may exert their Power.

A. It's true, the Law of Nature leaves Men at Liberty to act as they please in all indifferent Matters; and if any traditional Law abridges this Liberty, so far 'tis contrary to that of Nature, and invades those Rights which Nature and its Author has given Mankind.

Human Legislators are so far from having a Right to deprive their Subjects of this Liberty, that their main End in submitting to Government is, to be protected in acting as they think fit in all such Cases where no One is injur'd; and herein the whole of human Liberty consists, the contrary being a State of meer Vassalage; and Men are more or less miserable, according as they are more or less depriv'd of this Liberty; especially in Matters of meer Religion, wherein they ought to be most free.

'To suppose God has in these last Days, as they are call'd in Scripture, depriv'd any Part of Mankind of that Liberty which before was granted to all, wou'd be to make him act unreasonably; since all those Reasons which oblig'd him to
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... to command good, or forbid evil Things, must wholly cease in relation to a Subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither; and was there any Reason to deprive Men of their Liberty in indifferent Things, they would then cease to be indifferent; on the contrary, the same Reasons which oblige him to interpose in Things, whose Nature is either good or evil, forbids it in indifferent Things; since Men Happiness depends on their Liberty in all such Things. Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary to the eternal Law of his Nature; and consequently, to deprive Men in any of these Cases, is to make the Dictates of his Nature, and his revealed Will to clash.

In short, the Law of Nature either is, or is not, a perfect Law; if the first, 'tis not capable of Additions; if the last, does it not argue Want of Wisdom in the Legislator, in first enacting such an imperfect Law, and then in letting it continue thus imperfect from Age to Age; and at last thinking to make it absolutely perfect, by adding some merely positive and arbitrary Precepts. To what End does God continually impress on Christians as well as Others this Law of Nature; since that was needless, had they another more perfect, and more plainly reveal'd.

If Men have been at all Times oblig'd to avoid Superstition, and embrace True Religion, there must have been at all Times, sufficient Marks of Distinction; which could not arise from their having different Objects, since God is the Object of both; but from the having different Notions of him and his Conduct: Nay, allowing that the Light of Nature was sufficient to teach Men, that True Religion consists in entertaining such Notions of God as are worthy of him, and Superstition in such as are unworthy of him; yet That alone would not enable Men, when they came to Particulars,
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ticulars, to distinguish one from the other: And, therefore, the same Light of Nature must teach them what Notions are worthy, and what unworthy of having God for their Author: But how can there be such Marks flowing from the Nature of Religion and Superstition, if what is Superstition by the Light of Nature, can, notwithstanding these Marks, be made a Part of Religion by Revelation.

If he, who resembles God most is like to understand him best, is it not "because, as Bishop Tillotson observes, he " finds these Perfections in some Measure in himself, which " he contemplates in the divine Nature; and nothing gives " a Man so sure a Notion of Things as Practice and Ex- " perience; every good Man is in some Degree Partaker " of the divine Nature, and feels That in himself, which " he conceives to be in God; so that this Man does ex- " perience what others do but talk of; he sees the Image " of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from " an inward Sense and Feeling of his Excellency." But this would not be just Arguing, if God was an arbitrary Being, and cou'd command his Creatures Things which carried no Perfection or Goodness with them.

In a Word, if the Essence of Religion consists in believing and practising such Things, as have a real Worth and Excellency in them, tending to the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; the Essence of Superstition, which is its Opposite, must consist in imagining to propitiate an All-wise and gracious Being by such Things as have no Worth or Excellency in them; such as may as well not be done, as done; or as well done this as that Way. Superstition is defin'd by Dr. H. More (and all our divines speak to the same Purpose) to be That Impiety, by which a Man considers God to be so light or passionate, as with trivial Things, either to be
be appeas'd, or else mov'd to Wrath. Can any Thing be more trivial, than useless Speculations, and unnecessary Observations?

How numerous soever Christians may be, tho' they are but few in Comparison of the rest of Mankind, yet the Church of Christ, by the Confession of all Parties, is a very small Body of Men; each Sect, tho' they complain of one another's Uncharitableness, yet they, excluding all other Sects, either as Schismatics or Heretics, confine Salvation to their own Church. Dr. Scot says, "While Men behold the State of Religion thus miserably broken and divided, and the Professors of it crumbl'd into so many Sects and Parties, and each Party spitting Fire and Damnation at its Adversary; so that, if all say true, or, in deed, any Two of them in five hundred Sects, which there are in the World; (and for ought, I know, there may be five thousand) it is five hundred to One, but that every One is damn'd, because every One damns All but itself; and itself is damn'd by four hundred and ninety nine." How, I say, can these Differences be avoided, as long as Men take into their Notion of Religion; nay, make unnecessary Things necessary Parts of it; and if many of our Divines have got rid of these absurd Notions, is it not because they are, what in Contempt they are call'd, Rationalists?

The pious Bishop Taylor says, "He could not expect, but that God wou'd some Way or other punish Christians, by Reason of their pertinacious Disputing of Things unneccessary, undeterminable and unprofitable; and for their hating and persecuting their Brethren (which shou'd be as dear to them as their own Lives) for not consenting to one another's Follies and senseless Vanities."

But
But, is there any certain Way of judging what are unnecessary or unprofitable Things, but by the Rules here laid down, of judging of Things from their Nature and Tendency? Without observing this Rule, there's nothing so trifling, or senseless, but People may be persuaded to place Religion in, and be in continual Broils about it. If a Dispute between two Preachers, whether the first Words in the Lord's Prayer shou'd be translated Father our, or Our Father, cou'd cause such Disturbances, as it lately did at Hamburgh; what is there so indifferent, if once believ'd to belong to Religion, but may have pernicious Effects? And there are a number of Instances in all Ages, where Things as trifling have occasion'd strange Disorders.

And the primitive Times were not free from them, the memorable Mr. Hales gives this Account of the then Quarrel about the Time of keeping Easter: "It being, says he, upon Error taken for necessary, that an Easter must be kept; and upon worse than Error, if I may so speak, (for it was no less than a Point of Judaism forc'd upon the Church) thought further necessary, that the Ground for the Time of our keeping that Feast, must be the Rule left by Moses to the Jews; there arose a stout Question, Whether we were to celebrate it with the Jews on the fourteenth Moon, or the Sunday following? This Matter, tho' most unnecessary, most vain, yet caus'd as great a Combustion as ever was in the Church; the West separating from the East for many Years together. In this fantastical Hurry, I can't see but all the World were Schismatics, neither can any Thing excuse them from that Imputation, excepting only this, that we charitably suppose that all Parties, out of Conscience did what they did. A Thing which befee them, thro' the Ignorance of their Guides;"
and because-thro' Sloth and blind Obedience Men examin'd not the Things they were taught; but like Beasts of Burden patiently couch'd down, and indifferently underwent whatever their Superiors laid upon them.

"And can we, says Dr. Burnet, think without Astonishment, that such Matters, as giving the Sacrament in leavened or unleavened Bread; or an Explication of the Proc.ession of the Holy Ghost, whether it was from the Father and the Son, or from the Father by the Son; cou'd have rent the Greek and Latin Churches so violently one from another, that the Latines, rather than assist the other, look'd on till they were destroy'd by the Ottoman Family?"

And other Instances he gives of fatal Disturbances from Disputes about Trifles; as the removing the Pictures of certain Bishops out of a Church occasion'd Image-Worship; for those who oppos'd their Removal, went so far as to maintain, that Pictures ought not only to be set up, but worshipp'd; which caus'd not only great Disorders in the East, but made Italy to revolt at the Pope's Instigation: This Contest too begat another, Whether the Sacrament was only the Image, or the very Substance of Christ?

I might add, that the Dispute between the Lutherans and Calvinists about the Sacrament, tho' it has created such fierce Animosities, is meerly verbal; since both Sides are against any Change in the Elements, and both Sides maintain a real Presence of the Body of Christ.

I need not have gone to distant Times and Places for Instances, our own late Divisious and Persecutions about such trifling Things, as Rites and Ceremonies, nay, Habits and Postures, wou'd in all likelyhood have ended in the utter Ruin both of Church and State, had not the blessed Revolution interpos'd.
B. I wou'd not have you treat what you call Postures so
ir reverently; ought not People to kneel at their Devotions?
A. The whole Christian World for many Ages thought
not; and the Anti-Nicene Fathers, as well as the Council
of Nice, forbad Kneeling on all Sundays, and all other Days
between Easter and Whitsunday.

In a Word, if those Sentiments must be true, which tend
most to make Men love and honour God, by giving the
brightest and noblest Ideas of his Wisdom and Goodness;
and which free him from the Imputation of Change and In-
constancy, and from imposing from Time to Time arbitrary
Commands; and from Partiality and Respect of Persons;
what I have laid down must be true; and the contrary, not
only false, but impious: But however, since this is a Point
of the utmost Consequence; I shall proceed to other Ar-
guments, and shew how inconsistent it is with the Good
of Mankind, to suppose any merely positive Things to be
Part of the Ingredients which constitute True Religion.
THE Happiness of human Society, and of every particular Member consisting in the due Observation and Practice of Morality; whatever diverts, or discourages That, must be highly injurious. Now 'tis certain, that the Mind may be over-loaded as well as the Body; and the more it is taken up with the Observation of Things, which are not of a moral Nature; the less it will be able to attend to those that are; which requiring the Application of the whole Man, can never be rightly perform'd, while the Mind, by laying Stress on other Things, is diverted from attending on them; especially, if it be consider'd, that Superstition, if once suffer'd to mix with Religion, will always be gaining Ground: If Reason is to be heard, no unnecessary Things will be admitted; but if it be not; where shall we stop? If People are once brought to believe such Things are good for any Thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all Things; at least, Pretences will never be wanting for a thousand Things of this Nature;
Nature; and there's nothing of this Kind that Men will not come into, if they are made to believe they carry any Merit with them: These they will be punctual in observing, in Hopes to atone for indulging themselves in their darling Vices; which they, not knowing how to leave, and yet willing to secure their future Happiness, hope by the Help of such Expedients, to compound with Heaven; and then vainly imagine, they cannot have too many Things of this Nature; or shew too great a Zeal for the Practice of them, when assured by their Priests (who, as they fondly imagine, know the whole Counsel of God) that they are acceptable to the Deity; and tend to make him propitious to the religious Observers of them.

The Banditti, and Bravoes most religiously observe the Orders of their Church, about not eating Flesh, &c. and Instances of this Nature might be produc'd from the most immoral in all Churches; who, not satisfy'd with practising such Things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And, indeed, the Substance of Religion has been destroy'd in most Places to make Room for Superstition, Immorality, and Persecution; which last, when Men want Reason to support their Opinions, always supplies its Place. And are there not even now, Numbers in the best reform'd Churches, of the same Sentiments with those Dr. Scot complains of? ‘Who, he says, persuade themselves, that God is wonderfully concern'd about small Things, about trifling Opinions and indifferent Actions, and the Rites and Modes, and Appendages of Religion; and under this Persuasion they hope to atone for all the Immoralities of their Lives, by the Forms and Outsides of Religion; by uncommanded Severities, and affected Singularities; by contending for Opinions, and

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"... stickling for Parties; and being pragmatically zealous about the Borders and Fringes of Religion. And,

I'm afraid 'tis but too true, as is observ'd in the Letters concerning Inspiration; that "Men have thought it an Ho-

nour to be stil'd that which they call zealous Orthodox,

to be firmly link'd to a certain Party, to load Others with

Calumnies, and to damn by an absolute Authority the

rest of Mankind; but have taken no Care to demon-

strate the Sincerity and Fervour of their Piety, by an ex-

act Observation of the Gospel Morals; which has come

to pass by Reason that Orthodoxy agrees very well with

our Passions; whereas the severe Morals of the Gospel

are incompatible with our Way of Living." And One

would be apt to think, that Zeal for Speculative Opinions,

and Zeal for Morality were scarce consistent, thou'd he form

his Judgment from what he sees most practis'd. "Moral

Goodness, says Dr. Scot, is the great Stamp and Impress

that renders Men current in the Esteem of God; where-

as on the contrary, the common Brand by which Hypo-

crites and false Pretenders to Religion are stigmatiz'd, is

their being zealous for the Positives, and cold and indif-

ferent as to the Morals of Religion.

"And, in general, we find mere moral Principles of such

Weight, that in our Dealings with Men, we are seldom

satisfy'd by the fullest Assurance giv'n us of their Zeal in

Religion, till we hear something further of their Charac-

ter. If we are told a Man is religious, we still ask What

are his Morals? But if we hear at first that he has hon-

est moral Principles, and is a Man of natural Justice,

and good Temper, we seldom think of the other Que-

tion, Whether he be religious and devout?"
It is a general Observation in History, that where any Thing has had the Appearance only of Piety, and might be observ’d without any Virtue in the Soul, it easily found Entertainment among superstitious Nations. Hence Tacitus Hist. 5. 13—says, "Men extremely liable to Superstition are at the same Time as violently averse to Religion." Le Clerc not only makes the same Remark, but says, "Those who had a constant Notion of Christian Piety, believ’d it could not maintain itself without the Help of outward Objects; and I know not what heathenish Pomp, which at last extin-
guish’d the Spirit of the Gospel, and substituted Paganism its Room.

Whate’ver Appearance it might have of Piety, what Virtue did it require in the Practice, to make War with the Saracens for the Holy Land; (tho’ considering the Impieties committed there, it might be call’d Unholy;) yet so highly meritorious was this Project for several Ages thought to be, that vast Shoals of Bigots for its sake have frequently gone from the West to fight Men in the East, who never did them any Harm; and these Bigots, presuming on the Merits of this sacred Expedition, were most enormously flagitious.

B. If this was Superstition, it was built on a Notion which had long before prevail’d, of believing it a Piece of Piety to visit Jerusalem, and the holy Places there. The great St. Jerome says, Certe adorasse ubi steterunt Pedes Domini, Pars Fidei est, &c. "That it was undoubtedly a Part of Faith, to go, and worship in those Places, where the Feet of our Saviour had once stood; and to have a Sight of the Tracks, which at this Day continue fresh, both of his Nativity, Cross, and Passion.

A. In
A. I believe St. Jerome, when he says, We ought to worship where the Feet of our Lord stood, chiefly intended his last Foot steps when he mounted up to Heaven; the Print of which says Sulpicius Severus, remain to this Day. Quae cuncte applicabantur, insolens humana suscipere terra respueret, excussis in orae apponentium sepe marmoribus. — Et cum quotidie confluuentium Fides certatim Domino calcata diripiat, damnnum tamen arena non sentiat; & eadem a duc su speciem, velut impressis signata vestigiis, terra custodit. And Paulinus says the same.

A strict Observance of such Things as require no Virtue in the Practice, and may with great Ease be punctually observ’d, makes the superstitious liable to be every where cheated by your Tartuffis, or Mackw—hs; while Men who put the whole Stress on Morality, are represented not only as Enemies to Religion, but even as Encouragers of Immorality, and mere Libertines, because they are for Liberty in thinking; tho’ This can’t fail to make Men see the Folly of Licentiousness in acting.

And, indeed, we shall generally find those Ecclesiastics, who inveigh most against Free-Thinking, are the real Encouragers of Immorality; by screening, not only the most immoral of their own Order on Pretence of preserving the Honour of the Church, tho’ to the Dishonour of Religion; but also by laying the most moral, if they differ from them in speculative Points, under constant Sufferings, to enforce them to play the Hypocrites with God and Man; and who is it that the corrupt Part of the Clergy shew more Inveteracy against, than the very best Men of their own Order, for not approving these Methods?

It’s worth while to remark, how differently Men are treated for Civil and Ecclesiastical Offences: “In Civil Cases, as a Right Reverend and Excellent Author observes, the Offender, if his Crime be not capital, suffers a Temporary Punish—
"Punishment, proportion'd to the Fault he has committed; and when he has undergone That, nothing further is requir'd of him, except in some Cases to find Security for his good Behaviour for the future. But in Cases of Heresy, there is no Regard to the Degree of the Offence, in the Punishment inflicted: Nor is there any End of it. 'Tis not enough to have suffer'd the severest Punishment, tho' for the smallest Offence; 'tis not enough to give Security of not offending for the future: The innocent Offender must declare (what 'tis oftentimes impossible he should declare) that he has chang'd his Sentiments, and is become Orthodox; and This, tho' perhaps no Methods of Conviction have been used, except that of Punishment be one. This is the miserable Condition of a Convicted Heretick: The Punishment which fell on him for expressing Thoughts heretical, he must continue to endure for barely thinking; which is a Thing not in his own Power, but depends on the Evidence that appears to him: He must for ever (cruel Justice!) for ever suffer for his Private Thoughts (tho' they go not beyond his own Heart) the Punishment which some Overt-Act has once drawn upon him. To punish toties quoties, as often as those Overt-Act are repeated, will not satisfy the Holy Office. — If an Offender can't be convicted of Heresy, he may however be convicted of Writing, or Speaking against the establish'd Doctrine of the Church; and That will draw on him all the same Consequences, that Heresy would do. — Well does this Author advise, Whatever you do be Orthodox: Orthodoxy will cover a Multitude of Sins, but a Cloud of Virtues cannot cover the Want of the minutest Particle of Orthodoxy. —

"It may, I doubt not, be demonstrated with the greatest
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"Evidence, that all Christian Churches have suffer'd more
"by their Zeal for Orthodoxy, and by the violent Methods
"taken to promote it; than from the utmost Efforts of
"their greatest Enemies. But for all that, the World will
"still think the same Methods necessary.

A Man, who has, or pretends to have a blind Zeal for
those Things, which discriminate his Sect, tho' he be e-
ever so immoral, too often finds Countenance and Credit
from them; and tho' thought a Devil by others, pass'd
for a Saint with his own Party: So that the superstitious
lye under strong Temptations to be vicious, and the vicious
to act superstitiously. Nay,

"The Way that Men are apt to take to pacify God, Tillotson's Sermon,
"is, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, by some external
"Piece of Religion. — Such as were Sacrifices among 334.
"the Jews and Heathens. — The Jews pitch'd upon
"those which were most pompous and solemn, the rich-
"est, and most costly; so they might but keep their Sins,
"they were well enough content to offer up any Thing
"else to God; they thought nothing too good for him,
"provided he would not oblige them to become better.

"And thus it is among ourselves, when we apprehend
"God is displeas'd with us. — We are content to do any
"Thing, but to learn Righteousness.

"As to the Church of Rome, — He says, They (as
"they pretend) are the most skilful People in the World
"to pacify God. — I do not wrong them by represent-
ing them enquiring after this Manner: Shall I go be-
"fore a Crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the High
"God? — To which of the Saints or Angels, shall I
"go to mediate for me, and intercede on my Behalf?
"Will the Lord be pleas'd with Thousands of Pater-

U 2  "nothers,
nusters, or with ten Thousands of Ave-Maries? Shall
the Host travel in Procession, or myself undertake a
tedious Pilgrimage? Or shall I lift myself a Soldier
for the Holy War? Shall I give my Estate to a Con-
vent? Or chastise, and punish my Body for the Sin
of my Soul?

The Heathen Priests, knowing what would render
them most acceptable to the People, made the chief Part
of their Religion to consist in gaudy Shews, pompous
Ceremonies; and such other Tricks as serv'd to amuse,
and divert them, who, provided they entertain'd such No-
tions as created a Reverence for their Priests, and be-
liev'd they could discover to them the Will of their Gods;
might be as leud, and wicked as their Gods themselves:
"Are the Gods angry? Must we repent of our Crimes,
and re-enter into the Paths of Natural Justice to di-
vert their Thunder? Not at all; only take a Calf of
such a Colour, call'd at such a Time, and let his
Throat be cut by a religious Butcher, in such a Dress,
with a consecrated Knife; and the Gods, as you will
find by the Entrails, will be strait appeas'd.

The Mahometans make the going a Pilgrimage to Mecca,
the highest Act of Religion; and there, out of deep Devo-
tion, play many Monkey-Tricks; and then, they return
cleaned from all Impurity. As to the Jewish Priests, and
the Doctors, who depended on them, we learn from our
Saviour, how they made the moral Law void by their
vain Traditions; and that the Temple then, as the Church
in After-Times, was made the grand Pretence: And what
vile Things has not the abus'd Name of the Church pa-
tronis'd? Nay, even in the best constituted Church, have
we not lately had Numbers of Men fond of the Name of
High
High-Church, whose Religion chiefly consisted in drinking for the Church; cursing, swearing, and lying for the Church; raising Riots, Tumults, and Sedition, in favour of a Popish Pretender, and all for the Security of the Protestant Church of England; and in having a profound Veneration for black Gowns, no Matter what the Wearers are; and a great Contempt for Men in black Cloaks, how deserving soever; and in firmly believing, that those who go to Places with Steeples can never be in the Wrong; and that those who go to Places without them can never be in the Right; without knowing what either hold, or so much as what is the true Meaning of even the Word Church?

What Advantage have not the Popish Priests gain'd by their Arts of reconciling the Practice of Vice, with the Prospect of Heaven. The Jesuits, tho' the youngest Order, yet flourish most, being the most expert in this Artifice; as may be seen in Monsieur Pascal's Provincial Letters. But all the Popish Priests agree, in defending their Superstition by Fire and Faggot; while their Churches are open Sanctuaries for the most flagitious; which shews how sensible they are, that Superstition and Immorality support each other. And perhaps 'tis but reasonable, that the Places, where they learn vile Things, shou'd protect them, when they have committed the vilest. 'Tis by these Means that Holy Church gets a terrible Party, who can't refuse to maim or murder, as their spiritual Protectors direct, for fear of being deliver'd up to civil Justice; and not only your mean Rogues, but even the greatest have been frequently screen'd this Way.

The supposing indifferent Things equally commanded with Matters of Morality, tends to make Men believe they are
are alike necessary: Nay, the former will, by Degrees, get the better with the Superstitious; and acquire such a Veneration by Age, as to make Men have Recourse to them upon all Occasions, tho' ever so unseasonable. If People can be so far impos'd on, as to admit such Things into their Religion, they will as easily be persuaded to put a greater Stress on Things, tho' of some Use in Religion, than their Nature will bare; to the confounding Things of the greatest Moment with those of the smallest; and if this is reckon'd Superstition, much more ought the other to be thought so.

The not distinguishing Means from Ends, has been the Occasion of endless Superstition; and there have been Numbers, in all Ages, especially of the female Sex, who have thought themselves very religious, if they, tho' to the Neglect of their Family-Concerns, went from Church to Chappel, from Chappel to Church; and were punctual in observing all Church-Ceremonies, without regarding the End, for which alone they cou'd be instituted; so that instead of being humble, affable, and good, they have prov'd big with the worst Sort of Pride, spiritual Pride; censuring and despising their Neighbours, tho' ever so good, if they were not as punctual as themselves in observing those Things; and the Conceit they had of their own Godliness, has made them as troublesome at Home as Abroad, as bad Wives, as Neighbours.

Upon the whole, nothing can be of worse Consequence, than thus to depreciate Morality, by mixing Things of an indifferent Nature with it; because, as Experience shews, Men are more or less vertuous according to the Value they put on Virtue; and can a Man, who acts contrary to Reason not be an Enemy to a Religion founded on Reason? The Precepts of natural Religion, and the Rules of right Reason
Reas'~n, can't but make strong Impressions on rational Creatures; what is fix'd on the Minds of Men, and wrought in as it were with their very Constitution, can't easily be broke thorow; human Nature is apt to start, and recoil at any such Attempt: And yet some have found a most effic-tual Way to break through it, by teaching Men, that the most moral Actions, without a right Notion forsooth in cer-tain Things of another Nature, are to be look'd on, as Splendida Peccata, and partaking of the Nature of Sin.

It is the chief Business of Preachers, to shew the Rea-sonableness of the Doctrines they teach, as the most effec-tual Way of operating on rational Creatures; and all the Laws of natural Religion being built on their own Reasona-bleness, They, who attend to the Dictates of their Reason, can scarce fail to pay a ready and cheerful Obedience to all its Laws; but when Men take Things meerly on Authority, and would have taken the contrary on the same Authority; Reason is discarded, and rational Motives cease to operate; nor can Men any longer perform moral Duties with a free and cheerful Mind; but slavishly obey, out of Fear, the suppos'd arbitrary Commands of a Being, too mighty to be contended with; and that only with a View to atone for Immoralities.

As long as Men believe the Good of the Society is the supreme Law, they will think it their Duty to be govern'd by that Law; and believing God requires no-thing of them but what is for the Good of Mankind, will place the Whole of their Religion in benevolent Actions, and to the utmost of their Abilities copy after the divine Original; but if they are made to believe there are Things, which have no Relation to this Good, necessary to Salvation; they must suppose it their Duty, to
to use such Means as will most effectually serve this Purpose; and that God, in requiring the End, requires all those Means as will best secure and propagate it. And,

'Tis to this Principle we owe the most cruel Persecutions, Inquisitions, Crusades and Masacres; and that Princes have endeavour'd, not only to destroy their Subjects, but to disinherit their own Issue, to make Room for supposititious Children. And,

'Tis to this Principle we also owe innumerable Tumults, Seditions, and Rebellions, even against the best of Princes; as well as endless Feuds and Animosites in private Families, and among the nearest Relations: They who are govern'd by this Principle can't be good Men, good Subjects, good Citizens, or good Neighbours; no Ties of Friendship or Gratitude, no Vows or Oaths can bind them, when the Interest of such Things, as they think, they are oblig'd to promote on Pain of God's Displeasure, requires the contrary Conduct.

The Jews, as they were most superstitious, so were they most cruel; and as the Papists have, beyond all other Christians, introduc'd into Religion, Things which are far from contributing to the Good of Mankind; so they have exercis'd a matchless Cruelty for the Support of them: And no Wonder; since their Priests gain by the Superstition of the People, and consequently, inspire them with a proportionate Hatred against all, who will not comply with it. And,

Among Protestants of what Denomination soever, they who lay the greatest Stress on useless Speculations, Rites, Modes and Ceremonies, are for the most Part four, ill-natur'd Persons, ready to come into any persecuting Meas-
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sures for their sake: But nothing has done so much Mis-
chief as that most monstrous Opinion of Imperium in Impe-
rio. Those, who pretended to a spiritual Empire, claim'd,
as well they might, a divine Right to judge of the Extent
of That Empire, and to do all they judg'd necessary for
its Support; and consequently, that they had a Right,
since temporal Things must give Place to spiritual, to de-
pose the Governors of the State, whenever they judg'd it ne-
necessary for the Safety of the Church. 'Tis from hence
there have been so many Tumults, Seditions, Insurrections,
Rebellions, Civil Wars, Murders and Massacres upon the
Pretence of Religion; and which at last ended in the In-
slaving of the Christian World to the Pope, as Head of the
Church: whose Power of deposing heretical Princes, was
for many Ages universally allow'd; no Nation, no Univers-
ity declaring against it; nor so much as one Divine, Civilian,
or Cauif. Nor were Things mended, when, by Reason of
the great Schisms about the Popedom, Councils pretended to
govern the Church: They then carry'd their Power to such
a Height, as dispos'd Princes to enter into Agreements with
the Popes, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected
in what they had reserv'd to themselves. They, therefore,
who maintain, that People may forfeit their Properties by
Schism, Herefy, Infidelity, &c. play the Hypocrites, when
they pretend the Power of Princes is more sacred than
the Properties of the People, for whose sake they have
all their Power: And, therefore, we may justly conclude,
that they, who are for soliciting Kings, and Magistrates
to assist the Church in punishing Misbelievers, are equally
Enemies to the Power of Kings, as well as to the Rights
of the People; and they have never fail'd to shew it,
 whenever they have found it their Interest.

X

AND
AND tho' at first those Princes were idoliz'd, who were the Instruments of their Cruelty; yet when by their Means, the People were entirely at the Devotion of the Clergy, they too were soon forc'd to submit; and had just Cause to curse their own, and Predecessors Bigotry, which enabl'd the Ecolestařlocks to insult them as they pleas'd. And what Disturbances have not your Becketts, Lauds, &c. created here, when they got into Power, and became then as insolent, as before they were submissive. Father Paul, no Stranger to our Constitution, in one of his Letters writ in the Reign of King James I. says thus; "As for the Englifh, I am in Fear; the great Power the Bishops have, tho' under a King, makes me very jealous; for should they have an easy Prince, or an Archbishop of an high Spirit, the Kingly Power must sink by the Bishops aspiring to an absolute Dominion.

I believe you will allow, that in the late Times, Men were as much in earnest about Religion as ever; and yet by their mixing several Things, not of a moral Nature with it, and thinking all Means proper to promote them lawful, Imposture and Zeal, Bigotry and Hypocrify, were strangely blended together. And as we are assur'd by an eminent Historian, it was the Opinion of Cromwell, that "the Moral Laws were only binding in ordinary Cases; but that upon extraordinary ones these might be superseded; he, and that Set of Men, justifying their ill Actions from the Practice of Ehud and Jael, Sampson and David.

Here, indeed, they were no Hypocrites; but frankly confess'd what at the Bottom influences all those, who, tho' they have not the Grace to own it, make Things, not of a moral Nature, necessary Ingredients of Religion; and thereby give too just Occasion for this Remark of Arch-bishop
bishop Tillotson's, "That it will be hard to determine, how many Degrees of Innocence and good Nature, or Coldness and Indifference in Religion, are necessary to over-balance the Fury of a blind Zeal; since several Zealots had been excellent Men, if their Religion had not hinder'd them; if the Doctrines and Principles of their Church had not spoil'd their natural Disposition." What can be a greater Satyr on any Religion, than that it is able to spoil the best Disposition; and that, if it does not make Men arrant Devils, 'tis only because Nature is too hard for Principles?

B. These sure are uncommon Principles.

A. Not so uncommon, as you may imagine, since all Religion inclines Men to imitate what they worship; and they who believe that God will damn Men for Things not Moral, must believe, that in Order to prevent damnable Opinions from spreading, and to shew themselves holy, as their heavenly Father is holy, they can't shew too much Enmity to those, against whom God declares an eternal Enmity; or plague them enough in this Life, upon whom in the Life to come God will pour down the Plagues of eternal Vengeance. Hence it is, that Animosity, Enmity, and Hatred, has over-run the Christian World; and Men, for the sake of these Notions, have exercis'd the utmost Cruelties on one another; the most cursing and damning Churches having always prov'd the most persecuting: The Papists, tho' they declare it to be their Duty to love their own Enemies, yet looking on all Protestants as God's Enemies, think it meritorious to murder them; and Protestants had no sooner renounc'd those persecuting Principles of Popery, but they too shamefully practis'd the same themselves, for the Support of such trifling Notions, as the Publick had not the least Interest in. And before

X 2
before the happy Revolution, the Spirit of Persecution was so outrageous, that Protestants ruin'd Protestants upon the Account of Rites, Ceremonies, Habits, &c. to the great Joy of the common Enemy. And,

Tho' there may be, even now, some, who will not forgive their being debarr'd the Exercise of their former Tyranny, and wou'd be glad, at any Rate, to destroy that hated Liberty we are now bless'd with; yet, I may venture to say, that All, who have so just an Opinion of Religion, as to think it requires nothing but what is for the Good of Mankind, are to a Man zealous for the present Government establish'd on the Principles of Civil and Religious Liberty.

To preserve which, the Legislator has not only excluded all Papists, as Men of persecuting Principles from the Crown; but, by affording Protection to Dissenters, has set the differing Churches in South and North-Britain on a Level; well knowing, that neither Civil nor Ecclesiastical Liberty can be preserv'd on any other Foot. Had they gone a Step further, and excluded on the strictest Tests, Men of persecuting Principles from inferior Posts, as well as the persecuting Papists from the highest; they had acted up to those Principles of Protestantism upon which the Revolution is founded. And all, who are in earnest about Religion, wou'd have been highly pleas'd to have seen it an establisht'd Maxim, that no Man ought to suffer in his Person, his Property, or Reputation, for his Opinion in Matters of meer Religion.

They, who think Force lawful for the Support of such Opinions as can't be supported by Reason, (as what Church, when it has Power, does not;) can't but think Fraud so too; especially when 'tis us'd not only for Mens eternal but
temporal Good, and to prevent such Severites, as otherwise would be thought wholesome and necessary. How can Men of these Principles think any Untruth not lawful, when 'tis necessary to guard fundamental Truths? Nay, must they not think it much more their Duty to deceive Men, for the sake of their eternal Good, than to deceive Children or sick People for an infinitely less Good; especially when the temporal Interest of the Deceivers is join'd with the spiritual Interest of the deceiv'd; who, happy Men, have the good Luck to be cheated into Paradise; and by the Stratagem of a pious Fraud to obtain an heavenly Crown? If it be lawful to deceive melancholy Persons, who design to poison themselves, and put a Remedy in the Place of the Poison; can any think such an Artifice unlawful, when he believes 'tis to hinder Millions from imbibing such Notions, as are rank Poison to their immortal Souls?

'Tis with an ill Grace that those Protestants, who are for restraining the Liberty of the Press, or suffering nothing to be printed, but what has undergone their Sponges, rail at the Papists for their Index Expurgatorius: These Men may, indeed, plead Authority; since as Daille observes, "This Opinion has always been in the World; that De ufu Pa; to settle a certain and assur'd Estimation upon that c. 3. which is good and true, (that is to say, upon what we account to be such;) it is necessary to remove out of the Way whatsoever may be an Hindrance to it: Neither ought we to wonder, that even those of the honest, innocent, primitive Times made use of these Deceits, seeing for a good End they made no Scruple to forge whole Books.

They, indeed, (and such there are, to the Honour of the present Time, not a few;) who think Sincerity will carry Men
to Heaven, lie under no Temptation to use pious Frauds; but for Men of other Principles, tho' they go under the Name of Fathers and Saints, there's no depending on them; since a Desire to deceive People into their Opinions, will hold in Proportion to the Zeal they have for propagating those Opinions.

If those Men, in whose Hands the sacred Books from Time to Time have been chiefly deposited, did allow that every Man was to judge for himself of their Meaning, in Order to make him acceptable to God; there could be no Danger of their being designedly corrupted: But if they believ'd, that a certain Set of Opinions was necessary to Salvation, then they must have thought themselves in Charity oblig'd, to take the most proper Methods to bring Men to embrace them; and consequently, must have believ'd it their Duty to substitute some Words of their own, which would best express those Opinions, on which Men's Salvation depended, in the Room of others, which were apt to lead them into fatal Errors; since by thus chang-ing of Sounds, they might save Millions of Souls; who, they were confident, wou'd otherwise everlastingly perish. Must not the same Principle, that oblig'd them to im-pose their own Words, instead of the Words of God, in their Creeds and Articles on Pain of Damnation, equally oblige them to act the same Part in relation to the Scrip-ture? And if Men have stuck so close to this Principle, that they have, (wherever they had a convenient Opportunity) left out, added to, or altered all other Books of Religion what-ever, which have fallen into their Hands; there can be no Reason to think, they would not do the same with the Bible, where the Motives were so much stronger. "'Tis no Wonder, "says that primitive Father, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, that some
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"some attempt to adulterate the holy Writings of our Lord; since they have basely falsify'd such as are of an inferior Authority:" And it must be either to put a Stop to, or prevent this Practice, that the Revelation concludes with a Curse on all who should make any Alteration in that Book. And 'tis morally impossible, but that they, who thought it their Duty to commit the most barbarous Acts of Cruelty for propagating of Opinions, shou'd not think it lawful to use Deceit for the same End: Which they can never imagine to be an Evil, while they suppose it so useful for the saving of Mens Souls, without giving up all the other indirect Methods, they took to hinder Men from seeing what may be said for, or against any Opinions.

Nor is there any one Thing in which all Parties agree, but in taking it for granted, that their Adversaries will scruple no Means to gain Credit to their own Opinions, or to discredit those of their Adversaries; and in Order to it, misrepresent their Persons as well as Opinions, and make Men Saints or Devils, as it serves their Cause; which, as you will find in Church-History, had afforded a Number of Miracles for the Orthodox, and as many Judgments on the Heterodox: And if there be Miracles on both Sides, ours to be sure are divine, and yours diabolical.

If ever the Words of David, that All Men are Liars, were literally true, it has been in this Case; and all History shews the Jusfnets of my Lord Bacon's Remark: *Maxime Nox. Or. 12* babenda sunt pro suspectis, *quæ pendent quomodocunque a Re- Aph. 29:* ligione; ut Prodigia Livii.

The Arabian Writers are full of Miracles done by Mahomet, which they impose on People, by telling them, that "Mahomet's Enemies would not invent them; and his Friends are forbid telling Lies of him on Pain of Damnation." B. You
B. You may make as bold as you will with Mahometans; but can you charge Protestant Writers, much less the holy Fathers, with any such Practices?

A. I hope, 'tis no Crime to take Notice, that one of the ten Reasons the celebrated Chillingworth gives for his turning Papist, is, "Because the Protestant Cause is now, and "and hath been from the Beginning, maintain'd with gross "Falsifications and Calumnies, whereof the prime Contro-"verfy-Writers are notoriously, and in a high Degree, guil-"ty." And upon his Return to the Church, he says, Iliacos
intra muros peccatur & extra; which is in plain English, Priests of all Denominations will lie alike. And I may add, that it is so fully prov'd in the Historical Essay of the Thirty
nine Articles, that, that Clause in the twentieth Article, that the Church has Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Au-
thority in Controversies of Faith, had neither the Sanction of Parliament or Convocation; that no One has offer'd the least
Reply, tho' for the Honour of those good Church-men who first forg'd it, and those who since defended it, we might expect all that could be said, tho' the Clause had not given them a Power which can only belong to Parliaments, of decreeing
Rites and Ceremonies; and another Power, which can belong to no Mortal, Authority in Controversies of Faith. What Cre-
dit ought to be given to the Representations of modern Di-
vines, we may, in some Measure, learn from a Pamphlet enti-
tul'd, The Reproduction of the present State of Religion; with
Regard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Hereby and Pro-
faneness, as it pass'd the lower House of Convocation; where there are almost as many notorious Falshoods, as there are Par-
agraphs; not to say anything of a certain Pastoral Letter. And if we look into Church-Story, we shall find it to have been the constant Practice of a certain Set of Men, not only to impute to their
their Adversaries Opinions which they disown'd, but to re-present those Opinions as ready to prevail, was it not for their Interposition: By which Means they hop'd not only to be highly reverenc'd for their great Zeal, but to have new Powers granted them to oppress Mankind. Thus the Consequence of believing the Followers of Wickliff, was the Statute de Haæretico comburendo, granted at the Petition of the Clergy; and the believing the Albigenses, Waldenses, &c. rais'd a Crusado against those poor People.

As for the holy Fathers, They, as Daille has a whole Chapter to prove, did not think themselves in their Controversial Writings (and most of theirs were such) oblig'd to speak the Truth, but that every Thing was lawful which serv'd to gain the Victory. They thought they might, by Way of Oeconomy or Dispensation, say one thing and mean the contrary: "Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinaris, To. 2. p. 105, (says, St. Jerome) have writ largely against Celsus and Porphyry; Do but observe, says he, the Manner of their Arguing, and what slippery Problems they us'd. They all'd against the Gentiles, not what they believ'd, but what they thought necessary; Non quod sentiunt, sed quod necesse est, dicunt. And adds, I forbear mentioning the Latin-Writers, as Tertullian, Cyprian, Minucius, Victorinus, Laærantius, and Hilary; lest I should seem rather to accuse others, than defend myself:

And yet he goes on charging, not only St. Paul, but even Jesus Christ himself with the same Practice. And there was nothing so sacred that cou'd escape being chang'd, either in whole or in part; even the Canons of the famous Council of Nice, as well as the Canons of other Councils, have been falsify'd; and those forg'd Canons of Nice the Popes for many Ages impos'd on the Christian World as genuine;
genuine; and the antient Liturgies, tho' Things of daily Use, underwent divers Alterations: Nay, even the Creeds themselves, tho' thought to be the sacred Deposition of the Faith, have had the same Fate. "Tis well known, says an eminent Divine, "that the Apostles Creed has receiv'd various Additions to the original Form; That the Nicene Creed was enlarg'd by the Constantinopolitan Fathers, and has also, with respect to the Filioque, been interpolated by the Latin Church; that 'tis probable, the Latin Church has interpolated the Athanasian Creed too, with Respect to the Filioque; nay, the Athanasian Creed itself, as Bishop Art 8, p 106. Burnet has shown, was a Forgery of the eighth Century: Nor did they confine their Forgeries to Church Matters, but practis'd on the imperial Laws, and inserted in the Theodosian Code, a Rescript of Constantine, relating to the Power of Bishops, long before repeal'd.

The further back we go, the greater was their Recourse to pious Frauds. Scaliger speaking of the primitive Christians, says, Omnia, qua putabant Christianismo conducere, bibliis interferuerunt. And as he supposes, nothing certain of the Church till the Times of Pliny, so he says, speaking of the second Century, Adeo verbum Dei inefficax esse censuerunt, ut regnum Christi sine mendacio — promoveri posse diffiderunt, ut qui utinam illi primi mentiri cepissent. And Caubon says, Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis Ecclesiae temporibus quam plurimos extitisse, qui facinus Palmarium judicabant, cælestem veritatem signum suis ire adjutum; quo facilius nova illa doctrina Gentium sapientibus admitteretur. And the learned Blondel says, "That the second Century of Christianity, whether you consider the immoderate Impudence of Impostors, or the deplorable Credulity of Believers, was the most miserable Time, and exceeded
exceeded all others in holy Cheats; and that, to the Dis-
grace of Christianity, there was a greater Aversion to Ly-
ing, more Fidelity, and a greater Simplicity not to de-
part from the Truth, to be found in profane Authors,
than the Christian Writers.

Our most learned Bishop Stillingfleet, says, "That An-
tiquity is most defective where it is most useful; namely,
in the Times immediately after the Apostles: And that
the Fathers were often deceiv'd with pious Frauds; but Orig. Sac-
then it was when they made for the Christians." And the pious Bishop Fell does not speak quite so tenderly in
saying, Tanta fuit primis seculis singendi licentia, tam prona
in credendo facilitas, ut rerum gestarum fides exinde gra-
viter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum, sed & dei Ec-
Clefsa de temporibus suis mysticis merito queratur.

How unhappy were we of the Laity, had we not the
Reason and Nature of Things (which no Priests can alter)
to depend on; but were entirely oblig'd to take our re-
ligious Sentiments from Men, who as far as we have any
Account of Things, have, even from the earliest Times, not
scrup'd to forge, not only whole Passages, but whole Books;
and left nothing entire on which they cou'd lay their foul
Hands: Which, as that great and honest Critick Daille ob-
serves, "has render'd the Writings and venerable Monu-
ments of Antiquity so imbroil'd, and perplex'd, that it is
c. 120. H to
will be the hardest Matter in the World for any Man to
make out any clear or perfect Discovery of those Things,
which so many several Artists have endeavour'd to con-
ceal from us." As to this imposing Temper of the Eccle-
siasticks, I shall only say, that it is plain from History, that
the ambitious, domineering Part of the Clergy, the Impos-
sers of Creeds, Canons and Constitutions, have prov'd the

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common Plagues of Mankind; and the true Authors and Fomenters of the most general and most fatal Calamities, which have befallen the Christian World. What the Consequence was of imposing Creeds, may be learnt from an eminent Father, who flourished when this Trade of Creed-making was at its Height. "It it, says St. Hilary, a Thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are at present as many Creeds, as there are Opinions among Men. — We make Creeds arbitrarily, and explain them as arbitrarily. — We can't be ignorant, that since the Council of Nice," (there it seems the fatal Mischief began) "we have done nothing but made Creeds. "— We make Creeds every Year, nay, every Moon; we repent of what we have done; we defend those that repent; we anathematize those we have defended; we condemn the Doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another in Pieces, we have been the Cause of one another's Ruin.

Thus you see, how Fraud and Force are unavoidable, when 'tis believ'd Things, having no Foundation in Nature or Reason, are necessary Parts of Religion; and Ecclesiastical History contains a continued Scene of Villany, for the Support of such Notions: And that the more good Sense, Piety, and Virtue any Man was endow'd with, the more, if he did not come into those Notions, was he hated and persecuted as a most dangerous Enemy. But,

Before I leave this melancholy Subject, I must observe, these Men have done their best to justify a Remark of Uriel Acoña, who, in his Exemplar vitae humanae, says, "That when Men depart ever so little from Natural Religion, it is the Occasion of great Strifes and Divisions; but if they recede much
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"much from it, who can declare the Calamities which ensue?" And can Men more depart from it, than by imposing on their Brethren, either by Fraud, or Force, Things no Ways tending to the Good of Mankind?

Tho' we cry up the great Advantage we have above all other Animals, in being capable of Religion, yet those Animals, we despise for Want of it, herd most socially together; except such carnivorous Creatures which Necessity separates. The Ants, notwithstanding they have Stings, are crouded in vast Numbers in the same Hillock; and, having all Things in common, seem to have no other Contention among them, but who shall be most active in carrying on the common Interest of their small Republick. And much the same may be said of Bees, and other Animals; yet Men, tho' they can't subsist but in Society, and have Hands, Speech, and Reason to qualify them for the Blessing of it above all other Animals; nay, what is more, have Religion, design'd to unite them in the firm Bonds of Love and Friendship, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good Offices; and the good natur'd Laity too have, at a vast Expence, hir'd Persons to inculcate these generous Notions; yet alas! in spite of all these Helps and Motives, Religion has been made by these very Persons, a Pretence to render Men unsociable, fierce, and cruel; and to act every Thing destructive to their common Welfare: And the greater the Number of these religious, and the more Expence People have been at in maintaining them, the more of these Mischiefs have they most ungratefully occasion'd to their generous Benefactors.

B. Granting that a Deluge of every Thing that's ill has overflow'd Christendom, and does so still in most Places; and that Religion has been made a Handle for such Barbarities,
ties, as human Nature, left to itself, wou'd startle at; yet how is this to be remedy'd?

_A. Education_ is justly esteem'd a second Nature, and its Force so strong, that few can wholly shake off its Prejudices, even in Things unreasonable and unnatural; and must it not have the greatest Efficacy in Things agreeable to Reason, and suitable to humane Nature? Let those, therefore, who have the Education of Youth, recommend Morality as the End of all Religion; and let every Thing not tending to promote the Honour of God and the Good of Man, be accounted Superstition; let the Youth be taught to join the Ideas of Virtue with the Ideas of Beauty, Pleasure, and Happiness; and the Ideas of Vice with those of Deformity, Grief, and Misery; there wou'd then be little Room for so odious a Thing as Vice to take Possession of Peoples Minds, and justle out Virtue so firmly rooted. For these Ideas thus early associated, wou'd by Degrees become inseparable; especially if Men, as they grew up, were frequently shewn the necessary Connexion between these Ideas; and how essential Virtue is to the Felicity of Nations, Families, and private Persons; and on the contrary, how miserable Vice must render Men in every Station of Life.

'Twas after this Manner, that the Heroes of Old, those Benefactors to Mankind, were educated; and the Discourses of the Philosophers, who had the instructing them, were full of the intrinick Loveliness of Virtue, and Deformity of Vice; and taught them to direct all their Actions to the common Good, as to a common Centre; and that their future as well as present Happiness depended on it: But afterwards the Education of the Youth being committed to Men of another Stamp, devoted to the Interest of their own Order; they, instead of infusing these noble Sentiments into them,
them, persuaded them that their separate Interest, with the Things on which it depended, which they call'd The Good of the Church, was to be their chief Aim; and so little Regard have some Men had to the common Good, that they have industriously dress'd up Vice in such lovely, and Virtue in such odious Colours, as to maintain, that bating the Consequences of a future State, they wou'd act like Fools, who did not indulge themselves in a vicious Course. And I believe, Men of such Principles can't boast of much more Virtue, than a late Prelate of uncommon Parts and Learning, who from the Pulpit endeavour'd to prove, that In this Life the virtuous Man is most miserable; and who, by all his Actions, especially, by his late monstrous Practices, shew'd how firmly he believ'd his own Doctrine; and how resolv'd he was, that Virtue shou'd not make his present Life miserable.

B. I grant you, 'tis of the utmost Consequence to the Common-wealth, that Youth shou'd be rightly instructed in all such Principles as promote the common Good; but can you imagine Pagan Philosophers cou'd infuse more generous Sentiments into them, than Christian Clergy-men?

A. I do not think so, when they are such Clergy-men as those who at present have the instructing our Youth; otherwise I can't help giving into the Sentiments of a noble Author, who, speaking of the Education of Youth, when instructed by Philosophers, says, "It tended to make them as useful to the Society they liv'd in as possible. There they were train'd up to Exercise and Labour, to accustom themselves to an active Life; no Vice was more infamous than Sloth, nor any Man more contemptible, than he who was too lazy to do all the Good he could. The Lectures of their Philosophers serv'd to quicken them up to This; they recom-
the Preservation of the Laws and publick Liberty; sub-
servient to which they preach'd up moral Virtues, such as
Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, a Contempt of Death,
&c. They taught their Youth how, and when to speak
pertinently; how to act like Men, to subdue their Pas-
sions, to be publick-spirited; to despise Death, Torments
and Reproach, Riches, and the Smiles of Princes as well
as their Frowns, if they stood between them and their
Duty. This Manner of Education produce'd Men of anoth-
er Stamp than appears now upon the Theatre of the
World, such as we are scarce worthy to mention, and
must never think to imitate, till the like Manner of Insti-
tution grows again into Reputation: Which in enslav'd
Countries 'tis never like to do, as long as the Ecclesias-
ticks, who have an opposite Interest, keep not only the Education
of Youth, but the Consciences of old Men in their Hands.

B. This, I confess, is the right Way to prevent Immo-
rality; but if every Thing, as you contend, ought to be
look'd on as superstitious which is not of a moral Nature,
Superstition has spread itself over the Face of the Earth,
and prevail'd more or less in all Times and Places.

A. This is no more than what has been own'd long

ci. 1. 2. de ago by a very good Judge, who says, Superstitiones
Divinat. e 72.

oppressit omnium ferè Animos, atque bominun occupa-
vit Imbecillitatem. And the Univeruality of Superstition is in
Effect own'd by every Sect, in affirming that Superstition is
crept into all other Sects; and that 'tis the chief Business of
their respective Teachers to promote it: And is it possible
to be otherwise, as long as Men are taught to build their
Religion on a narrower Foundation, than that on which the
universal Being has universally laid it?
'Tis the Observation of *Naturalists*, that there is no Species of Creatures, but what have some innate Weakness, which makes them an easy Prey to other Animals, that know how to make the Advantage of it: Now the peculiar Foible of Mankind is Superstition, which at all Times has made them liable to be practis'd on, not by Creatures of different Species, but by those of their Own; who, by a confident Pretense of knowing more than their Neighbours, have first circumvented the many, the credulous and unwary; and afterwards forc'd the Free-thinking few into an outward Compliance: And as far as we have an Account of Things, we shall find that most of the prevailing Superstitions have been erected on this Foundation, and to it owe their whole Support. And whoever knows any Thing of *France* and *Italy*, not to mention other Countries, can't but know that the better Sort are sensible of the prevailing Absurdities; but, over-aw'd by the Priests and Mob, are forc'd to submit. And,

The more Superstition the People have, the easier they may be impos'd on by designing Ecclesiasticks; and the less Religion the Clergy have, the more unanimous they will be in carrying on their common Interest; and when the Clergy are without Religion, and the People abound in Superstition, the Church, you may be sure, is in a flourishing Condition; but in great Danger, when Men place their Religion in Morality: For then all indifferent Things are look'd on as they are in their own Nature, indifferent; then the People have no superstitious Veneration for the Persons of Men, and the Clergy are esteem'd only in Proportion to the Good they do; and every Evil they commit is reckon'd a Breach of Trust, they being maintain'd by the People chiefly to set them good Examples: But this Method of gaining all
that Reverence and Authority they pretend to, has, it seems, been thought too laborious and servile. They have (I mean where Popery prevails) as Masters of the Religious Ceremonies, most effectually gain'd their End, by introducing such Things into Religion, as have promoted a superstitious Veneration to themselves; and made People believe, that the chief Means to obtain their eternal Happiness, were of a different Nature from those, which caus'd their temporal Happiness; and only to be dispens’d by them, in Order to get the sole Management of spirituals to themselves; and consequently, (since there can't be at the same Time two supreme Powers) of Temporals also: And so well have they succeeded, that, in most Places, the temporal Interest of the Clergy passes for the spiritual of the Laity.

There are two Ways which never fail to make Superstition prevail; Mysteries to amuse the Enthusiasts, especially the Pretenders to deep Learning, and all that admire what they do not understand; and gaudy Shews and pompous Ceremonies, to bewitch the Vulgar: And the Popish Church, whose Conduct shews how well they understand their Interest, may vie with the old Egyptian Church for Mysteries; and Pagan Rome must yield to Christian Rome in such Shews, Rites, and Ceremonies as dazzle the Eyes of the People, and insensibly gain their Hearts; and the more there are of these in any Church, the more the Clergy, the holy Dispensers of them, are reverenced; not to say, ador'd by the unthinking Multitude; as they are in the Church of Rome. "That Church has, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, weaken'd the Force of Christianity upon the Hearts and Lives of Men, by amusing them with external Rites, which they have multiply'd to that excessive Degree, as to make the Yoke of Christ really heavier than That of Moses;
Moses; and the Christian Religion a more external and
carnal Commandment than That of the Law; and have
diverted the Minds of Men from the main Design of
Christianity. — They have had no Leisure to think of
being good Men, and to mind the great and substantial
Duties of the Christian Life. —— The Simplicity of the
Christian Worship they have incumber’d with so many fri-
volous Rites and Observances, as not only render it more
burthensome, but less apt to make Men inwardly, and sub-
stantially good, than Judaism itself.

This great Man observes, that "Those Things which
are agreeable to our Nature, our Reason, and our Interest,
are the great Things which our Religion requires of us.—
And that Mankind might have no Pretence left to excuse
them from These, the Christian Religion has set us free
from those many outward positive Observances, that the
Jewish Religion was incumber’d withal; that we might
be wholly intent on these great Duties, and mind nothing
in Comparison of the real, and substantial Virtues of a good
Life." If so, can we suppose the Christian Religion has
superadded any outward positive Things of its own, to hin-
der us from being wholly intent on these Duties?

The Popish Priests are so far from giving the People
any just Idea of God, that they represent him as an arbi-
trary and tyrannical Being, imposing, on the highest Pain,
the Practice of ridiculous Ceremonies, and the Belief of ab-
furd Doctrines; as a fantastical Being, angry without Caufe,
and pleas’d without Reason; as a vain-glorious Being, fond
of having his Ministers and Favourites, that is, themselves,
live in Pomp, Splendor, and Luxury, to the miserable Op-
pressions of the People. But 'tis no Wonder, that they
are made to believe, that God requires the observing in-

Z 2  different
different Things on the severest Penalties; since their Priests claim the same Power, in making such Things necessary to the communicating in their holy Church; out of which, they affirm, Salvation is not to be had. I wish I cou'd say, the Popish Priests only were guilty of this horrid Impiety; and that some Others had not been as zealous for imposing such Things, by making them necessary Terms of Communion, and damning those that durst not comply with them; and who seem to be of the Spirit with the famous Bishop Gunning, who, when the Presbyterians urg'd that Lights, Holy Water, and such like, might as well be impos'd as the Cross and Surplice; reply'd, The more the better. But if External Rites, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, have cut out the Heart of Religion in the Church of Rome; by Parity of Reason, Religion should seem to have made the deepest Impression on the Quakers, who are the most averse to Things of this Nature; and are therefore hated by the Formalists of all Churches.

B. Sensible Things make a deeper Impression on the Minds of the common People than Words; and therefore, the using fymbolical Representations being for the Advantage of Religion, why may they not be ordain'd of God?

A. If you must have Recourse to Words, to explain the Signification of such Symbols, are they not arbitrary Marks, whose Meaning cannot be known, but from Words; and, not being capable of expressing Things more fully than Words, wholly needless as to that Purpose? Nay, Words themselves being but arbitrary Signs, to multiply such Signs needlessly would be very absurd.
Chap. 11. Christianity as old as the Creation.

As to sensible Things making a deeper Impression on the common People, That, I presume, is a just Reason against their Use in Religion; because the Vulgar, who generally look no further than Externals, do not use them barely, as they do Words, to express their Meaning; but conceive in them, I know not what internal Holiness; and think such symbolical Representations as necessary as the Things represented by them; nay, by Degrees, forgetting the Reason of their Institution, come to idolize them, as the Israelites did the brazen Serpent: And this the People have always done in all Religions whatever, where these symbolical Representations have been used.

The chief Cause of the Egyptians falling into groffer Idolatries than other less knowing Nations, was, no Doubt, owing to the Use of Hyeroglyphicks in their religious Worship: An Ox, that laborious and useful Animal, was at first only a symbolical Representation; the Meaning of which, the People in Time forgetting, fell to down-right adoring the Beast; and, perhaps, it was for the same Reason that Leeks and Onions, and other Garden-stuff came likewise to be worshipped: But without looking into the Pagan World, and shewing by what Degrees they came to worship those sensible Representations, Statues and Images; whoever reflects on the Use the Papists have made of such Things, must see how fatal it is to bring them into Religion: The Images and Pictures of Saints, and Crosses were first introduced, on Pretence, that being sensible Representations, they might serve to excite Peoples Devotion; but that End was soon forgotten, and the superstitious Vulgar worshipp'd the very Images, Pictures, and Crosses: I need not tell you what Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, Real Presence, and other Absurdities of that Nature are owing to; and what Mischiefs they
they have occasion'd: But supposing such symbolical Representations might be occasionally used; is it not, for the Reasons already given, incumbent on the Parties concern'd, to appoint, alter, and vary them as Occasion requires?

B. If God has delegated to the Clergy a Power to consecrate Persons and Things; can any, whether Prince or People, dispense with this Power, and substitute Things unconsecrated?

A. As God alone is absolutely holy, so Men may be said to be more or less holy, according as they imitate him; and as this Holiness consists in a good and pious Disposition of Mind; so Mens Actions are no otherwise holy, but as they flow from, and are Signs of this holy Disposition. Inanimate Things can only be said to have a relative Holiness, as made Use of in Actions, by which Men express that holy Disposition of Mind; and can last no longer than they are thus employ'd. What Holiness, either real or relative, wou'd the Ark now have? tho' it once had such a legal Holiness, that more than fifty thousand Reapers were destroy'd for peeping into it. Nay, Persons who want all real Holines, may yet have a relative Holiness, as Ministers employ'd by the Congregation about holy Things; but this can be no more than a derivative Holiness, and can last no longer than the holy Action they are about; and belongs equally to those from whom 'tis deriv'd. Thus all the relative Holiness which concerns publick Worship, whether as to Persons, Places, or Things, must be deriv'd from the Congregation; and nothing sure, can be more absurd, than to imagine the Clergy, by any Form of Words, can bestow any permanent Holiness, whether real or relative, on Timber, Stone, &c. And therefore, the Method us'd by Archbishop Laud
Laud, in consecrating of a Church, was generally cry'd out on as profane, and tending to justify those Consecrations us'd in the Greek and Latin Churches; whereby they cheat the People of immense Sums. But 'tis no Wonder, if they, who claim this Power in Relation to inanimate Things, shou'd pretend to convey to Men, tho' ever so wicked, a real inherent, nay, indelible holy Character; tho' wherein That consists, they themselves can't tell. But,

What the Priests aim at, by this Cant, is to make People believe their Prayers are of greater Efficacy than Those of the unsanctify'd Laity; very well knowing, that if the People were so weak as to believe it, they wou'd be thought necessary on all Occasions; especially to Persons on their Death-beds. What Advantages they have made by being then thought thus necessary, none can be ignorant of. I do not wonder, that so loose an Haranguer as St. Chrysostom shou'd say, The Prayers of the People, which are weak in themselves, laying bold on the more prevailing Prayers of the Priests, may, by them, be convey'd to Heaven. But I admire, that the judicious Bishop Potter, the King's of Church Gru

But this is modest in Comparison of what Hicks, Brett, and Others of that Stamp, assign to Priests; in supposing they have such transcendent Privileges by Virtue of their indelible Character, that they can bless, or curse authoritatively; nay, that their very Prayers to God himself are authoritative Prayers.

B. Tho' some have had too little Regard for Natural Religion, as being too stubborn to yield to any selfish Views; yet that will not justify you for levelling your Ar-
Arguments against the divine Omnipotency. Are we not God's Creatures; and may not our Creator give us what arbitrary Commands he pleases?

A. Not to repeat what I have said already, I shall only ask you, Why may not God deceive us? Tell us one Thing, and act the contrary? Is not his Power absolute? And his Will, who can resist? Would you not reply, that God as he is infinitely good and happy, can have no Motive to deceive us? And that he could do whatever he thought fit for the Good of his Creatures, without having Recourse to such mean Shifts? And will not this Reason equally hinder him from burthening us with arbitrary Commands? Is not one as much as the other, inconsistent with his Wisdom and Goodness, by which his Power is always directed? And of the Two, it should seem less absurd, that God might deceive People for their Good, than impose arbitrary Things on them for their Hurt; by annexing severe Penalties on Non-observance.

B. May not God give us arbitrary Commands to try our Obedience?

A. A Man, who knows not the Hearts of Others, nor foresees how they will act, may think it prudent to try People in Things of little, or no Moment, before he trusts them in greater; but God, who foreknows what Men will do on all Occasions, can need no such Trial. If earthly Kings, who may be deceiv'd, and for the most Part are so, wou'd be justly esteem'd Tyrants, if they require Things of their Subjects meerly to try their Obedience; how can we think This of the Omniscient, infinitely Glorious King of Kings? Tho' was a Trial necessary, moral and immor-
cause we can't practise one, or refrain from the other, without subduing our Lusts and Passions: But what speculative Articles will not an ill Man profess? Or what indifferent Things will he not practise, to be indulg'd in any one darling Vice?

And now don't you think we may justly conclude, that whatsoever God requires of us to believe, or practise, is purely for our Good; and consequently, that no Belief, or Practice, which does not contribute to that Good, can come from God; and therefore, as long as we adhere to what Reason reveals to us concerning the Goodness of God, by admitting every Thing into Religion which makes for the Good of Man, and nothing that does not, we can't mistake our Duty either to God, or Man.

And therefore, I shall conclude this Head with a Quotation from a noble Author, "To believe, that every Characterist.

"Thing is govern'd, order'd, or regulated for the best, by a designing Principle, or Mind, necessarily good and per-
"manent, is to be a perfect Theist.

"To believe no one supreme designing Principle, or Mind, but rather two, three, or more, (tho' in their Na-
"ture good) is to be a Polytheist.

"To believe the governing Mind, or Minds, not abso-
"lutely and necessarily good, nor confin'd to what is best, but capable of acting according to mere Will or Fancy, is to be a Daemonist."
C H A P. XII.

That They, who, to magnify Revelation, weaken the Force of the Religion of Reason and Nature, strike at all Religion; and that there can’t be Two Independent Rules for the Government of human Actions.

B. I N

From Reason you would make some of less Candor than myself, take you for an arrant Free-Thinker.

A. Whate’er is true by Reason, can never be false by Revelation; and if God can’t be deceiv’d himself, or be willing to deceive Men, the Light he hath given to distinguish between religious Truth and Falsity, cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them in Things of so great Moment.

They, who do not allow Reason to judge in Matters of Opinion, or Speculation, are guilty of as great Absurdity as the Papiests; who will not allow the Senses to be Judges.
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Judges in the Case of Transubstantiation, tho' a Matter directly under their Cognizance; nay, the Absurdity, I think, is greater in the first Case; because Reason is to judge, whether our Senses are deceived: And if no Texts ought to be admitted as a Proof in a Matter contrary to Sense, they ought, certainly, as little to be admitted in any Point contrary to Reason.

In a Word, to suppose any Thing in Revelation inconsistent with Reason, and, at the same Time, pretend it to be the Will of God, is not only to destroy that Proof, on which we conclude it to be the Will of God, but even the Proof of the Being of a God; since if our reasoning Faculties duly attended to can deceive us, we can't be sure of the Truth of any one Proposition; but every Thing would be alike uncertain, and we shou'd for ever fluctuate in a State of universal Scepticism: Which shews how absurdly they act, who, on Pretense of magnifying Tradition, endeavour to weaken the Force of Reason; (tho' to be sure they always except their own;) and thereby foolishly sap the Foundation, to support the Superstructure; but as long as Reason is against Men, they will be against Reason. We must not, therefore, be surpris'd, to see some endeavour to reason Men out of their Reason; tho' the very Attempt to destroy Reason by Reason, is a Demonstration Men have nothing but Reason to trust to. And,

And to suppose any Thing can be true by Revelation, which is false by Reason, is not to support that Thing, but to undermine Revelation; because nothing unreasonable, nay, what is not highly reasonable, can come from a God, of unlimited, universal, and eternal Reason: As evident as this Truth is, yet that shall not hinder me from
examining in a proper Place, whatever You can urge from Revelation. And give me Leave to add, that I shall not be surpris'd, if for so laudable an Attempt, as reconciling Reason and Revelation, which have been so long set at Variance, I shou'd be censur'd as a Free-Thinker; a Title, that, however invidious it may seem, I am far from being ashamed of; since One may as well suppose, a Man can reason without thinking at all, as reason well without thinking freely. But,

The irreconcilable Enemies of Reason seeing it too gross, in this reasoning Age, to attack Reason openly, do it covertly under the Name of Free-Thinking; not despairing, but that the Time may come again, when the Laity shall stifle every Thought rising in their Minds, tho' with ever so much Appearance of Truth, as a Suggestion of Satan, if it clashes with the real, or pretended Opinions of their Priests.

B. Tho' You talk so much about Reason, You have not defin'd what You mean by that Word.

A. When we attribute any Operation to it, as distinguishing between Truth and Falsity, &c. we mean by it the rational Faculties; but when we ascribe no such Operation to it, as when we give a Reason for a Thing, &c. we then understand by it, any Medium, by which our rational Faculties judge of the Agreement, or Disagreement of the Terms of any Proposition; and if an Author writes intelligibly, we may easily discern in which of these two Senses he takes the Word. But to go to the Bottom of this Matter,

It will be requisite to give a more distinct Account of Reason in both these Senses: By the rational Faculties then, we mean the natural Ability a Man has to appre-
apprehend, judge, and infer: The immediate Objects of which Faculties are, not the Things themselves, but the Ideas the Mind conceives of them. While our Ideas remain single, they fall under the Apprehension, and are express'd by simple Terms; when join'd, under the Judgment, and express'd by Propositions; when so join'd as to need the Intervention of some other Idea to compare 'em with, in Order to form a Judgment, they become by that Intervention, the Subject of Inference, or Argumentation; and this is term'd, Syllogism or Argument. It must be observ'd too, that all the Ideas we have, or can have, are either by Sensation or Reflection; by the first, we have our Ideas of what pass'd or exists without; by the second, of what pass'd, or exists within the Mind: And in the View, or Contemplation of these consists all our Knowledge; that being nothing but the Perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement of our Ideas; and any two of these, when join'd together, so as to be affirm'd or deny'd of each other, make what we call a Proposition; when consider'd apart, what we call the Terms of that Proposition; the Agreement, or Disagreement of which Terms being express'd by the rightly affirming, or denying 'em of each other, is what we call Truth; the Perception of their Agreement or Disagreement, is what we term Knowledge: This Knowledge accrues either immediately on the bare Intuition of these two Ideas, or Terms so join'd, and is therefore stily'd Intuitive Knowledge; or, self-evident Truth: Or by the Intervention of some other Idea, or Ideas, as a common Measure for the other two; and is therefore call'd the Medium, by which Reason judges of their Agreement, or Disagreement; and this is call'd Demonstrative Knowledge, which is never to be had without the Help of the other. For,
If there were not some Propositions which need not to be prov'd, it would be in vain for Men to argue with one another; because they then could bring no Proofs but what needed to be prov'd. — Those Propositions which need no Proof, we call self-evident; because by comparing the Ideas, signify'd by the Terms of such Propositions, we immediately discern their Agreement, or Disagreement: This is, as I said before, what we call intuitive Knowledge, and is the Knowledge of God himself, who sees all Things by Intuition; and may, I think, be call'd divine Inspiration, as being immediately from God; and not acquir'd by any human Deduction, or drawing of Consequences: This, certainly, is that divine, that uniform Light, which shines in the Minds of all Men, and enables them to discern whatever they do discern; since without it there could be no Demonstration, no Knowledge, but invincible Obscurity, and universal Uncertainty.

Where a Proposition can't be made evident, by comparing the two Ideas, or Terms of it with each other, it is render'd so by intermediate Ideas or Terms; whereby the Agreement, or Disagreement of the Ideas under Examination, or the Truth of that Proposition is perceiv'd; and when there is an intuitive Perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement of the intermediate Ideas in each Step of the Progession, then, and not till then, it becomes demonstrative Knowledge; otherwise it can rise no higher than Probability, which consists not in a certain, but a likely Connexion between the Terms of a Proposition, and the intermediate Proofs of it: So that every Proposition that's only probable, must have a proportionable Degree of Uncertainty, otherwise it would amount to Demonstrati-
on; and consequently, Probability, as well as Certainty,
is founded on the Relation it has to self-evident Truths; because where no Relation to them of any Sort can be discover'd, there is no Room for Certainty, or Probability.

Hence we see that all wrong Reasoning is the Effect of Rashness, and consists either in taking Propositions to have a certain Connexion with self-evident Truths, when they have but a probable one; or imagining there's a probable Connexion, when there's no Connexion at all; or else mistaking the Degrees of Probability.

B. The Quakers are very positive, that there is in all Mankind, a Principle of Action distinct from Reason, (and which is not Inspiration) by which all are to be govern'd in Matters of Religion, as they are by Reason in other Matters; and which they commonly call the Light within.

A. Was there any such Principle, Men destitute of all Reason were as capable of knowing all Matters of Religion, as if they had been ever so rational. 'Tis strange, that all Mankind shou'd have a Principle of acting, of which they never were sensible; nor can these modern Discoverers tell them what it is, or how it operates; nor do they themselves ever use it in any of their Debates about Religion; but argue like other Men from Principles that are in common to all Mankind, and prove Propositions that are not self-evident by those that are so; and confute false and bad Reasons (of which they can only judge by Reason) by true and good Reasons; which supposes that Reason, however fallible it may be, is all rational Creatures have to trust to; and that 'tis the highest Commendation of Religion, that it is a reasonable Service. And since this is an Age, where Words without Mean-
Meaning, or Distinctions without Difference, will not pass current; why shou'd they, who otherwise appear to have good Sense, thus impose on themselves, and be expos'd by others, for such senseless Notions, as can only serve to pre-judge People against their other rational Principles? But 'tis the Fate of most Sects to be fondest of their ugliest Brats. But not to deviate,

Were it not for those self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all our Reasonings, there could be no intellectual Communication between God and Man; nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with those self-evident Notions, which are the Tests by which we are to judge of every Thing, even the Being of a God and Natural Religion; which, tho' not knowable by Intuition, are to be demonstrated by such Proofs, which have, mediately or immediately, a necessary Connexion with our self-evident Notions. And therefore, to weaken the Force of Demonstration, is to strike at all Religion, and even the Being of God; and not to give Probability its due Weight, is to strike at the Authority of that Revelation you contend for; because, that God reveal'd his Will by Visions, Dreams, Trances, or any other Way besides the Light of Nature, can only come under the Head of Probability. And,

If it be but probable, that God made any external Revelation at all, it can be but probable, tho' perhaps, not in the same Degree of Probability, that he made this, or that Revelation: And this Evidence all pretend to, since, perhaps, there never was a Time or Place, where some external Revelation was not believ'd, and its Votaries equally confident, that Theirs was a True Revelation: And, indeed, the prodigious Numbers of Revelations, which from Time to
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To time have been in the world, shew how easily mankind may in this point be imposed on. And as there can be no demonstration of the revelation itself, so neither can there be any of its conveyance to posterity; much less that this, or that, has been convey'd entire to distant times and places; especially, if a revelation be of any bulk; and which may have gone thorough the hands of men, who not only in the dark ages of the church, but even in the beginning, if we judge by the number of corrupted passages, and even forg'd books, were capable of any pious fraud. Nay, the very nature of probability is such, that were it only left to time itself, even that would wear it quite out; at least if it be true what mathematicians pretend to demonstrate, viz. That the probability of facts depending on human testimony, must gradually lessen in proportion to the distance of the time when they were done. And we have a reverend divine, who has publish'd, as he thinks, a demonstration of this, with relation to facts recorded in scripture; and has gone so far, as to fix the precise time, when all probability of the truth of the history of Christ, will be entirely spent, and exhausted.

Archbishop Laud says, that "the assent we yield to this main point of divinity, that the scripture is the word of God, is grounded on no compelling or demonstrative ratiocination, but relies on the strength of faith more than any one principle whatever." And by the confession of the best protestant writers, the internal excellency of the christian doctrines is the main proof of their coming from God; and therefore, Mr. Chillingworth says, "For my part, I profess, if the doctrine of the trine of the scripture was not as good, and as fit to come from God, the fountain of goodnes, as the miracles, by which..."

Laub against Fisher, p. 110.
which it was confirm'd, were great, I should want one
main Pillar of my Faith; and for want of it, I fear,
should be much stagger'd in it.

This, I think, may be sufficient to shew, what a
Folly they are guilty of, who, in Order to advance the Credi
t of Revelation, endeavour to weaken the Force of Rea-
son.

B. I don't think, we ought to have the same Regard for
Reason, as Men had formerly; when That was the sole
Rule God had given them for the Government of their
Actions; since now we Christians have two supreme, in-
dependant Rules, Reason and Revelation; and both require
an absolute Obedience.

A. I can't see how that is possible; for if you are to be
govern'd by the latter, That supposes you must take every
Thing on Trust; or meerly because it's said by those, for
whose Dictates You are to have an implicit Faith: For to-
examine into the Truth of what they say, is renouncing
their Authority; as on the contrary, if Men are to be go-
vern'd by their Reason, they are not to admit any Thing
further than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both
consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not to take,
Things on Trust.

To receive Religion on the Account of Authority sup-
poses, that if the same Authority promulgated a different
Religion, we shou'd be oblig'd to receive it; and indeed,
it's an odd Jumble, to prove the Truth of a Book by the
Truth of the Doctrines it contains, and at the same Time
conclude those Doctrines to be true, because contain'd in
that Book; and yet this is a Jumble every One makes,
who contends for Mens being absolutely govern'd both by
Reason and Authority.
What can be a fuller Evidence of the Sovereignty of Reason, than that all Men, when there is any Thing in their traditional Religion, which in its literal Sense can't be defended by Reason, have Recourse to any Method of Interpretation, tho' ever so forc'd, in Order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all Parties, when press'd, as they are all in their Turns, say with Tertullian, "We ought to interpret Scripture, not by the Sound of Words, but by the Nature of Things." Malo te ad- sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exerceas. But sometimes the Letter of the Scripture is such an Authority, as can't be parted with without Sacrilege; and sometimes 'tis a Letter which killeth.

In a Word, when Men, in defending their own, or attacking other traditionary Religions, have Recourse to the Nature or Reason of Things; does not That shew, they believe the Truth of all traditionary Religions is to be try'd by it; as being That, which must tell them what is true or false in Religion? And were there not some Truths relating to Religion of themselves so evident, as that all must agree in them, nothing relating to Religion cou'd be prov'd, every Thing wou'd want a further Proof; and if there are such evident Truths, must not all others be try'd by their Agreement with them? And are not these the Tests, by which we are to distinguish the only True Religion from the many false Ones? And do not all Parties alike own, there are such Tests drawn from the Nature of Things, each crying their Religion contains every Thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of having God for its Author; thereby confessing, that Reason enables them to tell what is worthy of having God for its Author. And if Reason tells them this, does
does it not tell them every Thing that God can be sup-
pos'd to require?

In short, nothing can be more certain, than that there are some Things in their own Nature good, some evil; and others neither good nor evil; and for the same Rea-
son God commands the Good, and forbids the Evil, he leaves Men at Liberty in Things indifferent; it being inconsistent with his Wisdom to reward the Observance of such Things; and with his Goodness to punish for not observing them. And as he cou'd have no End in creating Mankind, but their common Good; so they answer the End of their Creation, who do all the Good they can; and to enable Men to do do This, God has given them Reason to distinguish Good from Evil, useful from Useless Things: Or in other Words, has made them moral A-
gents, capable of discerning the Relations they stand in to God and one another; and the Duties resulting from these Relations, so necessary to their common Good: And consequently, Religion, thus founded on these immutable Relations, must at all Times, and in all Places, be alike immutable; since external Revelation, not being able to make any Change in these Relations, and the Duties that necessarily result from them, can only recommend, and inculcate these Duties; except we suppose, that God at last acted the Tyrant, and impost'd such Commands, as the Relations we stand in to him, and one another, no Ways require.

To imagine any external Revelation not to depend on the Reason of Things, is to make Things give Place to Words; and implies, that from the Time this Rule commenc'd, we were forbid to act as moral Agents, in judging what is good; or evil; fit, or unfit; and that we are to make no other Use of
of our Reason, than to see what is the literal Meaning of Texts; and to admit That only to be the Will of God, tho' ever so inconsistent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reason of Things. Is not this to infer, there's nothing good or evil in itself, but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being; which, tho' it may change every Moment, is to be unalterably found in such a Book? And;

All Divines, I think, now agree in owning, that there's a Law of Reason, antecedent to any external Revelation, that God can't dispense, either with his Creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external Revelation can be true, that in the least. Circumstance, or minutest Point, is inconsistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one Thing in Revelation to be true, till we perceive, by that Understanding, which God has given us to discern the Truth of Things; whether it agrees with this immutable Law, or not?

If we can't believe otherwise than as Things appear to our Understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our Understandings (a Matter we can't know but by using our Understanding) to any Authority whatever, is to suppose he requires Impossibilities. And our self-evident Notions being the Foundation of all Certainty, we can only judge of Things, as they are found to be more or less agreeable to them; to deny This on any Pretence whatever, can serve only to introduce an universal Scepticism. And therefore Bishop Taylor very justly observes, "'Tis Reason that is Polem. Diso. the Judge; and Fathers, Councils, Tradition, and Scripture the Evidence." And if Reason be the Judge, can it form a right Judgment, without examining into every Thing which offers itself for Evidence? And wou'd it not exa-
examine in vain, if it had not certain Texts, by which it could try all Evidences relating to religious Matters.

B. Tho' Reason may be the Judge; yet the Scripture, we say, is the Rule, by which Reason must judge of the Truth of Things.

A. If it be such a Rule, must it not have all the Qualifications necessary to make it so? But if Reason must tell us what those Qualifications are, and whether they are to be found in Scripture; and if one of those Qualifications is, that the Scripture must be agreeable to the Nature of Things; does not That suppose the Nature of Things to be the standing Rule, by which we must judge of the Truth of all those Doctrines contain'd in the Scriptures? So that the Scripture can only be a secondary Rule, as far as it is found agreeable to the Nature of Things; or to those self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all Knowledge, and Certainty.

In short, no Man can any more discern the Objects of his own Understanding, and their Relations, by the Faculties of another, than he can see with another Man's Eyes; or than one Ship can be guided by the Helm of another: And therefore, he, who demands a Man's Assent to any Thing, without conveying into his Mind such Reasons as may produce a Sense of the Truth of it; erects a Tyranny over his Understanding, and demands an impossible Tribute. No Opinion, tho' ever so certain to one Man, can be infus'd into another as certain, by any Method, but by opening his Understanding, so that he may find the Reasonableness of it in his own Mind; and consequently, the only Criterion, by which he tries his own Reasonings, must be the internal Evidence he has already of certain Truths, and the Agreeableness of his Inferences to them. And,
To suppose a Creature to have Reason to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a Contradiction; and if we are religious as we are rational, can Religion oblige us not to be govern'd by Reason, tho' but for a Moment? Nay, what is the Religion of all rational Beings, but what the Scripture terms it, a reasonable Service? Or, their Reason employ'd on such Subjects, as conduce to the Dignity of the rational Nature? So that Religion and Reason were not only given for the same End, the Good of Mankind; but they are, as far as such Subjects extend, the same, and commence together. And if God can no otherwise apply to Men, but by applying to their Reason, (which he is continually doing by the Light of Nature) does he not by That bid them use their Reason? And can God at the same Time forbid It, by requiring an implicit Faith in any Person whatever?

If You allow, that Men by their reasoning Faculties are made like unto God, and fram'd after his Image; and that Reason is the most excellent Gift God can bestow; do they not destroy this Likeness, deface this Image, and give up the Dignity of human Nature, when they give up their Reason to any Person whatever?

Can we lay too great a Stress on Reason, when we consider, 'tis only by Virtue of It God can hold Communication with Man? Nor can otherwise, if I may so speak, witness for himself, or assert the Wisdom and Goodness of his Conduct; than by submitting his Ways to Mens cool Deliberation, and strict Examination? since 'tis from the Marks we discern in the Laws of the Universe, and its Government, that we can demonstrate it to be govern'd by a God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness: He, whose Reason does
does not enable him to do This, can neither discern the Wisdom, Goodness, or even the Being of a God.

They only answer the End for which their Reason was given them, who judge of the Will of God, by the Reasonableness and Goodness of Doctrines; and think his Laws, like his Works, carry in them the Marks of Divinity; and they likewise do the greatest Honour to the Scripture, who suppose it deals with Men as with rational Creatures; and therefore admit not of any of its Doctrines without a strict Examination; and those, who take a contrary Method, would, if they liv'd in Turky, embrace Mahometism, and believe in the Alcoran.

And indeed, a blind Submission is so far from doing Credit to True Religion, that it puts all Religions on the same Foot; for without judging of a Religion by its internal Marks, there's nothing but Miracles to plead; and Miracles true or false, if they are believ'd (and where are they not?) will have the same Effect: Nay, if Miracles can be perform'd by evil, as well as by good Beings, the worst Religion may have the most Miracles, as needing them most. And it was a proverbial Saying among the Philosophers of Greece, ὄνωματα μερός: Miracles for Fools, and Reasons for wise Men. The Boetians were remarkable for their Stupidity, and the Number of their Oracles; and if You look no further than the Christian World, You will find, that Ignorance, and the Belief of daily Miracles go hand in hand; and that there's nothing too absurd for the Peoples Belief. And if the most learned Huetius gives us a true Account of Things, there are no Miracles recorded in the Bible, but many of the like Nature are to be found in Pagan Histories.
Wou'd not Christians themselves, think it a sufficient Proof of a Religion's not coming from God, if it wanted any of those internal Marks, by which the Truth of all Religion is to be try'd, without inquiring into its Miracles, or any other external Proofs? And consequently, wherever these internal Marks are found, are not external Marks needless? But,

How can we maintain, that the Scripture carries with it all those internal Marks of Truth, which are inseparable from God's Laws; and at the same Time affirm, it requires an implicit Faith, and blind Obedience to all its Dictates? if it does so, how could we have examin'd whether it had those internal Marks? Or how can we say, we can't know without the Scripture, what are the internal Marks of Truth; and at the same Time suppose, we must by our Reason know what are those Marks, before we can tell whether they are to be found in the Scripture?

If our Nature is a rational Nature, and our Religion a reasonable Service, there must be such a necessary, and close Connexion between them, as to leave no Room for any Thing that is arbitrary to intervene: And consequently, the Religion of all rational Beings must consist, in using such a Conduit to God, and their Fellow-Creatures, as Reason, whatever Circumstances they are in, does direct.

We find St. Paul himself saying, that **Bo' We**, (the Apostles) or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed: And is not this laving the whole Stress on its internal Marks? Since there's nothing in the Nature of such Things as have not those Marks, to hinder them from being chang'd every Moment.

And as to those who depress Reason, in Order to exalt Revelation, I wou'd ask them; what greater Proof the **C c** Scripture
Scripture can give us of the Rectitude of human Understanding in religious Matters, than calling it the Inspiration of the Almighty; or than God's so frequently appealing to it, for the Justification of his own Conduct?

In the Prophet Isaiah, God representing his own Conduct towards his People, under the Parable of a Vineyard, expressly says, O ye Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard. And in Ezekiel, God, after a long Vindication of his Carriage towards his People, appeals to them, saying, Hear now, O House of Israel, is not my Way equal? Are not your Ways unequal? And in the Prophet Micah he says, He will plead with them; asks what he has done; and bids them testify against him. And in the Prophet Isaiah, after the Lord had said, Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; Cease to do Evil, learn to do well; seek Judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow; he adds, Come near, let us reason together, tho' your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow. Does not God here appeal to their Reason for the Sufficiency of moral Things, to wash away their Sins, tho' of the deepest Die? And cou'd God and Man reason together, except there were some Notions in common to both; some Foundation for such Reasoning? Otherwise how cou'd Job say, I desire to reason with God? And certainly, the next Thing to reasoning with God, is reasoning with one another about God and Religion; That being the chief End, for which our Reason was giv'n us. Thus Paul reason'd in the Synagogue every Sabbath. And again, He reason'd with them out of the Scriptures. And as be reason'd of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembl'd:

Which,
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Which, certainly, he had never done, had Paul talk’d about Types, Allegories, Rites, and Ceremonies, &c.

B. You argue, as if we had no certain Way of knowing the Will of God, except from the Light of Nature, and that eternal Rule of Reason, by which, You suppose, God governs all his own Actions, and expects Men shou’d govern all theirs; but may not God take what Method he pleases, to communicate his Mind?

A. This all traditional Religions with equal Confidence assert; and they wou’d have equal Right to plead it, if Reason did not afford Men certain Criteria to know God’s Will by, which Way soever reveal’d.

If God created Mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the Rules he gave them, must be sufficient to answer that benevolent Purpose of infinite Wisdom; and consequently, had Mankind observ’d them, there cou’d have been no Occasion for an external Revelation; and its great Use now is, to make Men observe those neglected Rules, which God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, design’d for their present, and future Happiness.

B. Do not our Divines say, Mankind were for many Ages in a deplorable State, for want of an external Revelation?

A. If God does every Thing that’s fit for him to do, cou’d Men be in such a State, because God did not do a Thing, which was not fit for him to do? viz. make a Revelation, before it was fit for him to make it? Or can the greatest Part of Mankind be now in that deplorable Condition, for want of a Revelation, which God, out of his infinite Wisdom, has not as yet thought fit to communicate to them; at least with that Evidence, as is necessary to make them believe it?

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Must not these Gentlemen suppose, that either God, in creating Mankind, did not design their future Happiness, tho' he gave them immortal Souls capable of it; or else, that tho' he design'd it, he prescrib'd them such Means, or gave them such Rules, as either were not sufficient at first; or in Process of Time became insufficient for that End? but that after Men had been, for many Ages, in this miserable Condition, God thought fit to mend the eternal, universal Law of Nature, by adding certain Observances to it, not founded on the Reason of Things; and that those, out of his partial Goodness, he communicated only to some; leaving the greatest Part in their former dark and deplorable State? But,

Is it not incumbent on those, who make any external Revelation so necessary to the Happiness of all Mankind, to shew, how it is consistent with the Notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have reveal'd it to all his Children, when all had equal Need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all Nations, as to any one Nation, or Person? Or in all Languages, as in any one? Nay, was it not as easy for him to have made all Men, for the sake of this noble End, speak in one, and the same Language; as it was at first, to multiply Languages, to prevent their building a Tower up to Heaven? Nay, I see not how God can have any Need at all of Language, to let Mankind know his Will; since he has at all Times communicated his Mind to them without it.

B. These, I confess, are considerable Difficulties; but as to the last Difficulty, did not God give Laws to the Jews, of which other Nations knew nothing?

A. Nor were they concern'd to know, or when known, oblig'd to observe them; nor did they bind the Jews them-
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selves, but for a Time; and even then, they were for
the most Part impracticable, out of the Land of Ca-
naan; where God, as I shall fully shew hereafter, acted,
not as Governor of the Universe, but as King of the
Jews, by Virtue of the Horeb Covenant; which he ob-
tain'd at his own Request. But when God acts as Go-
vernour of the Universe, his Laws are alike design'd for
all under his Government; that is, all Mankind: And
consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally
knowable by all. And if the Universality of a Law,
be the only certain Mark of its coming from the Gover-
nour of Mankind; how can we be certain, That, which
wants this Mark, comes from him? And if Religion be-
longs to us, as we are Men, must we not, as Men, be
capable of knowing it? And if all Mankind are Cre-
tures of the same Creator, and Fellow-Creatures with
one another, must not all their religious Duties, as they are
Creatures of the same God, and Fellow-Creatures with
one another, be the same? And let me add, that

If Men are religious, as they are rational; must they
not be capable, when they come to the Use of their
Reason, of knowing a Religion founded on Reason? Or
must they be oblig'd to leave their Country, and end-
lessly rove up and down, in search of such Opinions, as
have no Foundation in Reason? Or, if they are forc'd
to stay at Home, be ever examining into all the arbi-
trary Precepts, which are to be met with in any of the
traditional Religions they can come at? And should they
do so, must they not, since Reason cou'd not direct them
in Things not depending on Reason, perpetually remain in
a State of Uncertainty?
I might go further, and ask You, Whether it is consistent with that Impartiality, which is essential to the Deity, not to make those, he designs should know his Will by Revelation, capable of knowing that Revelation; and consequently, his Will, contain'd it, at one Time as well as another? Which cou'd not be, if that which was plain at first, became obscure by Reason of the Change of Languages, Customs, the Distance of Time and Place, the Errors of Transcribers and Translators, and an hundred other Things too long to mention. Can these Difficulties be avoided, without supposing, that Religion, which Way, soever reveal'd, carries such internal Marks of Truth, as, at all Times and Places, plainly shews itself, even to the meanest Capacity, to be the Will of a Being of universal and impartial Benevolence.

B. The greater Stress You lay on Reason, the more You extol Revelation; which being design'd to exalt and perfect our rational Nature, must be itself highly reasonable.

A. I grant You this is the Design of Religion; but have not the Ecclesias'ticks in most Places entirely defeated this Design; and so far debas'd human Nature, as to render it unsociable, fierce and cruel? Have they not made external Revelation the Pretence of filling the Christian World with Animosity, Hatred, Persecution, Ruin and Destruction; in Order to get an absolute Dominion over the Consciences, Properties and Persons of the Laity? But passing this over, If the Perfection of any Nature, whether human, angelical, or divine, consists in being govern'd by the Law of its Nature; and ours, in acting that Part, for which we were created; by observing all those Duties, which are founded on the Relation we stand
stand in to God and one another; can Revelation any otherwise help to perfect human Nature, but as it induces Men to live up to this Law of their Nature? And if this Law is the Test of the Perfection of any written Law; must not That be the most perfect Law, by which the Perfection of all others is to be try'd? And, if nothing but Reasoning can improve Reason, and no Book can improve my Reason in any Point, but as it gives me convincing Proofs of its Reasonableness; a Revelation, that will not suffer us to judge of its Dictates by our Reason, is so far from improving Reason, that it forbids the Use of it; and reasoning Faculties unexercis'd, will have as little Force, as unexercis'd Limbs; He that is always carry'd, will at length become unable to go: And if the Holy Ghost, as Bishop Taylor says, works by heightening, and improving our natural Faculties; it can only be by using such Means as will improve them, in proposing Reasons and Arguments to convince our Understanding; which can only be improv'd, by studying the Nature and Reason of Things: I apply'd my Heart (says the wisest of Men) to know, and to search, and to seek out Wisdom, and the Reason of Things.

So that the Holy Ghost can't deal with Men as rational Creatures, but by proposing Arguments to convince their Understandings, and influence their Wills, in the same Manner as if propos'd by other Agents; for to go beyond This, would be making Impressions on Men, as a Seal does on Wax; to the confounding of their Reason, and their Liberty in choosing; and the Man would then be merely passive, and the Action would be the Action of another Being acting upon him; for which he could be no Way accountable: But if the Holy Ghost does not
not act thus, and 

Revelation itself be not arbitrary; must it not be founded on the Reason of Things? And consequently, be a 

Republication, or Restoration of the Religion of Nature? And since that takes in every Thing thus founded, all the Help any Authority whatever can afford a reasonable Being, is the offering him Arguments, of which his own Reason must judge: And when he perceives their Agreement with his self-evident Notions, 'tis then, and only then, he can be sure of their Truth: And tho' Men cou'd not mistake, as we see they daily do, a natural for a supernatural Suggestion; yet whether that Suggestion comes from a good or evil Being, (continually tempting People) can only be judg'd by the Nature of the Things suggested. For 'tis in vain to have Recourse to Miracles, if evil as well as good Beings had the Power of doing them? And some are so heterodox, as to imagine, one Reason why evil Beings are permitted to do Miracles, is, least from the Report of Miracles, (which is alike spread every where, and for every Religion) Men might be tempted not to rely on the Reason and Nature of Things; and so run into endless Superstitions. And,

Deut. 13. 1-3. God, in the Old Testament, is said to suffer Miracles to be done by false Prophets, in Order to prove his People; and in the New, such Miracles, as wou'd, if

Matt. 24. 24. it were possible, deceive the very Elect.

In short, Revelation either bids, or forbids Men to use their Reason, in judging of all religious Matters; if the former, then it only declares That to be our Duty, which was so independent of and, antecedent to Revelation; if the latter, then it does not deal with Men as with rational Creatures; but deprives them of that inestimable Blessing.

B. Who
B. Who, I pray, maintains, that Revelation forbids us the Use of our Reason, in judging of the Truth of any religious Matters?

A. Is not every One of this Opinion, that says, we are not to read the Scripture with Freedom of assenting, or dissenting, just as we judge it agrees, or disagrees with the Light of Nature, and the Reason of Things? And this, one wou'd think, none cou'd deny was absolutely necessary, in reading a Book, where 'tis own'd that the Letter killetb. Nay, do not all in Effect own as much, who will not allow the Scripture any Meaning, how plain soever, but what is agreeable to their Reason? which shews, that in their Opinion, Reason was rather given to supply the Defects of Revelation, than Revelation the Defects of Reason. Is there a Divine, who, tho' he pretends ever so high a Veneration for the Scripture, but will own there are many Places, where 'tis necessary to recede from the Letter, and find out a Sense agreeable to his Reason; which supposes it is That, and not the Authority of the Book, for that's the same in both Cases; which makes him approve the literal Sense in one Case, and condemn it in another. And were Men not govern'd by their Reason, but by some external Revelation, they had nothing more to do, but to take the Words of that Revelation, in its literal, obvious, and plain Meaning, how absurd soever it might appear to their carnal Reason.

B. We may take the Words of fallible Men in the plain, literal Sense; but if any Thing is said by infallible Men, which in the obvious Meaning of the Words is inconsistent with Reason, we must have Recourse to an allegorical Sense; or if that will not do, we must put no Meaning at all on the Words; thus we support the Dignity of both Revelation and Reason.

D d A. Is
A. Is not this owning you take not your Religion from those infallible Men, but you endeavour to impose that Religion your Reason tells you is true, upon their Words; by allowing them no other Meaning, how plain soever, but what you antecedently know by the Light of Nature to be the Will of God. And

There's no Book, but you may own its Infallibility, and yet be entirely govern'd by your Reason, if you, as often as you find any Thing not agreeable to your Reason, torture it, to make it speak what is so. Would you think a Mahometan was govern'd by his Alcoran, who, upon all Occasions should thus depart from the literal Sense; nay, would you not tell him, that his inspir'd Book fell infinitely short of Cicero's uninspir'd Writings; where there is no such Occasion to recede from the Letter?

The Moammarites, a famous Sect among the Mahometans, and the Mysticks, very numerous in Turky, sensible of the Difficulties and Uncertainties that attend all traditional Facts, maintain, "That God can never discover himself with Certainty any other Way, than by speaking to the Reason and Understanding of Men: For if we depend, say they, on Oral Tradition, we lay ourselves open to the greatest Falsities and Impositions; there being nothing so liable to infinite Changes and Alterations, numberless Mistakes, Additions and Subtractions, according as Mens Opinions vary by the Change of Times and Circumstances: Nor are Books more exempt from such Doubtfulness and Uncertainty; since we find so much Disagreement among Books wrote by different Men, in different Parts and different Ages; and even among the different Books of the same Men. But suppose, continue they, "we
"we should resolve all our Faith into the sole Text of the "Alchoran, the Difficulty and Uncertainty will still re-
"main; if we consider, how many Metaphors, Allegories,
"and other Figures of Speech; how many obscure, ambi-
"guous, intricate and mysterious Passages are to be met
"with in this infallible Book; and how different are the
"Opinions, Expositions and Interpretations of the most
"subtle Doctors, and learned Commentators on every one
"of them. The only sure Way, then, add they, to come
"to the certain Knowledge of the Truth, is to consult
"God himself, wait his Inspirations, live just and honest
"Lives, be kind and beneficent to all our Fellow-Crea-
tures, and pity such as differ from us in their Opini-
"ons about the Authority, Integrity, and Meaning of the
"Alchoran.

The Mahometans, tho' they own the Law of Christ, yet
they make it of no Use, because they suppose, the Law of
Mahomet is more perfect; and 'tis That they must stick to:
And do not some Men, by arguing much after the same
Manner in relation to the Gospel, render the Law of Na-
ture useless? But if we are still moral Agents, and as such
are capable of judging between Religion and Superstition;
Can we think otherwise of the Gospel, than that it is de-
sign'd, not to free us from the eternal Law of Nature, but
from those Absurdities, which the Folly or Knavery of
Men have introduc'd in Opposition to it? Hence it is, that
the Scripture speaks in general Terms, without defining
those Things which it commands, or forbids; because it sup-
poses Men moral Agents, capable by their Reason to discern
Good from Evil, Virtue from Vice, Religion from Super-
"dition.
If Mr. Locke reasons justly, "No Mission can be look'd on to be divine, that delivers any Thing derogating from the Honour of the one, only, true, invisible God; or inconsistent with Natural Religion and the Rules of Morality: Because God having discover'd to Men the Unity and Majesty of His eternal Godhead, and the Truths of Natural Religion and Morality by the Light of Reason, he cannot be suppose'd to back the contrary by Revelation; for that would be to destroy the Evidence and Use of Reason, without which, Men cannot be able to distinguish divine Revelation from diabolical Imposture.

Does not this suppose, First, That no Mission can be divine, or its Revelation true, that admits of more than one, only, true, invisible God? Secondly, That Men, by their Reason, must know, wherein the Honour of this one, only, true, invisible God consists; otherwise, they might (for ought they know) be oblig'd by Revelation to admit what is derogatory to his Honour? Thirdly, They must know by the Light of Reason, what are the Truths of Natural Religion and Rules of Morality; because otherwise they might be oblig'd to admit Things inconsistent with them: And that to suppose the contrary, would be to destroy the Use and Evidence of Reason, without which, Men would not be able to distinguish divine Revelation from diabolical Imposture; which implies, that in Things tending to the Honour of God, and the Good of Mankind, the dernier Refort is to Reason; whose Dictates, as they need no Miracles for their Support, so all Doctrines inconsistent with them, tho' they plead endless Miracles, must be look'd upon as diabolical Impostures. And

When
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When the Apostle says, *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, think on these Things;* is not this referring us to the Light of Nature, to know what these Things are, which shew themselves to be the Will of God by their internal Excellency?

B. Our Divines, tho' they own Reason may do tolerably well in Things between Man and Man, yet in Matters relating to God, Reason, they say, must submit to Faith; and that the chief End of Revelation is to give Men, especially the common People, just Conceptions, and right Notions of the Nature and Perfections of God; which they cou’d never have from the dim Light of Nature; without the Help of Revelation.

A. Tho' they argue thus, yet at the same Time they find themselves oblig’d to own, that the Scripture, when taken literally, gives the Vulgar false and unworthy Notions of the divine Nature; by imputing, almost everywhere, to God, not only human Parts, but human Weakness and Imperfections, and even the worst of human Passions. To this, indeed, they have two Answers, which seem inconsistent: First, That 'tis necessary to accommodate Things to some Measure to the gross Conceptions of the Vulgar. The Other is, that Reason has given all Men such just Conceptions of the divine Nature, that there’s no Danger that even the common People shou’d take these Expressions literally.

B. Tho’ Reason, on which You lay such Stress, may demonstrate, that there are not more Gods than One; yet Reason can never tell us, that there’s more than One God;
God; tho' Reason tells us, that there are not Three Gods, yet Reason cou'd never tell us, that, tho' in the Idea of a divine Person, the Idea of God be included, each Person being by himself God; yet that the Multiplying of divine Persons, was not the Multiplying of Gods? And tho' Reason declares, there's a Difference between Three and One; yet Reason will never discover, that there's no more in Three Persons, than in One; all Three together being the same Numerical God, as each is by himself. Reason will never be able to find out a Middle between a Numerical, and a Specifick Unity; between One in Number, and One in Kind; and yet without it, how can we suppose the same God to be self-existent, and not self-existent, &c. Reason can as little discover a Medium between a Nominal, and a Real Difference; and yet without it how can we avoid Sabellianism on the one Hand, or Polytheism on the other? There's nothing Reason can tell us more plainly, than that God and a Man are two distinct, intelligent Persons; but can Reason tell us they may become one intelligent Person, even while their personal Natures and Properties remain infinitely distinct and different? Thus You see, how Reason must submit to Faith.

A. I, for my Part, not understanding these Orthodox Paradoxes, can only at present say, I do not disbelieve them; but must add, that as I am a rational Creature, and God requires of me a reasonable Service, I ought not, nay, I cannot have any Faith, which will not bear the Test of Reason; and therefore, notwithstanding your Maxim of Reason's submitting to Faith, I will venture to affirm, if a Book assert (supposing the Words of it are taken in their plain, literal Sense) immoral, or impious Doctrines; and there are not in that Book certain Marks to tell us, where they
they are to be taken literally, and where figuratively; or, what is the figurative Sense; that Men in these Points are as much to be determin'd by their Reason, as if there was no such Book.

B. This, sure, can't be the Case with relation to the Scriptures.

A. I shall only tell You what the most celebrated Fathers say on this Head. Athanasius says, (a) "Should we understand a great Part of the sacred Writ literally, we should fall into most enormous Blasphemies." St. Cyril says (b) much the same. St. Gregory the first says, (c) "The Scripture is not only dead, but deadly; for it is written, "The Letter kills, but the Spirit quickeneth;" and this is what the whole divine Letter does." And in another Place (d) he compares them to Beasts who regard the Letter. And St. Jerom says, (e) "If we adhere to the Flesh of the Letter, it will be the Occasion of many Evils."

And Gregory Nyssen (f) makes the like Reflection.

B. I durst not have made so bold with the Scriptures, as these Fathers; but content myself with saying with the excellent Bishop of Litchfield, that "God, was he to speak with Men, must not only speak their very Language, but according to the Conceptions of those, he speaks to: To rectify their Sentiments in Natural, Historical, or Chronological Matters; to mend their Logick, or Rhetoric when 'tis defective; but has no ill Influence on Piety, is not the Business of Revelation. — Needlely

"to contradict innocent vulgar Notions, is the sure Way
to lose the Peoples Affections, and to forego a prudential
Way of gaining them."

A. With Submission to this learned Author, is there
no Difference between God's not rectifying Mens Sentiments in those Matters, and using himself such Sentiments as need to be rectify'd; or between God's not mending Mens Logick, or Rhetorick, where 'tis defective, and using such himself; or between God's not contradicting vulgar Notions, and confirming them; by speaking according to them? Or can the God of Truth, stand in need of Error to support his Truth; his eternal Truth? Or can infinite Wisdom despair of gaining, or keeping Peoples Affections, without having Recourse to such mean Arts? No Wonder, if Men use pious Frauds, when they think God himself has Recourse to them. In this Case, must not Men by their Reason judge, when God makes use of defective Logick, or Rhetorick; and speaks in Natural, Historical, and Chronological Matters, not according to the Truth of Things, but according to the Conceptions of those of the vulgar, to whom he directs his Speech? Nor can I think of any Falshood, suppos'd to be authori'sd by the God of Truth, but may be made use of to some ill Purpose; in Divinity as well as Mathematicks it's a certain Maxim, Uno absurdo dato mille sequentur.

St. Austin argues after another Manner, in saying,
"Should Unbelievers know us to be mistaken in such
Things as concern the Natural World, and allege our
Books for such vain Opinions; how shall they believe
the same Books, when they speak of the Resurrection
of the Dead, and the World to come?"

"Dr."
Dr. Prideaux, speaking of the Marks of Imposture, says, "If there be but one known Truth in the whole Scheme of Nature with which it interferes, This must make the Discovery; and there's no Man, that forgets an Imposture, but makes himself liable to be this Way convicted of it." The Doctor, sure, wou'd not have affered this so roundly, had he not compar'd the Philosophical, and Scriptural Scheme of Nature, and perceiv'd their exact Agreement. But, Not only Dr. Burnet, in Defence of his *Archæologia*, but all, who maintain, that the Sun is immovable, and that 'tis the Earth which moves; sufficiently shew, that the Scriptural and Philosophical Account of Natural Things seldom agree: However, to give one Instance, there's scarce a Country-man so ignorant, as not to know, that if the Seed thrown into the Earth is kill'd by Drought, or dies by any other Accident, it never rises; but St. Paul (without regard to that Judgment, which our Saviour denounces against a Man who calls his Brother Fool,) says, *Thou Fool.* *I Cor. 15:36.* that which thou sowest is not quickned, except it die: And our Saviour himself says, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a John 12:24.* Corn of Wheat fall into the Ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much Fruit. And the *The Works of Gregory of Greek Church, at this Day, make use of boil'd Corn at their Commemoration of their Dead, to signify the Resurrection of the Body.*

To convince You how entirely we are to depend on Reason in Matters of Religion, I will only ask You, Why You suppose it so absurd in the *Papists* to say, that Men bred up in their Church, are oblig'd entirely to depend on its Infallibility; and that they, who have not had the Happiness to be thus educated, ought, indeed, to use their Rea-
son to bring them into their Church; but that then they are no longer to be govern'd by it, but with the rest of the Members, equally to rely on the Church's infallible Decisions.

B. Because this suppos'd Infallibility puts it in the Power of that Church, to make their Votaries believe Virtue to be Vice; and Vice, Virtue; or any other Absurdity whatever; since they have no Way to know, whether it does not require such Things, but by examining, by their Reason, all her Doctrines; and if Reason be sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God; and that their Church holds no Doctrines disagreeable to his Will, (for this they must own Reason capable of discovering, before it could bring Men into their Church) they, in spite of their Pretences to Infallibility, put the whole Stress on Reason. And if afterwards, they teach Men to renounce that Reason, by which before they would have them wholly govern'd; it can be for no other Cause, but to prevent their discovering in that Church such Errors, as they cou'd not well know before; and which, if known, wou'd have hinder'd them from coming into it.

A. The Papists, You know, reply, that if this Reasoning is good, it strikes at all implicit Faith in St. Peter, as well as his Successors; and equally concludes against Mens giving up their Reason to any Persons in former Ages, as well as the present; since 'tis by that alone they are able to judge, whether their Doctrines are consistent with the Light of Nature, and free from Superstition; and contain nothing in them unworthy of a divine Original: Before examining what Men teach, there's no Reason to have an implicit Faith in one Set of Men more than another; and Examination destroys all implicit Faith, and all Authority whatever; since
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since if they then embrace the Opinions of others, whether Apostles or not, 'tis because they appear agreeable to their Reason. If You say, the Apostles wou'd by Reason bring Men into their Religion, and after that, have them wholly govern'd by their Authority; may not the Papists retort on you your own Answer? and cry, "That if Reason is sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God, and that the Apostles taught no Doctrines, but what are agreeable to his Will; (for this, say they, You must allow Reason capable of discovering, otherwise it cou'd never lead Men to believe what the Apostles taught;) You alike put the whole Stress on Reason. And You must own, either that Men are entirely to be govern'd by Reason, and then you destroy all Authority whatever; or else not to be govern'd by it, and then you can't, by Reason, shew the Absurdity of that implicit Faith, the Catholick Church requires.

B. You know, that in Answer to all Objections of this Nature, we say as Bishop Burnet does, in his Exposition of the Articles of our Church, "That if we observe the Style and Method of the Scriptures, we shall find in them all over a constant Appeal to Mens Reason, and to their intellectual Faculties. If the meer Dictates of the Church, or of infallible Men, had been the Resolution and Foundation of Faith, there had been no need of such a long Thread of Reasoning and Discourse, as both our Saviour us'd when on Earth, and the Apostles us'd in their Writings. We see the Way of Authority is not taken, but Explanations are offer'd, Proofs, and Illustrations are brought, to convince the Mind; which shews that God, in the clearest Manifestation of his Will, wou'd deal with us as with rational Creatures, who are not to believe, but..."
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"on Persuasion; and to use our Reason, in Order to the
attaining that Persuasion.

A. This is all I contend for, and had not what the Bi-
shop says, (tho' it amounts to giving up all implicit Faith)
been agreeable to the whole Tenor of the Scriptures, and
the Doctrines of our Church; some of those, who have so
nicely examin'd into all Parts of his Exposition of the Ar-
ticles, would never have let this Passage escape without
Remarks. And, therefore, since 'tis in Defence of the Pro-
testant Religion, and the whole Current of Scripture, I
shall add, to what this excellent Father of the Church
has said; that when any Person has Recourse to Argu-
ments and Reasonings, he does, in those Instances, disclaim
all Authority, and appeals to the Reason of those he means
to persuade; and, in Order to it, would have them judge
of the Force of his Arguments, by those common, and self-
evident Notions, upon which the Validity of all Proofs
depend; and Men, in examining what he says by that
Reason to which he appeals, wholly answer the End for
which he argues with them; tho', upon Examination,
they are not convinc'd by his Reasons. To require more,
would be to require Impossibilities; since 'tis not in Mens
Power, after they have consider'd Things as well as they
are able, to believe otherwise than they do. And had the
Apostles said to those they design'd to convert; "It will be
an Affront to our Infallibility, not to have an implicit
Faith in us; not to take on Content whatever we say;
You are, therefore, no longer to act as moral Agents, or
to have Recourse to the essential Difference of Good and
Evil; to the Light and Law of Nature, or to the etern-
Reason of Things, to judge of the Truth of what we
declare. No, this is the Faith, and thus you must believe,
or perish everlastingly." Had the Apostles, I say, talk'd after this Manner, do you think they could have gain'd one reasonable Convert? No, they knew full well, that this was not the Way to deal with rational Creatures; they, on the contrary, as I shall fully shew hereafter, every where speak to this Effect, " We desire you would, with the utmost Free-
dom, examine our Doctrines; since if they are, as we affirm, true, they will not only bear the Test of Reason,
but the more they are try'd, the brighter they will appear: This will be enobling yourselves, and doing Justice to your own Understandings, as well as to our Doctrines." If Men have any Authority, 'tis then only, when they re-nounce all peremptory Authority; and instead of claiming Dominion over Mens Faith, desire they would prove every Thing by those Tests God had given them, in order to dis-cern Good from Evil, Truth from Falsity, Religion from Superstition; thus the Apostle seeks to maintain his Cre-dit and Authority with the Thessalonians; Prove all Things, says he, bold fast that which is Good.

B. Do not You, by laying such a stress on Reason, in Effect, set aside Revelation?

A. No, if Revelation be a reasonable Revelation, the greater stress we lay upon Reason, the more we establish Revelation.

B. But not on the Foot of its own Authority, but only as You judge it agreeable to Reason; and therefore I question, whether any of our eminent Divines talk thus in Commenda-tion of Reason, to the Disparagement of Authority.

A. If Reason is all we rational Creatures have to trust to, being That alone which distinguishes us from Brutes, incapable of Religion; Divines, even those of the most narrow Principles, however they may shuffle a while, must make
make Reason their dernier Refort; but however, since Reason alone will not satisfy You, but You must have Authority even against Authority, I shall mention what some of our most eminent Divines say, when they are defending Revelation against the Attacks of Infidels; or writing against the Papists, or Men popishly affected.

Dr. J. Clarke, Dean of Sarum, in defending Christianity against the Attacks of Infidels, who charge it with requiring an implicit Faith, thinks This such a Scandal to Christianity, that a good Part of his Boylean Lectures are to clear it from that Charge; "We find, says he, no Command in Scripture to lay aside our Reason or Understanding, but directly the contrary is there affirmed of the Christian Religion; viz. that it is our reasonable Service: And therefore the Method in which Christ and his Apostles taught this Service, was agreeable to Reason; viz. by exhorting Men to attend seriously, to weigh diligently, their Doctrines and Precepts, &c. and then asks, Are these, and such like Expressions calculated to enslave Mens Understandings, and to induce a blind and implicit Obedience? Such Methods may serve the Purpose of Superstition, but true Religion can gain nothing by them.

Dr. Whitcbot does this Justice to external Revelation, as to say, "The Scripture's Way of dealing with Men in Matters of Religion, is always by Evidence of Reason and Argument; and very judiciously adds, I reckon, That which has not Reason in it, or for it, is Man's Superstition, and not Religion of God's making:" What an Infinity of Disputes would this Rule have cut off? What I pray, was the grand Occasion of so many monstrous Here- fies, even in the primitive Times, but their believing the Scripture's Way of dealing with Men, was not by Evidence of
of Reason. And if any now think otherwise, are they not
in Danger of making no better Distinction between Religion
and Superstition, than a modern Philosopher, who thus con-
cisely distinguishes them; Tales publickly allow'd, Religion;
not allow'd, Superstition.

Br. Hoadly, the strenuous Asiérter of our religious, as well
as civil Rights, says, Authority is the greatest and most
irreconcilable Enemy to Truth and Argument, that this
World ever furnish'd out; All the Sophistry; all the Co-
lour of Plausibility; all the Artifice and Cunning of the
subtleft Disputer in the World, may be laid open, and
turn'd to the Advantage of that very Truth, which they
design'd to hide, or to depress: But against Authority
there is no Defence." And after having shewn, that it
was Authority that crush'd the noble Sentiments of Socrates
and Others; and that it was by Authority, that the Jews
and Heathens combated the Truth of the Gospel; he says,
"When Christians were increas'd to a Majority, and came
to think the same Method to be the only proper One, for
the Advantage of their Cause, which had been the Ene-
my and Destroyer of it; then, it was the Authority of
Christians, which, by Degrees, not only laid waste the
Honour of Christianity, but well nigh extinguish'd it a-
mong Men. — It was Authority, which would have
prevented all Reformation, where it is; and which has
put a Barrier against it, wherever it is not. — How in-
deed, can it be expected, that the same Thing, which has
in all Ages, and in all Countries, been hurtful to Truth,
and True Religion, amongst Men, shou'd in any Age, or
any Country, become a Friend and Guardian of them."
And to obviate an Objection easily foreseen, he says, "It was
Authority, which hinder'd the Voice of the Son of God
himself from being heard; and which alone stood in Op-
position to his powerful Arguments, and his divine Doc-
trine." Which supposes there's no Christian Doctrine,
but what has powerful Arguments to support it; or in other
Words, has Divinity stamp'd on it, shewing itself by its
innate Excellency to be the Will of God; since to put its
Credit on mere Authority, is to put its Credit on that,
which has been, and always will be, an Enemy to Truth:
Nay, he supposes, that were it possible, that Authority and
Truth could consist together, and the latter be receiv'd for
the sake of the former, it could not avail. His Words are,
"Where Truth happens to be receiv'd for the sake of Au-
thority; there is just so much diminish'd from the Love
of Truth, and the Glory of Reason, and the Acceptable-
ness of Men to God; as there is attributed to Authority."
And,

ARCHBISHOP Tillotson says, "All our Reasonings about
divine Revelation are necessarily gather'd by our natural
Notions about Religion; and therefore, he, who sincerely
desires to do the Will of God, is not apt to be impos'd on
by vain, and confident Pretences of divine Revelation;
but if any Doctrine be propos'd to him, which is pre-
tended to come from God, he measures it by those sure,
and steady Notions, which he has of the divine Nature
and Perfections; and by these he will easily discern, whe-
ther it be worthy of God or not, and likely to proceed
from him: He will consider the Nature and Tendency of
it, or whether it be a Doctrine according to Godliness,
such as is agreeable to the divine Nature and Perfections,
and tends to make us like unto God; if it be not, 'tho' an
Angel should bring it, he would not receive it." And if
no Miracles, no, not the Preaching of an Angel, ought to
make
"make us receive any Doctrine that does not carry those
internal Marks; no Miracles, certainly, ought to make
us reject any Doctrine that has these internal Marks." And
much to the same Purpose, our judicious Doctor Claget
says, "When Men pretend to work Miracles, and talk of
immediate Revelations, of knowing the Truth by Inspec-
tion, and of more than ordinary Illumination, we ought
not to be frightened with those big Words, from looking
what is under them; nor to be afraid of calling these
Things into Question, which are set off with high-flown
Pretences. From hence it has come to pass, that Su-
perstition and Idolatry, Enthusiasms and Impostures have
so much prevail'd in the World. It is somewhat strange,
that we should believe Men the more, for that very Rea-
son upon which we should believe them the less.

I shall give You the Sentiments of one judicious Divine
more, since they contain a Summary of what I have been
saying; his Words are, "It could not be avoidable, but
that this natural Reverence for divine Revelations, and
Proneness of believing them, would produce some ill
Effects, prejudicial to the Reason and Interest of Man-
kind; a fatal Credulity would creep into the World, and
possess the Minds of the more ignorant Persons; and in-
duce them blindly to believe every bold Pretender to Re-
velation. After a laborious and fruitless Search of future
Happiness, Men were apt to embrace any System of Re-
ligion presented to them; if it flatter'd their Hopes of fu-
ture Felicity, they were loth to discover the Error and
Illusion of any pleasing Revelation; they wish'd it might
be true, and at first, what they wish'd, they at last be-
liev'd to be true. — Many fear'd they should be injurious
to the divine Majesty, and incur the Guilt of Atheism, if
F f
they should scrupulously examine what pretended to carry the Stamp of his Authority, and to have been reveal'd by him. To entertain Scruples in this Case, was thought no less than Sacrilege, and every Doubt was esteem'd an Affront to God; to which may be added, That they should contract no small Merit, and ever lay an Obligation on God, if they immediately resign'd up their Judgment to his suppos'd Revelation, and blindly receiv'd it without any Doubt or Hesitation.

This in all Ages, open'd a wide Gap, and prepar'd a Way for Error and Superstition; while the Whimseys of every foolish Enthusiast, and the Follies of every bold Imposter were propos'd under the venerable Name of divine Oracles. Hence all the Absurdities of the Pagan Religion found Belief, and Entertainment in the World; and the most extravagant Impostors never wanted Proselytes. Hence the most pernicious Errors of Heretics, found Admission into the Church; and the Pretence of new Revelations, seduce'd some Part of the Christian World.

To this fatal Credulity, and Danger of Illusion arising from it, God and Nature have prescrib'd an excellent Remedy; the Use of our Reason, which may examine the Grounds and Testimonies of all pretended Revelations; enquire into their Truth, and after a scrupulous Trial, pass Sentence on them. This, the Interest of Truth, and the Honour of our Nature requires us to perform, that we may neither prostitute the former, nor deprecate the latter. — Without this precedent Enquiry, our Belief would become unlawful; for to obviate the Rules of Conduct, prescrib'd to our Understanding, were to overthrow all the Laws of Nature, to debase the
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"the Dignity of Mankind, and to efface the Image of God implanted in us. These Rules assure us, that God can't command any Thing foolish or ridiculous. — No greater Injury can be offer'd to the Deity, than to believe him the Author of any Religion, which prescribes, or encour-
rages foolish, or superstitious Practices. — Justly does Plutarch wonder, why Atheism should rather be accus'd of Impiety, than Superstition; since few are mov'd by any Defect in the Order of Government, to call in Quest-
ion the Existence of God; but the Tricks and Cheats of superstitious Persons; their Enthusiastic Motions, ri-
diculous Actions, Exorcisms, and Lustrations, and such like; give them Occasion to believe it better there should be no God, than such a God, as the Author of such a su-
perstitious Religion must necessarily be.

If this Author reasons justly, as all Protestants will allow, at least, when they write against the Enthusiasm of the Church of Rome; does it not follow, that 'tis our Duty, before we embrace any instituted Religion, to examine by that Light which God has given us, into every Part of it; and after a scrupulous Trial, pass Sentence on it? If the Interest of Truth, and the Honour of Man's Na-
ture require them to perform this grand Duty, must not their Reason, antecedently to all external Revelation, afford certain Tests to distinguish between Truth and Falsity in all religious Matters? T'would be ridiculous to tell Men, that 'tis a Crime worse than Atheism, to admit a Religion, which prescribes, or encourages foolish or superstitious Prac-
tices; unless upon a Supposition, that their Reason can tell them what are such Practices; and thereby hinder them from embracing a Religion, which requires Things of this Nature. And if Men are apt to embrace any Religion (the
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Muhametan for Instance) which flatters their Hopes of future Felicity, and makes them loth to discover the pleasing Illusion; does it not follow, that the more any Religion does so, the more Cause Men have critically to examine into its Reasonableness? Because without such a precedent Enquiry, their Belief would be irrational and unlawful, degrading the Dignity of Mankind, and effacing the Image of God implanted in them. And;

If the Absurdities, not only of the Pagan Religion, but even the most pernicious Errors among Christians, have been occasion'd thro' Want of previous Examination; nothing can be requisite to discover True Christianity, and to preserve it in its native Purity, free from all Superstition, but, after a strict Scrutiny, to admit nothing to belong to it, except what our Reason tells us is worthy of having God for its Author. And if be evident, that we can't discern whether any instituted Religion contains every Thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of a divine Original, except we can antecedently by our Reason discern what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author; it necessarily follows, that natural and reveal'd Religion can't differ: Because whatever Reason shews to be worthy of having God for its Author, must belong to Natural Religion; and whatever Reason tells us is unworthy of having God for its Author, can never belong to the True Reveal'd Religion. 'Tis upon this very Plan, that I have endeavour'd to shew You wherein True and Genuine Christianity consists.

B. By the Reasoning of these Divines, Religion is the plainest Thing in the World: We, it seems, have nothing to do, but to examine what Notions are worthy of God, in Order to know his Will; but do they tell us, how we may certainly know what those Notions are?

A. All
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A. All Divines of what Denomination soever agree, at least in Words, that God can't act arbitrarily in the Government of the World, or command Things for Commanding-sake; but that all his Laws, being calculated for the Good of Mankind, carry with them the Marks of consummate Wisdom and Goodness. However, I shall mention two.

The incomparable Archbishop Tillotson says, "It would be little less than an horrid and dreadful Blasphemy, to say, that God, out of his sovereign Will and Pleasure, can do any Thing which contradicts the Nature of God, or the essential Perfections of the Deity; or to imagine that the Pleasure and Will of the holy, just, and good God, is not always regulated, and determin'd by the essential and indispensable Laws of Goodness, Holiness and Righteousness.

The judicious Dr. Scot affirms, "That to suppose the Will and Power of God is not perfectly subject to his moral Perfections, is to suppose him a very defective and imperfect Being; a lawless Will and Power being the greatest Defect in Nature; wherefore to secure our Minds against all injurious Apprehensions of God, this is a most necessary Rule; that we conceive him to be such a Being as can never will, nor act any Thing, but what his own essential Wisdom, Goodness and Justice do approve. To affirm, he is not oblig'd to regulate himself by Wisdom, Justice and Goodness; or that he can do otherwise; is to attribute to him a Power to will, or act foolishly, &c.

B. I shou'd readily approve what the Authors you quote have said, to shew the Reasonableness of the divine Law in every Instance; were there not in Religion, Propositions to be believ'd, which are above Reason.

A. If
A. If I do not understand the Terms of a Proposition; or if they are inconsistent with one another; or so uncertain, that I know not what Meaning to fix on them; here is nothing told me, and consequently, no Room for Belief: But in all Cases, where I am capable of understanding a Proposition, 'tis Reason must inform me, whether 'tis certain, probable, or uncertain; and even in Propositions relating to such Facts as we learn from Report, 'tis by our Reason alone, in comparing Circumstances, &c. that we must judge of their Probability.

Altho' designing Men very well know, that it's impossible to believe, when we know not What it is we are to believe; or to believe an absurd, or contradictory Proposition; yet they, because without Examination, People may be brought to fancy they believe such Things; and it being their Interest to confound Mens Understandings, and prevent all Inquiry, craftily invented the Notion of believing Things above Reason: Here the Ravings of an Enthusiast are on a Level with the Dictates of infinite Wisdom, and None else render'd most sacred; here a Contradiction is of great Use to maintain a Doctrine, that, when fairly stated, is not defensible; because by talking backward and forward, by using obscure Terms, and taking Words in different Sences, they may easily amuse, and puzzle the People. On this Foundation Transubstantiation is built, and most of those mysterious Propositions, about which in former Days Christians so frequently murder'd each other.

But, if the Scripture was design'd to be understood, it must be within the Reach of human Understanding; and consequently, it can't contain Propositions that are either above, or below human Understanding; and if there are no Propositions
fitions in the Bible, but what have certain Ideas, by common Usage, annex'd to the Words; how can we suppose some are design'd to be understood, and some not? or know which are, and which are not? And indeed, if the End of God's giving a Revelation was to direct Mens Thoughts and Actions, it must (as necessary to that End) be deliver'd in such a Way, as is plain and easy to be understood, even by mean Capacities; and consequently, to suppose it dark and mysterious in any Part, is to represent it as unworthy of having God for its Author. And,

One wou'd think, that Men, when they knew they had Truth on their Side, wou'd speak after the plainest Manner, and not study to disguise it by unnatural Ways of expressing themselves; especially, when they reflect on others for so doing.

The Christians said, The Heathens were conscious their Religion was absurd, by their having Recourse to allegorical, æigmatical, and mysterious Explications; and consequently, that it cou'd not be design'd for the common People, incapable of such Explications; and that their Priests, instead of defending it, render'd it uncertain; since where the literal Sense is quitted, there may be many allegorical, or spiritual Sences, opposite to one another; and indeed, the wise Men among them, as Tully, &c. own'd as much.

Nor did the Heathens fail to retort the like Objection upon the Christians; and, in Truth, they equall'd, if not out-did them in allegorising away, not only the plainest Texts, but even Matter of Fact; which prov'd the Occasion of innumerable Heresies.

Dupin, speaking of the extravagant Opinions, which obtain'd among silly People in the primitive Times; says, "They
They sprang from the Principles of the Pagan Philosophers; and from the Mysteries, which crack-brain’d Men put on the History of the Old and New Testament, according to their Imaginations; the more extraordinary these Opinions were, the more did they relish, and the better did they like them; and those who invented them, publish’d them gravely as great Mysteries to the simple, who were all dispos’d to receive them. But could any crack-brain’d Writers have found out more Mysteries in the Old and New Testament, than the primitive Fathers; (who interpreted them according to their Imaginations, and jumbl’d them together with that Pagan Philosophy they were educated in?) Or have publish’d their mysterious Reveries with greater Gravity to simple People, always dispos’d to receive what they do not understand?

The same Author, speaking of St. Barnabas’s Cathlick Epistle in Answer to this Objection, “That it was incredible so great an Apostle, full of the Holy Ghost, and Colleague of St. Paul, shou’d be the Author of such forc’d Allegories, and extravagant Explications of Scripture; of those various Fables concerning Animals, with divers other Conceits of the like Nature; says, “They have but little Knowledge of the Jewish Nation, and of the primitive Christians educated in the Synagogues, who obstinately believe, that such Sort of Notions cou’d not proceed from them; that on the contrary, it was their very Character to turn the whole Scripture into Allegory. And,

I think, none of our celebrated Writers reject this Epistle as spurious, because of the Allegories it abounds with:

Our excellent Arch bishop says, “Even St. Paul himself in his Epistles, receiv’d by us as Canonical, affords us not a few
few Instances of this, which is so much found Fault with
in St. Barnabas: As I might easily make appear from a
Multitude of Passages out of them, were it needful for
me to enlarge myself on a Point, which every One, who
has read the Scriptures with any Care, cannot choose but
have observ'd. And those Christians St. Paul mentions,
for believing the Resurrection was past, were, no Doubt,
great Allegorists.

The primitive Fathers exactly follow'd the Precedent set
them by the Apostle Barnabas, and other Apostolical Men:
Clemens of Alexandria says, "The Oeconomy of the Law,
Stroma l. 2. c. 19 p. 403. B
is typical and prophetical; and that Moses and the Pro-
phets, wrote all in Parables." So Tertullian, "The
Law is spiritual and prophetical, and almost in all Points
figurative." And Le Clerc observes, that "The Fathers Le Clerc's Life
of Clem Alexander.
To. 10. p. 236
did not content themselves with interpreting the Old Test-
ment allegorically, but they did the same as to the
New." — But because,

Origen was famous for this allegorical Method, and
by Virtue of it esteem'd the greatest Champion of Christi-
anity, next to the Apostles; and since what he says, was
not only his own, but the Sense of the then Church, it
will not be improper to cite him. "If we adhere, says he, Hom. 7. in
of God, as the Jews do, in the common Acceptation of the
Words, I blush to own, that God ever gave such Laws; for
mere human Constitutions, as those of the Romans, Athe-
nians, or Lacedemonians, will seem more reasonable and
proper; but if the Law of God is to be understood in the
Sense the Church teaches, then truly it exceeds all human
Ordinances." For which Reason he makes the allegorical
Way of interpreting Scripture to be the Key of Knowledge;
G g
and following the Letter of the Law, the direct Way to
Infidelity and vain Superstition. Literam sequentes in In-
fidelitatem, & varias Superstitiones incurunt. And he ob-
jects to Marcion the Heretick, that he was against the alle-
gorical Way of interpreting Scripture.

B. Do not these Fathers suppose God either a weak Be-
ing, who could not frame as wise Laws as Men; or else an
ill-natur'd Being, who, in Order to puzzle Mankind, speaks:
in Riddles and Mysteries? What should we think of a Law-
yer, who said, he shou'd be ashamed of the Laws of his
own Country, if taken in a literal Sense; but that there was
an allegorical Sense which could one but hit, wou'd discov-
er profound Wisdom?

A. Thus the Fathers sufficiently acknowledg'd the Sove-
reignty of Reason, in allegorising away Matters of Fact,
that were in Truth, incapable of being allegoris'd; tho'
that is but running into one unreasonable Thing, to get
rid of another: And how can we depend on any Thing
sai'd in the Scripture, if we can't on its Facts? One
wou'd think nothing was a plainer Fact, than that of
Loi's lying with his two Daughters, yet St. Irenæus alle-
gorises That away; and is so fond of Allegorising, that
for the sake of it, he contradicts the Scripture, and says,
"The Harlot Raab entertain'd three Spies;" and had he
not made them three, he wou'd have been at a Loss,
how to say as he does, that this Harlot bid in her House,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "How can we be edi-
fy'd, says Origen, in reading that so great a Patriarch
as Abraham, not only ly'd to King Abimelech, but also
betray'd to him the Chastity of his Wife? What Instruc-
tions can we reap from the Wife of so great a Patriarch,
if we think she was expos'd to be debauch'd by her Hus-
band's
Chap. 12. Christianity as old as the Creation.

"band's Contrivance. Let the Jews believe such Things, and those with them, who are greater Friends to the Letter than to the Spirit.

He asserts, "That there are even in the Gospel Things said, which, according to the Letter, or taken in their literal Sense, are mere Falsities, or Lies; as where our Saviour says,

"He that believeth in me, the Works that I do, shall he do also; and greater Works than these shall he do." John xiv. xii, &c." which, he shews, was not verify'd literally, but spiritually. And,

"That it was Want of Knowledge in the Scriptures, to think, that God spent six real Days in the Work of the Creation.

He desires any one to shew, "how the Truth of the Gospels can be maintain'd, or their seeming Contrarieties clear'd by any other than the analogical Method; which he affirms necessary for that Purpose.

He says, "The pair of Turtle-Doves, or two young Pigeons, offer'd for Jesus, were not such as we see with our carnal Eyes; not Birds, such as fly in the Air; but something divine and august, beyond human Contemplation, &c.

If you desire to be more plentifully furnish'd with Instances of the like Nature with those abovemention'd, consult the Philocalia of Origen.

St. Austin, a Man of the greatest Authority of all the Contra Mendacium, c. 12. Fathers, says, "We must not take the Story of Jacob's cheating his Father, by personating his Brother Esau, literal. rally, left the Scripture should seem to encourage Lying;"

and speaking of Jesus cursing the Fig-Tree, says, Hoc fac-tum, nisi figuratum situlum inventur. And he, with the rest of the Fathers, not only most unnaturally allegorizes away the History of the Fall, but even of the whole Creation; &c.

G.g
Christianity as old as the Creation.

and says, "The whole World was created in an Instant;" and tho' there is not one Word about Angels in the Text, yet this angelical Doctor makes Part of the six Days Labour relate to the Creation of Angels.

B. But how could he account for God's instituting the Sabbath, upon his resting from his six Days Labour, if all Things were created in an Instant?

A. How happy he was in allegorising, You may judge from his explaining that Passage of Genesis, iii. xiv. where the Latin Version which he follow'd, runs thus; Upon thy Breast, and upon thy Belly shalt thou go, and Dust shalt thou eat all the Days of thy Life. By the Breast, says he, is to be understood Pride; by the Belly, the Lusts of the Flesh; and that which is added, Dust shalt thou eat, is meant Curiosity, which extends only to Things temporal and earthly; and by Curiosity, he means Avarice. And,

St. Ambrose will not allow the Rainbow to be the Bow, which God plac'd in the Clouds; and faith, "Far be it from us to call this God's Bow; for this Bow, which is call'd Iris, is seen indeed, in the Day, but never appears in the Night:" For which weighty Reason, he substitutes in its Room, a strange, allegorical Bow, out of his own Imagination.

If the Fathers could allegorise away the most stubborn Matters of Fact, they could have no Difficulty in allegorising away any other Matter, where the Words are capable of various Senses: One would think, it was difficult to find out an allegorical Meaning to this Text, O Daughter of Babylon, happy is he, who taketh, and dasheth thy little Ones against the Stones; yet nothing is too hard for Origen, who assures us, that the Text intends, The Man who dasheth his vicious Thoughts against the solid Rock of Reason.
And indeed, the Fathers have so turn'd, and twisted the Scripture, with a pious Intention to make it speak nothing but what they thought agreeable to Reason; that they have render'd it like Aristotle's \textit{Materia prima}; \textit{nec quid, nec quale, nec quantum, nec aliquid eorum de quibus ens denominatur}: For by making the Scripture, in so many Places, say one Thing, and mean another, they have destroy'd its Certainty; since as \textit{Le Clerc} observes, "If, according to this Method, the sacred Writers had said quite another Thing than what they said, Or, if you will the quite contrary, yet One might find as good Sence in them; as those that will try it will presently observe." Therefore the \textit{Christians}, and the \textit{Jews} wou'd have done much better to keep close to the Letter, than to use so uncertain a Method, to defend the holy Scripture against the \textit{Pagans}.

B. \textit{All} the Fathers do not allegorise like \textit{Origen}; \textit{Justin Martyr}, for Instance, afferts, that the Threatning, that \textit{In} \\
\textit{his} \\
\textit{the} \\
\textit{Day} \\
\textit{thou} \\
\textit{eatest} \\
\textit{thefo} \\
\textit{thou} \\
\textit{shalt} \\
\textit{surely} \\
\textit{dye}, was literally fulfill'd, in that \textit{Adam} did not live out a thousand Years; which, with God, is but one Day: But to go no further than the Story of \textit{Abraham}'s prostituting his Wife; \textit{St. Ambrose}, to justify \textit{Abraham}'s Conduct, roundly afferts, Adultery to be no Crime before the giving of the Law by \textit{Moses}. And \textit{St. Austin} makes Adultery still lawful, if Husband and Wife content. \textit{St. Jerom}, indeed, runs into the other Extream, and approves the Conduct of those, who kill'd themselves, to preserve their Chastity. But the most eloquent \textit{St. Chrysostom} enlarges very much in Commendation of \textit{Abraham} and \textit{Sarah}, and says, "Tho' no-\textit{thing} gives a Husband more Uneasiness, than to imagine his Wife has to do with another; yet this just Man did what he cou'd, even to accomplish the Act of Adul-

\textit{tery},
tery. And adds, that Sarah too, (whom he sets as a Pattern for all Marry'd Women) accepted the Proposal very courageously; and then cries out, Who can enough admire this Readiness to obey her Husband? Who can sufficiently celebrate the Praises of Sarah, who, after so long Continence, and at her great Age, readily consented to this Act of Adultery, and to let the Barbarian have the Use of her Body, to save her Husband?

A. Might not those Fathers as well have allegoris'd, as talk'd thus absurdly? 'Tis chiefly owing to the Papists taking some Words in a literal Sense, relating to the eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of the Son of Man, that makes them to be of a different Religion from the Protestants; and tho' two Parties may agree, in taking the same Words in an allegorical Sense; yet by allegorising them differently, they may be of different Religions: By allegorising some Texts, the Jews have made the Messiah a Temporal Prince; the Christians a Spiritual One. Mr. Whiston must think there are no Words so plain, but are capable of being allegorised; since, he supposes the Catholic Church has all along allegorised plain Love-Songs, between Solomon and one of his Mistresses, into spiritual Hymns between Christ and his Spouse, the Church. And what Dr. South must have thought of the Revelations, I leave you to judge, when he does not scruple to call it a mysterious, extraordinary Book; which, perhaps, the more 'tis study'd, the less 'tis understood; as generally finding a Man crack'd, or making him so. And had not the Mahometan Divines had the Knack of allegorising Nonsense, Fools, and frantick Persons wouldn't have been had in such Honour and Reverence among the Mussulmen, only because their Revelations and Enthusiasms transported them.
them out of the ordinary Temper of Humanity. Therefore, upon the whole, I must needs say, Happy is the Man, who is so far, at least, directed by the Law of Reason, and the Religion of Nature, as to suffer no Mysteries, or unintelligible Propositions, no Allegories, no Hyperboles, no Metaphors, Types, Parables, or Phrases of an uncertain Signification, to confound his Understanding. And certainly, the common Parent of Mankind is too good and gracious, to put the Happiness of All his Children on any other Doctrines, than such as plainly shew themselves to be the Will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate; if they have but Courage and Honesty to make use of their Reason: Otherwise the Scripture would not be plain in all necessary Things; even to Babes and Sucklings.

B. You suppose then, that the Bulk of Mankind are taught by God himself, to know what Religion comes from him; even tho' they want Letters, to make 'em capable of understanding those external Proofs, on which all traditional Religions do, and must depend.
CHRISTIANITY AS OLD AS THE CREATION.

CHAP. XIII.

The Bulk of Mankind, by their Reason, must be able to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; otherwise they can never extricate themselves from that Superstition they chance to be educated in.

Religion either does not concern the Majority, as being incapable of forming a Judgment about it; or it must carry such internal Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean Capacity are able to discover; or else notwithstanding the infinite Variety of Religions, All who do not understand the Original Languages their traditional Religions are written in, which is all Mankind, a very few excepted, are alike bound in all Places to pin their Faith on their Priests, and believe in Men, who have an Interest to deceive them; and who have seldom fail'd to do so, when Occasion serves.

Can People, if incapable by their Reason to distinguish Truth from Falshood, have any Thing more to plead for the Truth of their Religion, than that they believe it to be the
the True Religion; because their Priests, who are hir’d to
maintain it, tell them it was a long While ago reveal’d to
certain Persons, who, as they, on their Priestly Words, af-
sure them, were too wise to be impos’d on themselves; and
too honest to impose on others: And that no Change cou’d
have been made in their Religion in After-times; the Care
Men have of their own Souls, as well as their natural Af-
fections for Posterity, obliging them from Generation to Ge-
neration, to hand down their Religion just as they re-
ceiv’d it: And that it was morally impossible, Innovations
shou’d creep in, since it wou’d be the highest Folly in any
to attempt to introduce new Doctrines, as a Tradition re-
ceiv’d from their Ancestors; when all must know they had
receiv’d no such Tradition. As This is all, the Bulk of
Mankind, if they are not capable of judging from the
Doctrines themselves of their Truth, can say for their
Religion; so they, in all Places, make use of this Argu-
ment; and with equal Confidence aver, That, tho’ all other
traditionary Religions are full of gros Falshoods, and most
absurd Notions, which their Priests impudently impose on
them as divine Truths; yet our own Priests are such faith-
ful Representers of Things, that One may as well ques-
tion the Truth of all History, as the Truth of Things believ’d
on their Authority. Priests of other Religions, we know,
will lie for Interest, and conscious that their traditional
Religion will not bear Examination, guard it with penal
Laws; but we can never suspe’t, that our own Priests,
Tho’ they take the same Methods, act on the same Mo-
tives.

This boast’d Argument, in which Men of all Reli-
gions so much triumph, if it proves any Thing, wou’d
prove there never was, nor cou’d be any false Religion,
Hh either
either in whole, or part; because Truth being before Falsehood, and Mens Ancestors having once possessed it, no Change cou'd afterward ever happen: Whereas, on the contrary, tho' there have been at Times great Numbers of traditional Religions, yet as far as it appears, no One of them has long remain'd the same; at least, in such Points as were merely founded on Tradition.

I see no Middle, but that we must either own, that there are such internal Marks fix'd to every Part of the true Religion, as will enable the Bulk of Mankind to distinguish it from all false Religions; or else that all traditionary Religions are upon a Level: Since those, who, in every Country, are hir'd to maintain them, will not fail to assert, they have all external Marks; such as Uninterrupted Traditions, incontestible Miracles, Confession of Adversaries, Number of Proselytes, Agreement among themselves; and all those other external Arguments, that the Papists and Mahometans set so high a Value on. In this Case, what can the common People do, who understand not a Word of the Language, their Religion, and its external Proofs are writ in, but be of the Religion in which they are educated; especially, if nothing is suffer'd to be publish'd, which may, in the least, tend to make them question its Truth; and all other Religions are represented as full of the grossest Absurdities.

Had the People of Rome, in the primitive Times of Christianity, been govern'd by external Marks, none of them had quitted their old Religion, which had every external Mark proper to recommend it; and under which they were so blest'd, as to become Masters of the best Part of the known World. But,

Because
Becausethis is a Point, wherein the greatest Part of Mankind are, at all Times, nearly concern’d, I shall beg Leave to mention, tho’ it be somewhat long, what Mr. Lock says on this Head.

"Have the Bulk of Mankind no other Guide, but of human Accident, and blind Chance, to conduct them to their Happiness, or Misery? Are the current Opinions, and licensed Guides of every Country sufficient Evidence and Security to every Man, to venture his greatest Concernments on; nay, his everlasting Happiness, or Misery? Or, can those be the certain and infallible Oracles and Standards of Truth, which teach one Thing in Christendom, and another in Turkey? Or, shall a poor Country-man be eternally happy, for having the Chance to be born in Italy; or a Day-Labourer be unavoidably lost, because he had the ill Luck to be born in England? How ready some Men may be to say some of these Things, I will not here examine; but this I am sure, that Men must allow one or other of these to be true; (let them choose which they please.) or else grant, that God has furnished Men with Faculties sufficient to direct them in the Way they should take, if they will but seriously employ them that Way, when their ordinary Vocations allow them the Leisure.

There can’t be a more dangerous Thing to rely on than the Opinion of others, nor more likely to mislead One; since there is much more Falshood and Error among Men than Truth and Knowledge: And if the Opinions and Persuasions of others, whom we know, and think well of, be a Ground of Assent, Men have Reason to be Heathens in Japan, Mahometans in Turky, Papists in Spain, Protestants in England, and Lutherans in Sweden.
Was there a Set of Priests, on whose Authority the common People were everywhere to depend for their religious Sentiments, they must be known by some plain, external Marks: To say the People must follow those Priests that are in the right, is to suppose People must judge what is right; and then judge (if that concern'd them) whether any Set of Priests are in the right; and if Men can't believe, when they see no Reason for believing, what Reason can the Bulk of Mankind have to prefer one Religion before a Number of Others, on the Account of such Things, as, upon Priestly Authority, are believ'd to belong to every One of them; such as Visions, Dreams, Trances, Extacies, Inspirations, Conference with Spirits, traditioary Report about Miracles, &c.? And shou'd the Chance of Education throw Men into the True traditionary Religion, yet considering its Style is not very exact, there being generally more express'd than is meant; and Things of the greatest Consequence are often so treated, as that Men can't from thence perceive the Nature and Extent of their Duty; and even Precepts of the greatest Moment are sometimes so far from being deliver'd plainly and simply, that they are express'd after a general, undetermin'd, nay, hyperbolical Manner; so that even in this Case, there's a Necessity for the common People to have Recourse to the Reason of Things.

Are not the unlearned wholly unacquainted with those Keys of Solution (as they are call'd) which the learned have such frequent Recourse to; such as those of a Transposition of Words, or Clauses, Errors of Copies, various Readings, various Meanings of the same Word, Punctuation, Taking away, or Adding of the Negative Particle;
Chap. 13. 'Christianity as old as the Creation.

Allusion to Customs, Consideration of the Matter in hand, Exaggeration, Interrogation, Parenthesis, literal Sense, figurative Sense; Want of exactness in the sacred Writers, Prudence in concealing some Things, or in complying with some Opinions prevailing in their Times; Condescension to Pagans or Jews; using such Ideas as prevail'd in such a Religion; Prejudication in the Hearers, Answers suitable to their Needs, rather than to their Queries; compendious Expressions, Phraseology of that Time, the Author's Nation, or native Country; Parallel Passages, Precepts peculiar to the Apostles, Advices to Perfection, Censures against certain Hereticks, the Circumstances of the Subject, the Scope of the Author, what goes before, and what follows; the Barrenness of the Hebrew Tongue; and consequently, its Ambiguity, its particular Idioms, the various Senses of the same Verb, in different Conjugations; the Want of certain Ways of Expression us'd in other Tongues; the sublime, and metaphorical Expressions most frequent in the Oriental Languages; the Imitation of the Hebrew Idiom in the LXX Version; and in the Original Text of the New Testament Greek of the Synagogue, &c.

The Bulk of Mankind being incapable of Metaphysical Speculations, and their Understandings giv'n them to discern those Rules of Action which God prescribes them, he has, no doubt, adjusted one to the other; and consequently, the Simplicity, the Reasonableness, the Conveniency and Usefulness of these Rules, point them out to be the Will of God, to Men in all Places, and Conditions of Life; but to carry Things further, can only serve the Designs of ill Men, who have taken an Occasion from thence to abuse their Credulity to the vilest Purposes.

Can, for Instance, the common People, who understand not a Word of the Language, the Jewish Books are writ in,
be better Judges than the Jews themselves of the Meaning of their own Books; and of their own Prophets speaking in their own Language? Or, are the common People capable of judging of the innumerable Disputes among Christians; if those likewise depend, not on the Reason of Things, but on the critical Understanding of Books, written in dead Languages; nay, what do they know of the distinguishing Doctrines of their own Churches? They, indeed, on all Sides, know, whom their Leaders would have them hate, but little, or nothing of those Opinions, which divide their Leaders.

B. Is there any Divine of Note, who makes Revelation thus difficult to be understood by the ignorant, and unlearned?

A. I shall mention one, against whom You have no Exception, who represents it thus obscure, even to the learned. Is not Bishop Taylor (highly esteem'd for his devotional, as well as polemical Works) a competent Judge in this Matter? And he (summing up, and that very briefly, what he had spent several Chapters to prove at large) says, "Since there are so many Copies with infinite Varieties of Reading; since a various Interpunction, a Parenthesis, a Letter, an Accent may much alter the Sense; since some Places have divers literal Senses, many have spiritual, mystical and allegorical Meanings; since there are so many Tropes, Metonemies, Ironies, Hyperboles, Properties and Impropieties of Language, whose Understanding depends upon such Circumstances, that it is almost impossible to know the proper Interpretation; now that the Knowledge of such Circumstances, and particular Stories is irrecoverably lost: Since there are some Mysteries, which, at the best Advantage of Expression..."
are not easy to be apprehended, and whose Explication, by reason of our Imperfections, must needs be dark, sometimes unintelligible. And lastly, since those ordinary Means of expounding Scripture, as searching the Originals, Conference of Places, Parity of Reason, Analysis of Faith, are all dubious, uncertain, and very fallible: He that is the wisest, and by Consequence, the likeliest to expound truest, in all Probability of Reason, will be very far from Confidence; because every One of them, and many more, are like so many Degrees of Improbability and Incertainty, all depressing our Certainty of finding out Truth in such Mysteries, and amidst so many Difficulties.

And in another Place, "The Obscurity of some Questions, the Niceties of some Articles, the Intricacy of some Revelations, the Variety of human Understandings, the Winding of Logick, the Tricks of Adversaries, the Subtilty of Sophisters, the Engagement of Educations, Personal Affections, the portentous Number of Writers, the Infinity of Authorities, the Vauntess of some Arguments, consisting in an Enumeration of many Particulars, the Incertainty of Others, the several Degrees of Probability, the Difficulties of Scripture, the Invalidity of Probation, of Tradition, the Opposition of all exterior Arguments to one another, and their open Contestation, the publick Violence done to Authors and Records, the private Arts and Supplantings, the Falsifyings, the indefatigable Industry of some Men to abuse all Understandings, and all Persuasions into their own Opinions: These, and a Thousand more, have made it impossible for any Man in so great a Variety of Matter, not to be deceive'd." And I might add in Confirmation of the Bishop's Sentiments, an
demonstrate too, were it not endless to go through Particulars, that there's scarce a Text, except in Things of their own Nature evident, where Commentators do not differ. Whether these Considerations alone, be not a sufficient Reason for the unlearned to adhere to those plain, simple Truths the Light of Nature dictates, I leave you to judge.

And do not other Divines, in Effect, say the same, when they make Religion not to be implanted in human Nature; but an Art so far above the Capacity of common People, that it requires great Learning and Labour to be competently skill'd in it; and tell us, that they, who have spent their Time in studying it, can't have too much Honour, or too great Rewards given them for deciding for the People, Points of Religion, as the Common Law Judges do Points of Property; and that People justly incur the dreadful Anathema pronounc'd in Synods and Councils, against those who refuse to submit to their Decisions; and that 'tis the Duty of the Magistrate to see their Decrees put in Execution.

A Right in Priests, whether in, or out of Convocations, to judge, and determine for the People, what they shall believe and profess, supposes it a Duty in them so to believe, and so to profess; and consequently, that the Religion of the Laity consists in believing in their Priests; and that whatever they decree, is to be the Rule of their Actions.

B. This is too severe; they only claim a Power of interpreting the Laws of Christ, not of making new Laws themselves.

A. There's only a verbal Difference between a Lawmaker, and a sovereign Interpreter of Laws, to whose Interpretation all are oblig'd to submit; so that ever since the Council of —— People have been taught to renounce both Natural and Reveal'd Religion; and become Priests— Wor—
Chap. 13. Christianity as old as the Creation.

Worshippers, and to have a divine Faith in their Dictates; and indeed, so they ought, if these Priests had, as they claim, a judicial Power to determine of Mens Condition hereafter; and thereby make God a meer Executioner of their Sentences, by which they bind, or loose Mens Sins to Eternity.

As this Notion carries with it the highest Blasphemy and Idolatry, so I think it is treated too gently by Mr. Chillingworth, in saying, "This presumptuous imposings of the Senses of Men upon the Words of God, the special Sense of Men upon the general Words of God, and laying them upon Mens Consciences together under the equal Penalty of Death and Damnation; This vain Conceit, that we can speak of the Things of God better than the Words of God; This Deifying our own Interpretations, and tyrannous Inforcing them upon others; This Restraining of the Word of God from that Latitude and Generality; and the Understanding of Men from that Liberty, wherein Christ and the Apostles left them; is, and hath been the only Fountain of all the Schisms of the Church, and that which makes them immortal; the common Incendiary of Christendom, and that which tears in Pieces, not the Coat, but the Bowels and Members of Christ; "Ridente Turca, nec dolente Judeo.

In short, True Religion can't but be plain, simple, and natural, as design'd for all Mankind, adapted to every Capacity, and suited to every Condition and Circumstance of Life; and if it be render'd otherwise, is it not owing to those, who have made it their Business to puzzle Mankind, and render plain Things obscure; in Order to get the Consciences, and consequently, the Properties of the People at their Disposal; and to be in a Manner ador'd, notwithstanding...
ing the grossest Immoralities, as the sole Dispensers of such Things, as no Ways relate to the Good of the Community, and to destroy all that will not comply with their pernicious Designs, as Enemies of God, and his Holy Church? And,

Tho' the Clergy have taken all possible Methods for a blind Submission, and a forc'd Uniformity, yet they have not been able to hinder Christians from being endlesly divided, even in what they call Fundamentals; and tho' no one Sect, as far as I can find, have ventur'd to give us a compleat Set of their Fundamentals; yet all Sects unanimously own, that those Things which are necessary to the Salvation of Christians, must be so plain, as that all Christians, even those of the meanest Capacities, may apprehend them. Would not One think, that a little honest Reflection shou'd carry them further, and make them see, that it is inconsistent with the universal and unlimited Goodness of the common Parent of Mankind, not to make That which is necessary for the Salvation of all Men, so plain, as that all Men may know it; tho' One wou'd be apt to think, that by the Number and Oddness of those Things, which in most Churches Divines have made necessary to Salvation, they were more zealous to damn others than to save themselves; or at least, that they thought there was no Room in Heaven for any, but Men of their own narrow Principles.

But,

Let me ask these charitable Gentlemen, Whether the Happiness of Others wou'd make Christians unhappy? Or, what Prejudice it will be to them, to suppose God is no Respecter of Persons; but that all may come to him, who believe that he will reward those in all Nations, and at all Times, who have diligently fought him?

Natural
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Natural Religion, which is of the greatest Importance to Mankind, and is a perpetual standing Rule for Men of the meanest, as well as highest Capacity, carries its own Evidence with it, those internal, inseparable Marks of Truth; but can that be said of any Religion, which depends on Tradition? Does not That want foreign Aid and Assistance? Ought we not to be certain, that the first Propagators of it could not be impos’d on themselves, or would not impose on Others? Or in other Words, were infallible, and impeccable? But since Numbers have taken their Reveries for divine Inspirations, ought we not to have certain Marks to distinguish one from the other? Nor is this adone sufficient; for if evil Beings can impress Notions in Mens Minds as strongly as good Beings, and cause Miracles to be done in Confirmation of them; is there any Way to know, to which of the two Notions thus impress’d are owing, but from their Nature and Tendency; or those internal Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, by which they plainly shew themselves to be Part of Natural Religion? If so, can external Proofs carry us further than the internal Proofs do? But,

'Tis not enough to be certain, these Men were not impos’d on; we must be as certain, they wou’d on no Occasion whatever impose on Others: Or in other Words, were not Men of like Passions and Infirmities with other Mortals. Does not the Scripture give very many Instances of inspir’d Persons as much govern’d by their Passions, as uninspir’d? Was not Abraham, tho’ a Prophet, and so dear to God, that he wou’d not destroy a neighbouring Town without acquainting him with it; guilty of an incestuous Marriage, his Wife being his Sister by the Father’s Side? And — 20. 12. did he not endeavour to betray her Chastity to two Kings — 12. 17.
in disowning her to be his Wife, by which Conduct, he—12. 16. 
got from one of them, who entreated him well for her Sake, Men and Maid-Servants, Sheep, Oxen, Asses, and Camels; and from the other, a Thousand Pieces of Silver, besides, Sheep, Oxen, Men and Women-Servants? And immedi-15. 6. ately after, his Faith was counted to him for Righteousness, did he not doubt of God's Promise, till God spoke—12. 13. to him in a deep Sleep?

Was not David, tho' a Prophet, and a Man after God's own Heart, guilty of many enormous Crimes, from the—Sam. 25. 22. Time he design'd to have murder'd all the Males in Nabal's Family, because he wou'd not pay Contributions to him, and those Men, who out of Debt, Discontent and Distress join'd him? tho' Nabal, by so doing, might have incurred the Fate of those Priests, from whom, David, by several—21. 6. 9. Falshoods, got both Shew-Bread, and Goliab's Sword. What cou'd be more treacherous, than his invading People, that were at least, in Peace, if not Allies of the King of Gath, to whom he fled for Safety; and having neither fav'd Man or Woman alive to bring Tydings, told his generous Protector, he had been making an In-road into Judea?

In a Word, (not to mention his Treatment of Uriah, which no brave Man can think of without Horror,) did he not leave the World in a very unforgiving Temper, when the last Thing he commanded his Son Solomon was, to put Shimei to Death; tho' he had sworn before the Lord, that he wou'd not put him to Death, and that he shou'd not dye?

Solomon, tho' inspir'd with Wisdom from Above, and had Conferences with God himself, yet his Passion for Women, made him guilty of gross Idolatry. And not to multiply Instances; we find one Man of God lying to anoth-
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other Man of God in the Name of God; purely for the Pleasure of making him eat Bread, and drink Water with him. 1 Kings 13. And if we go to the New Testament, 'tis plain, by what 18. our Saviour says to those, who had professed, and cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works in his Name, Deport from me, ye that work Iniquity; that neither Prophecies, nor Miracles are absolute Securities for Men to depend on. Nay, do we not find one of the Apostles, tho' he, with the rest, had the Power of doing Miracles, even to the Raising of the dead, betraying his Master for the 10. paltry Sum of thirty Pieces of Silver? And the other Apostles not only fled, and deserted him; but the chief of them forsook him, as often as he was ask'd about his 26. being one of his Followers; and he, as well as Barnabas, Gal. 2. 13. was afterwards guilty of a mean Piece of Dishimulation. And Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp Contention, tho' 39. about a very indifferent Matter, as to cause a Separation:

And even St. Paul says, The Good that I would, I do not; Rom. 7. 19. but the Evil which I would not, that I do. — But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members. And a great deal more to the same Purpose.

Do not these Instances, tho' many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspir'd Persons, whether Prophets or Apostles, are subject to the same Passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other Men? And that we sin against that Reason, which was given us to distinguish between Good and Evil, Religion and Superstition, if we do not by it examine all Doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever deliver'd? But supposing Prophets and Apostles impeccable as well as infallible; yet what Certainty can People have.
have, that those Things which were taught by them have been faithfully convey'd down for many Generations together by Men, who were far from being infallible, or impeccable? So that here, certainly, they ought to make use of their Reason, in judging of all Doctrines thus convey'd. Admitting Tradition has been a faithful Conveyancer, yet how can the common People be certain the Scripture has been truly translated? But, granting even That; yet since most Texts have vastly vary'd, and sometimes contrary Interpretations, and the literal Sense very often kills, how can they be confident they do not mistake their Meaning, except the Reason of Things makes it evident? But supposing no such Uncertainty in the Meaning of Texts, yet since the Scripture contains some Precepts, which are occasional, obliging only certain Persons, upon certain Occasions, and in certain Circumstances; and others that are of an eternal Obligation, and makes no Distinction in delivering them; can Men, even the most learned, have any other Way of knowing one from the other, but from the Nature of the Precepts; and that those only are of an eternal Obligation, which are founded on the eternal Reason of Things; and which would eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not? And,

Let me further add, That to make external Revelation of any Use, must we not, as I have already observ'd, be able to determine, whether God is oblig'd to act, as he declares in it he will do? And in Order to settle this important Point, which Revelation itself can never do, must not our Reason tell us, that infinite Wisdom can have no Commands, but what are founded on the unalterable
terable Reason of Things? And if God cou'd command at one Time for Commanding-fake in any one Point, he might do so in all Points, and Times; and consequently, that an arbitrary Will, which might change every Moment, wou’d govern all Things? And can they, who plead that their external Revelation is the unchangeable Will of God, any otherwise do it, but by having Recourse to the Nature of God, by which they can’t but perceive, that the Will of God before, as well as since any external Revelation, must be as immutable as God himself, as being founded on the eternal Reason of Things? So that they who make the Will of God, whether reveal’d by himself, or by any Messenger, not to be unchangeably the same, destroy all possible Proof, that any external Revelation cou’d be, or at least, continue to be the Will of God. Thus you see, that take what Hypothesis You please, yet You can prove nothing to be his Will, but what the Nature of God, and the Nature of Things point out to all Men, who dare use their Reason, to be his Will, his immutable Will.

Among the numerous Answereers of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, Mr. Chandler is deservedly reckond to stand in the foremost Rank; and this judicious Divine says, that "Natural Religion is the only Foundation, upon which Revelation can be supported, and which must be understood, before any Man is capable of judging either of the Nature and Evidence of Christianity: And I am persuaded, says he, that 'tis to the Want of a due Knowledge of the first Principles of all Religion, those Mistakes about the Christian are owing, that have obscur’d the Simplicity of it, and prejudice many against entertaining, and believing it.——

"If
If Natural Religion is not Part of the Religion of Christ, 'tis scarce worth While to enquire at all what his Religion is. If it be, then the preaching Natural Religion is preaching Christ. —— The Religion of Christ must be understood, before it can, or ought to be believ'd; and that it must be proved to be a consistent, and rational Religion, before they can be under any Obligation to receive it.

And, indeed, why should not every Man insist upon those Things? The only Consequence that I can imagine can flow from it is, not that the Cause of Christianity will suffer, which will stand the Test of the most impartial Inquiry, but that the rigid Directors of the Faith and Consciences of Men will lose their Authority, and human Schemes and Creeds, that have been set up in the Room of Christianity, will fall into the Contempt they so justly deserve.

—— 'Tis my hearty Prayer to the Father of Lights, and the God of Truth, that all human Authority in Matters of Faith, may come to a full End; and that every One, who hath Reason to direct him, and a Soul to save, may be his own Judge in every Thing that concerns his eternal Welfare, without any prevailing Regard to the Dictates of fallible Men, or Fear of their peevish, and impotent Censures." And in this Prayer, I believe, every honest Man will join.

The Reverend and Judicious Mr. Bullock, in summing up what I have been endeavouring to prove at large, says,
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"...further, stick close to the Principles of his Education? If this were safe, then all the contradictory Notions that are in the World, would be equally safe and true; and there could be no such Thing as a false Religion, or the Spirit of Error any where: But this will not be admitted. Is Truth, then, confin'd to any certain Country, or to any particular Set of Men? No: But if it were, still there would remain this Difficulty, to be assur'd to what Country, or to what Sort of Men it belong'd. If this were all the Rule we had to go by, every Man (no Doubt) would be partial to his own Country, and to those Men he is best acquainted with. And so the Principles of Education must prevail every where, instead of True Religion."

In Answer to these, and such like Objections, he says, "We are well assur'd, that God is the Author of our Serm. p. 18; Beings, and all our Faculties, and we cannot but acknowledge, that our Understanding is the most excellent Faculty he has given us. It is in That we excel the Beasts that perish; and it was plainly given us with this Intent, that by a due Use and Application thereof we might discern Truth from Error; that which is just and fit to be done, or observed by us, from that which is not. Should we, therefore, admit any Thing, as a Revelation coming from him, which contradicts the evident Dictates of our Reason, we sacrifice one Revelation, that which God gave us with our very Beings, to make Way for another, which is inconsistent with it. It is in Effect admitting, that the Judgment of our own Minds is in no Case to be depended upon; that the Faculties thereof, the very best Gift which God has given us, are of no real Use and Service to..."
"us; no, not even in discerning which Doctrines come
from God, and which do not. For, if I cannot de-
pend upon the plainest Dictates of Reason, how can I
be assur'd, that any Doctrine is a Revelation from God?
If I receive it without consulting my Reason, then for
ought I know, it may be an Imposture; and I am every
Way as liable to embrace an Error, as the Truth. But
if I embrace it upon the Tryal and Conviction of my
Reason, then 'tis plain, I admit the Principles of Rea-
son are to be depended upon; which if I do, I cannot
consistently admit any Thing as true, which contra-
dicts it.

To apply this Author's Reasonings, God is frequently
said to swear; nay, in both Old and New Testament, to
swear in Wrath. Now, if we are to admit nothing, that
is repugnant to the natural Notion we have of God, ought
we not to examine by our Reason, Whether God, who
has no Superior to invoke, can swear at all; much less
be in a Passion, and swear in Wrath?

Again, If there are ever so many Texts, which seeming-
ly confine Salvation to a Belief, to which the greatest
Part of mankind are utter Strangers; or else have not had
sufficient Reason to see they were oblig'd to examine in-
to it; or if they did, could not find out its Truth; must
it not, by this Author's Reasoning, be my Duty to con-
ider, whether this is consistent with the Character we have
from the Light of Nature, of the impartial and universal
Goodness of God, to damn Men for Impossibilities? Or,
whether One can be said to be sent as a Saviour of Man-
kind, if he comes to shut Heaven's Gates against those,
to whom before they were open; provided they follow'd
the Dictates of their Reason?
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If, besides these, there are innumerable Texts, which, in the plainest Manner Words can express, impute human Parts, human Infirmities, and human Passions, even of the worst Kind, to God; does not this suppose, that even all have a Right to examine; and consequently, sufficient Understanding to judge, when Texts, taken in their plain, obvious Meaning, are, or are not consistent with what the Light of Nature teaches them of the Character of the supreme Being? What Notions must the Vulgar have of God, if the Light of Nature can't direct them right, when they find he is said to be jealous and furious? And God himself says, My Fury shall come up in my Face, Ezek. 38. 18, for in my Jealousy, and in the Fire of my Wrath have I spoken; with a Number of other Expressions of the like Nature? Nay, does not the Scripture, if taken literally, suppose, that God does Things of the greatest Moment in Anger and Fury? Was it not thus he gave his Favourite People, Statutes, which were not good; and Judg. Ezek. 20. 23; enactments, by which they could not live? And does not St. Peter (to mention no other Apostle) the Jew, call the Jewish Law, given by God, a Yoke, that neither we, or our Fore-fathers could bear? In what a Number of Places is God said to do Things to try People; and yet notwithstanding this Caution, how often is he said to repent? Does he not even repent of the first Action he did in relation to Man? He repented that he made Man, Gen. 6. 6; and it grieved him at his Heart. Nay, does not the Scripture suppose he has so often repented, that he is weary Jer. 15. 6; of repenting? What strange Notions must the Bulk of Mankind, cou'd not their Reason direct them right, have of the supreme Being, when he is said to have rested, Exod. 31. 17. and to be refreshed; and that Wine cheareth both God and Judges 9. 13.

K k 2 Man?
Man? And what is yet stranger, such Actions are attributed to him, as can only belong to the lowest Rank of Creatures, such as hissing; God being in three Places in the Prophets said to hiss; and in one Place to hiss for a Fly, that is in the uttermost Part of the River of Egypt, and for the Bee, that is in the Land of Assyria?

B. Divines tell us, We must recede from the Letter, when the Nature of the Thing requires it; that is, when it contains any Notion, or Fact, which our Reason tells us, is unworthy of God, as being inconsistent with his Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, Immutability, impartial and universal Benevolence, or any other of his Perfections; or any Ways clashes with those Duties, that Men as Men, or Creatures of the same Creator, owe their Fellow-Creatures.

A. I should think that Man was unreasonable, who required a greater Scope in reading any Book, than what these Divines allow him in reading the Scripture; especially, considering the frequent Occasion he will have to exercise his reasoning Faculty, in allegorising away Facts deliver'd after the plainest Manner: As for Instance, If Reason tells us, that God, the Only True God is invisible, we must not interpret those numerous Texts literally, which suppose him to have been so often seen by mortal Eyes: No, not even those which represent him for many Days together visible on Mount Sinai, where what was under his Feet is mention'd; and that the Nobles on whom God laid not his Hand, saw God, and did eat, and drink. And Bishop Patrick says, "That after they saw God, they were so far from receiving any Harm, that they feasted with him upon the Relicks of the Peace-Offerings, with great Joy and Gladness." And tho' 'tis said, God spoke
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to Moses Face to Face, as a Man does to his Friend, yet Exod. 33. 11. for the same Reason, that Text must not be interpreted literally.

B. That’s certain, since God, in the same Chapter, says to Moses, Thou canst not see my Face, for there shall no Man see me, and live.

A. Does not God immediately add, Behold there is a Place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a Rock. And it shall come to pass, while my Glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a Clift of the Rock; and I will cover thee with my Hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine Hand, and thou shalt see my Back-parts; but my Face shall not be seen: And since Reason tells us, God has neither Fore-parts, or Back-parts, must not the Rock, the Clift of the Rock, and the Hand that cover’d Moses in this Clift, and the Back-parts seen upon taking away the Hand, be understood by Men of the meanest Capacity, in a spiritual Sense?

According to the acknowledg’d Maxims, You have laid down from Divines, we must not take literally the two Conferences mention’d in the first and second of Job between God and Satan; when Satan, in very good Company, with the Sons of God, presented himself before the Lord; who, when Satan wou’d not otherwise be satisfy’d of Job’s Integrity, permitted him to slay Job’s Children and Servants, and reduce him to Extremity to make the Experiment. The same may be said of the Lord’s saying at another Time to Satan, standing at the right Hand of the Angel of the Lord, to resist the High Priest Joshua, standing likewise before him. The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan: And must we not think it Zech. 3. 1, 2; as unworthy of God, to talk to a Serpent as to Satan? Or, how can we conceive a Serpent cou’d talk to Eve, and de- lude the Mother of Mankind, tho’ in the high State of Per-
Perfection; even tho' the Apostle says, The Serpent deceived Eve by his Subtily.

One wou'd be almost apt to imagine, that the Author of the Book of Genesis thought, that Words had Ideas naturally fix'd to them, and not by Consent: Otherwise, say they, how can we account for his supposing, that God brought all Animals before Adam, as soon as he was created, to give them Names; and that Whatever Adam call'd every living Creature, that was the Name thereof; and that the Serpent and Eve, almost as soon as created, entertain'd one another in the same Language: And some think, that this Author did not know the Reason of the necessary Variety of Language upon the Increase of Mankind, by making God to come down to see the City and Tower, whose Top was design'd to reach to Heaven; and then saying, this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrain'd from them, which they have imagin'd to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their Language. And, perhaps, the not knowing the natural Cause of the Rain-bow, occasion'd that Account we have in Genesis of its Institution.

As to the Story of an Angel of God's wrestling all Night with Jacob, and then laming, and blessing him, and changing his Name; "Interpreters of Note, whether Jews or Christians (as Mr. Nye observes) understand it done, not in Fact, but in Vision only;" tho' One would imagine the Jews thought it literally true, because the Text says, They eat not of the Sinew, that Sinew, which forrank, unto this very Day.

What a Number of Ideas must Balaam's Ass have, to be able to reason with his Master; when he saw, and knew an Angel: And tho' 'tis said by Peter, that the dumb Ass speaking with Man's Voice, forbad the Madness of the
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Prophet; yet in the Story itself, there does not appear any Thing like Madness: For that Prophet did nothing but what the Lord enjoind him; and declares, tho' Balak would give me his House full of Silver and Gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord, my God. And when he went to Balaam's second Messenger, it was by the express Command of God; and yet the Text says, God's Anger was kindled because he went: And then follows the Dialogue between the Ais and his Master.

How many Commands did God give his Prophets, which if taken according the Letter, seem unworthy of God, as making them act like mad Men, or Idiots? As for Instance, The Prophet Isaiah walk'd for three Years together naked for a Sign. Jeremiah is commanded to carry his Girdle as far as Euphrates, and there to bury it in the Hole of a Rock; and after many Days he is sent to dig it up again. So he is commanded to make Bands and Yokes, and put them about his Neck, and send them to several Kings. Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord to draw Jerusalem on a Tile, and lay Siege to it, build a Fort against it, set a Camp against it, and set battering Rams against it round about. Moreover, to take an Iron Pan, and set it for a Wall of Iron between him and the City: And immediately after he is commanded to lye three hundred and ninety Days on one Side, and forty Days on the other; and then to mix Man's Dung with his Bread. And afterwards the Lord said, I have given thee Cow's Dung for Man's Dung. At another Time he is commanded to dig a Hole through the Wall of his House, and carry forth his Goods in the Twilight, and cover his Face, as not to see the Ground. And as St. John was commanded to eat a Book, so the Prophet was commanded to eat a Roll; and likewise to clip his Hair, and to dispose of the Clippings.
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...ings after a very odd Manner; and several other Things as strange, too many here to mention. And the Prophet Ho. 1. 2. &c. Hosea, who was likewise a Priest, was bid to take a Wife of Whoredoms; (tho' that by Moses's Law was forbid a Priest,) and Children of Whoredoms; and had three Children by this Wife, to whom the Lord himself gave Names.

No Mathematician cou'd give a more exact Description Rev. 21. 10. of a City, than John does of that great City, the Holy Jerusalem; which from an high Mountain he saw descending out of Heaven from God; and he was so near it, as to describe the Gates, Wall and Streets; and to measure its Length, Breadth, and Height with a Reed. And Tertullian assures us, "that in his Time, there was seen for forty "Days together, a City hanging in the Air over Judea."

And yet Interpreters have since allegoris'd this great City into a meer Castle in the Air. But,

To come to Things of greater Moment, did not the Scripture suppose Reason was able to teach Men of the meanest Capacity, that God cou'd not be deceiv'd himself, or deceive us; the Prophet Jeremiab wou'd not have said, Jer. 20. 7. O Lord, Thou hast deceiv'd me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. — Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a Liar, and as Waters that fail? And in another Prophet the Lord says, The Days are prolonged, and every Vision fails. And tho' the Lord adds, There shall none of my Words be prolonged any more, but the Word, which I have spoken shall be done; yet he afterwards says, If the Prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a Thing, I, the Lord, have deceived that Prophet. And if the Prophet is deceived, must not the People, who rely on that Prophet, be deceived?

Jer. 4. 10. And does not the Prophet Jeremiab say, Ab! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this People? And to the fame
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sake Purpose the Prophet Isaiab, O Lord, thou hast made Isa. 63. 17. us to err.

There are other Texts which go further, and, if taken literally, represent God not only falsifying his Words, but his Oaths. To mention two, the first relates to the Children of Israel, to whom the Lord said, Ye shall not Num. 14. 30. come into the Land concerning which I sware to make you dwell; and ye shall know my Breach of Promise. The second is in Psalm 89. in the first Part of which is largely set forth the Promises of God to David by Covenant and Oath; and in the other Part David complains of God’s Breach, both of his Covenant, and his Oath; and in summing up those Breaches he says, Thou hast made void the Covenant of thy Servant: Lord, where are thy former loving Kindnesses which thou swearest to David in thy Truth? And there are several Facts mention’d in Scripture, which, if taken literally, look as tho’ the Prophets either were deceiv’d themselves, or were willing to deceive others. The Prophet Hilda assures good King Josiah from the Lord, that he shou’d be gather’d 1 Chron. 34. to his Grave in Peace; and yet soon after he receiv’d a mor. 1 lb. 35. 23. tal Wound, of which he dy’d. The Prophet Elisa sends 2 Kings 8. Word to Benbadad, the King of Syria, who consults him about his Recovery, that he may, (or rather shall, or will, for so it ought to be render’d,) certainly recover; yet he tells Hazael, who had a Design on his Crown and Life (and who before had been anointed King of Syria by the Prophet 1 Kings 19. Eliah, that he should surely die. And this look’d the more ungrateful in the Prophet, because he had receiv’d forty Camel Loads of the good Things of Damascus, to tell the King 2 Kings 8. the Truth. But I need not mention single Prophets deceiv-ing, or being deceiv’d, when the Scripture tells us of four hundred being deceiv’d at once, to the Destruction of a 2 Chron. 18. 5.
Number of innocent Persons. *I saw,* says the Prophet Micaiah, the Lord sitting upon his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing on his right Hand, and on his left. *And the Lord said; who shall entice Ahab, King of Israel, that he may go up, and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And One spake,* saying after this Manner; *and another saying after that Manner. Then there came out a Spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said I will go out, and be a lying Spirit in the Mouth of all his Prophets. And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail. Go out, and do even so."

As to the New Testament, I shall now only observe, that tho' St. Jude quotes (besides the Assumption of Moses) a Prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, and the Book containing this Prophecy was then in being; yet, because there were Things in it, which seem'd unworthy of God, and cou'd not be well allegoris'd; the Authority of an inspir'd Person quoting it as an inspir'd Book, cou'd not support its Credit; but it fell into Contempt, and was lost.

**B. Tho' You allow Reason to be the proper Judge in Things of Morality, as falling under its Cognizance; yet as to Prophecies, You must own, we are entirely to rely on Authority.**

**A. I have hitherto said nothing in relation to Prophecies, designing to speak of them at another Season; but since You mention them, I must, as to the Prophecies in the Old Testament, confess my Ignorance, that I do not understand them; and Divines themselves, as far as I can find, are infinitely divided about interpreting them: And as to those Prophecies, if they may be so call'd, in the New Testament, relating to the Second Coming of Christ, and the End of
of the World, the best Interpreters and Commentators own, the Apostles themselves were grossly mistaken; there scarce being an Epistle, but where they foretell that those Times they wrote in, were Tempora novissima; and the then Age the last Age, and those Days the last Days; and that the End of the World was nigh, and the Coming of Christ at hand; as is plain, among other Texts, from 1 Cor. 10. 11. Rom. 13. 11, 12. Heb. 9. 26. Jam. 5. 7, 8. 1 John 2. 18. 2 Pet. 3. 12, 13. And they do not assert this as a meer Matter of Speculation, but build Motives and Arguments upon it, to excite People to the Practice of Piety, and all good Works; as Phil. 4. 5. Let your Moderation be known to all Men, the Lord is at Hand. And to the same Purpose are Heb. 10. 24, 25. 1 Pet. 4. 7, 8. 1 Cor. 7. 29. 2 Pet. 3. 11, 12. And tho' they do not pretend to tell the very Day and Hour, when these Things must happen; yet they thought it would be during their Time, and continually expected it. Timothy is charged to keep this Commandment — till the 1 Tim. 6. 13, Appearing of the Lord. So Paul says to the Corinthians, As oft 1 Cor. 11. 26. as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he comes. And I think, 'tis plain, Paul himself expected to be alive at the Coming of the Lord, and that he had the Word of God for it. For this we say unto you by 1 Thes. 4. 15, the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the Coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. — The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these Words. And there are other Texts to the same Purpose, as 1 Cor. 15. 51, 52. 2 Cor. 5. 4.
B. Does not St. Paul suppose, that before the Coming of Christ, Antichrist must appear?

A. That does not in the least hinder, but he might believe both would happen in his Time; For, says he, the Mystery of Iniquity does already work. And St. John puts this Matter out of Dispute, in saying, Little Children, it is the last Time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last Time.

B. Does not St. Peter say, There shall come in the last Days, Scoffers —— saying where is the Promise of his Coming?

A. Saint Peter owns those to be the last Days, and the Promise of his then Coming he confirms, by saying, God is not slack concerning his Promise, the Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night: —— What Manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, Looking for, and hasting unto the Coming of the Day of God, wherein the Heavens being on Fire shall be dissolved, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat: Nevertheless we according to his Promise, look for new Heavens, and a new Earth.

B. Does not St. Peter say, Beloved be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day?

A. This, as in the Margin, seems to be quoted from Psalm 90. 4. where 'tis said, A thousand Years in thy Sight, are but as Yesterday when it is past. And surely St. Peter cou'd not imagine, that God affected to speak unintelligibly; and by one Day meant a thousand Years; and by a thousand Years one Day; and refer to this Place as a Proof.
B. Divines are at a Loss how to account for the Apo-
files so frequently declaring, the End of all Things to be at
Hand, and Christ to be then a coming; when our Saviour
says, Of that Day and Hour knoweth no Man; no, not the Mat. 24. 36.
Angels of Heaven, but my Father only.

A. Those Divines would not make these Reflections, did
they but consider what our Saviour declares to his Disciples,
when they came to him privately, saying, Tell us when these — Ver. 3.
Things shall be; and what shall be the Sign of thy Coming, and
of the End of the World. Does he not in Answer to their
Question, tell them what those Signs would be? withal ad-
ding, So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these Things, know — Ver. 33.
that it is near, even at the Doors. Verily, I say unto You, 34.
This Generation shall not pass, till all these Things be fulfill'd.
And to assure them of the Truth of what he declares, Heaven — Ver. 35.
and Earth, says he, shall pass away; but my Words shall not
pass away. And his adding, But of that Day and Hour Mat. 24. 36.
knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Fa-
ther only; was not meant to contradict what he just before
declard, that this Generation shall not pass till these Things be
fulfill'd; but to warn his Disciples not to be surpris'd as the
old World was, when the Flood came, and swept them all a-
way; Watch therefore, for ye know not what Hour your Lord
will come: But know this, that if the good Man of the House
had known in what Watch the Thief would have come, he
would have watch'd. — And the Apostles agreeable to this
Admonition of the Lord, say, Yourselves know perfectly, 1 Thes. 5. 2.
that the Day of the Lord cometh as a Thief in the Night. 2 Pet. 3. 10.
And after the Resurrection our Saviour says to Peter, who
asks him concerning the beloved Disciple; If I will, that be John 21. 22;
tarry 'till I come, what is that to thee? And the last Thing
his Disciples ask'd him on his Ascension, is, Wilt thou at Act. 1. 6.
this Time, restore again the Kingdom to Israel? And the Answer he gave them is very consistent with the Kingdom, even the temporal Kingdom of Israel's being restored again during their Lives. And by our Saviour's saying, when the last Supper was ended, I will not drink henceforth of the Fruit of the Vine, until that Day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom. They no doubt, believ'd this happy Time was not far off. But,

If most of the Apostles, upon what Motives soever, were mistaken in a Matter of this Consequence, how can we be certain, that any One of them may not be mistaken in any other Matter? If they were not inspir'd in what they said in their Writings concerning the then Coming of Christ; how cou'd they be inspir'd in those Arguments they build on a Foundation far from being so? And if they thought their Times were the last, no Description they gave, cou'd be intended to reach further than their own Times. And if John the Evangelist, and John the Divine are the same Person, he must believe what is mention'd in the Revelation, wou'd have happen'd within the Compass of that Age in which he writ. But leaving these Matters to another Time, let us return to the Consideration of those Duties, which Reason shews us from the Nature of God and Man, and the Relation Men stand in to him, and one another.

As I have already shown You by a number of Instances, where Divines themselves own, that tho' the literal Sense of the Scripture be ever so plain, yet it must not stand in Competition with what our Reason tells us of the Nature and Perfections of God; so I shall now shew You, the same in relation to those Duties Men owe to one another; and that if Men are not well grounded in the Reason and Nature of Things
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Things, and from thence judge of their Duty, in Relation to one another; there are Things either commanded, or approv'd of in the Scripture, which might be apt to lead Men astray. A Man, who looks no further than That, might think it no Crime to cheat his elder Brother, impose on his aged Parent, and by a Lie obtain his Blessing; nay, hope that God wou'd confirm it, when he sees how Jacob ob-Gen. 27.
tain'd the greatest Blessing from God.

If Men flatter themselves, that they are true Israelites, and those of a different Religion, mere Egyptians; will they not be apt to imagine, when they see how the Israelites spoil'd the Egyptians by the Command of God himself, who made them borrow what they were not to repay; that this might be a good Precedent for them?

B. I must own, that a Command to lend, hoping for no-Exod. 3. 21.
thing again; and a Command to borrow, without returning, 22.
any thing again, seem to be very different Commands.

A. When Men find the Harlot Rabab celebrated, even Heb. 11. 31.
in the New Testament, for lying to the Government, and betraying her Country to its most cruel Enemies; are they not in Danger, if they find their Advantage in it, and 'tis for the Service of those they judge to be true Israelites; to do the same? since 'tis not pretended the Harlot had any more a special Command for so doing, than Jael had for an Act of the highest Treachery; for which, because it serv'd the Interest of Israel, she is declar'd by the Prophetess De-
Jdg. 5. 24. borab to be blest' above Women.

What Prince can ever want a Pretence of going to War, and totally extirpating those he invades; when he sees, Saul 1 Sam. 15. 3, was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites, Men and Women, Infants and Sucklings, Ox and Sheep, Camel and A's, for an Injury done four hundred Years before? And how for Exod. 17. 8.
Sparing Agag, (whom Samuel hew'd to Pieces before the Lord;) and preserving some of the Cattle for Sacrifice, the Lord rejected him from being King; nay, order'd Samuel least Saul thou'd suspect the Design, to pretend a Sacrifice, when he sent him to anoint David?

Wou'd not People, if like the Children of Israiel, they were destitute of an Habitation, be apt to think what the Israelites did, to the Canaanites, a good Precedent; and that they might invade a neighbouring, idolatrous Nation, that never did them the least Harm; and extirpate not only Men and Women, but even their innocent Infants; in Order to get Possession of their Country? And I question whether the Spaniards wou'd have murder'd so many Millions in the Indies, had they not thought they might have us'd them like Canaanites.

How many Precedents, besides that of Ebud, (who, on a Message from the Lord, stab'd the King to whom his People sent him with a Presen:) did the Popish Priests plead from the Old Testament, for the Assasination of the two Henries of France? And had the Gun-Powder-Plot succeeded here, they wou'd, no doubt, have made Use of the same Plea to justify it.

Tho' the Lord bids the Jews to pray for the Peace of Babylon, whither be had caus'd them to be carry'd away captives; and that in the Peace thereof they shou'd have Peace; yet is it not said in the Psalms, O Daughter of Babylon, happy shall be he, who taketh, and dasheth thy little Ones against the Stones; and this for no other Reason, but becau'e she desir'd of her Captives one of the Songs of Zion.

The holier Men in the Old Testament are represented, the more cruel they seem to be, as well as more addicted to Curfing: How plentifully does David in the
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109th Psalm bestow the bitterest Curses on his Enemies? And how cruelly did he treat the Ammonites, when he took their Cities, cutting the People with Saws, and with Harrows of Iron, and with Axes?

Who is not surpris'd to find the holy Prophet Elias burning, in the Name of the Lord, little Children, for calling him bald Pate? And what is still more surprizing, Two She Bears, upon his burning, strait devour'd forty-two little Children.

And he likewise entail'd the Curse of Leprosy on his Man Gehazi, and his Seed for ever, for accepting, without his Master's Knowledge, a small Present from Naaman, the Assyrian; tho' the Prophet himself afterwards took forty Camel Loads of the good Things of Damascus, to tell their King the Truth, in relation to his Recovery; and yet deceiv'd him.

Elias's causing Fire to come down from Heaven, to destroy two Captains with their Companies, for no other Fault, but bluntly delivering a Message from the King, and perhaps, in the very Words they were commanded; was not so cruel, as his hindring it from raining upon the Earth for the Space of three Years and six Months; since a Drought of that Continuance, without Dew or Rain, in such a barren Country as Judea, must have, without Miracles, destroy'd every Thing; and yet St. James from hence takes Occasion to recommend the Efficacy of Prayer.

If God will not, in this Life, miraculously alter the Course of Things, for the sake of the innocent; he, certainly, will not do it for the guilty; nor break in upon the ordinary Methods and Laws of his Providence, to punish one Man for the Crime of another; the innocent for the guilty. If God cou'd act thus, it wou'd be no Crime in

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Man to imitate him; nay, how could we be sure, if God
deals thus with his Creatures in this Life, he will not act so
in the Life to come; since if the eternal Rules of Ju-
stice are once broke, how can we imagine any Stop? And
yet,

Are there not Examples in Scripture, which, taken in
their literal Sense, seem to make God break in upon the
common Course of Nature, and the ordinary Rules of his
Providence, to punish Men for Crimes they were not guilty
of; as God's causing, in the latter End of David's Reign,
a Famine for three Years together, for the Crime of Saul and
his bloody House, in slaying the Gibeonites: And that God
smote Israel, and destroy'd seventy thousand of them for Da-
vid's Fault, in causing the innocent Sheep, as he justly calls
them, to be number'd.

B. I believe there must be some Mistake in this last Sto-
ry; for is it not fit for several important Reasons, that Kings
should know the Numbers of their People? Are they not the
Strength and Riches of their Kingdom? And was not the
People of Israel, by being frequently number'd, and some-
times by God's own Appointment, a good Precedent for
David? But passing that by, how can we reconcile this
- 2 Sam. 21. 1. Story with itself? In one Place 'tis said, God mov'd David
to number Israel; in another Satan provok'd David. Did
God conspire with Satan in this Act, in Order to destroy a
Number of innocent Persons? But do these two Places
any more agree in the Account Joab gives in of the Num-
ber of the People? nay, if in the Beginning of Saul's Reign,
the Numbers were rightly calculated, 'tis morally impossible,
to say nothing of the Destruction made by continual War,
that either Account should be true. Besides,
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Can God change his Mind, and that suddenly too? Yet 'tis said, God sent an Angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; and as he was destroying it, the Lord beheld, and repented him of the Evil. And can any One think this to be a meer Pestilence, when a real Angel is said to be miraculously sent to execute God's Anger? And David, with the Elders of Israel, fell on the Earth and the Heavens, having a drawn Sword in his Hand, by the Threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite; and is there commanded to build an Altar.

A. What You say may be true, since there are several Mistakes crept into the Old Testament; where there's scarce a Chapter, which gives any historical Account of Matters, but there are some Things in it, which cou'd not be there originally; and even in this Book of Chronicles, there are Things mention'd, too late to be inserted by Ezra, or Nehemiah. And I might add, that the Jewish History being for the most Part taken from larger Accounts, 'tis no Wonder its Abstracts are not always very exact.

I cou'd give You many more Instances of this Nature, but I am afraid some will think these too many; tho' I have said nothing, but what Archbishop Tillotson does in Effect, in affirming, "The Difference between the Style of the Old and New Testament is so very remarkable, that one of the greatest Sects in the primitive Times did upon this very Ground, found their Heresy of Two Gods: The One evil, fierce, and cruel, whom they call'd The God of the Old Testament; the Other good, kind, and merciful, whom they call'd The God of the New Testament: So great a Difference is there between the Representations, which are made of God in the Books of the Jewish and Christian Religion, as to give, at least, some..."
"Colour, and Pretence for an Imagination of Two Gods." But,

It must be own'd, that the same Spirit (I dare not call it a Spirit of Cruelty) does not alike prevail throughout the Old Testament; the nearer we come to the Times of the Gospel, the milder it appear'd; for tho' God declares in the Decalogue, that he is a Jealous God, visiting the Iniquity of the Parents upon their Children, to the third and fourth Generation; and accordingly Achan, with all his Family, was destroy'd for his single Crime; yet the Lord afterwards says, The Soul that sinneth, it shall die; the Son shall not bear the Iniquity of the Father, &c.

Our Saviour, by saying, He came not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them; condemns their taking away the Lives of any, except in Defence of their Own, and of what is necessary for their Support; and this he declares, upon a most remarkable Occasion: Some of his Disciples, upon his not being receiv'd into a Samaritan Village, because his Face was towards Jerusalem, strait cry'd, Wilt thou we command Fire from Heaven, and consume them, as Elias did? He rebuk'd them; and said, Ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them. If any Precedent might have been pleaded from the Old Testament, it wou'd, no doubt, have been that of Elias, the Fore-runner of our Saviour; who came from Heaven (to which he went up by a Whirlwind in a Chariot of Fire, with Horses of Fire) to meet our Saviour

And if it be contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, even to wish to imitate that great Prophet so favour'd of God; the same will hold as strongly, in relation to all the Actions that are of a like Nature of other Holy Men, tho' quo-
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ted with Approbation in the New Testament; as Moses is, for acting the Part of a Magistrate, when a private Man, in Acts 7. 24. destroying his Fellow Subject. And if there’s a Contrast between the Spirit of the Old, and the Spirit of the New Testament, ought not we Christians to stick to the latter; and not suppose the Texts, which require doing Good even to the Gentiles, and dealing with them as ourselves expect to be dealt with; to relate to Christians only before they had Power to act otherwise; and that after they were to be govern’d by Precedents from the Old Testament?

B. Are there any so absurd, as to endeavour thus to reconcile the Old and New Testament?

A. We find the Orthodox, as soon as they had a Prince, who refus’d Submission to their Decisions in the Council of Nice, in express Terms own’d as much.

Lucifer Calaritanus, then a most orthodox Bishop, in several Discourses address’d to the Son of Constantine the Great; does not scruple to tell the Emperor himself, that it was the Duty of the Orthodox to kill him, on the Account of his Arianism; which he calls Idolatry: And for this he quotes Deut. 13. 6. and 1 Maccab. 1. 43, to Ver. 29th of Chap. 2. and then insultingly says, “If you had been in the Hands of Matthias, or Phineas, they wou’d have kill’d You. You say you suffer despiteful Usage from us, contrary to the Admonitions of holy Scripture.—If ever any One of the Worshippers of God spared Apostates, let what You say of us be true. —— Pray shew me but one of them, that ever spar’d the Adversaries of his Religion.” And the Texts for Obedience to Magistrates from Titus 3. 1. he evades, by saying, “That the Apostle spoke of those Princes and Magistrates, who as yet had not believed in the only Son of God; that they by our Humility, and

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Meekness, and suffering long under Adversity, and all possible Obedience in Things fitting, might be won over to Christianity.

Athanasius, and the Confessors that were with him highly applauded Lucifer's Discourses, and says, "We plainly see the Picture of an Apostle, the Boldness of a Prophet, the Mageistry of Truth, the Doctrine of true Faith. You seem to be the true Temple of our Saviour, who dwelling in You, speaks these Things by You."

"Believe me, Lucifer, You alone did not say these Things, but the Holy Ghost with You; how came You to remember Scripture at that Rate? how came You to understand the Sense and Meaning of it so perfectly; if the Holy Ghost had not ascended You in it?"

They, who design a New Religion, in Opposition to establish'd Ones, wou'd, no doubt, as these Fathers suppose, begin with Precepts of the greatest Humanity and Tenderness, and doing the utmost Good to Mankind, tho' of ever so different Persuasions; but to think, as these Fathers then did, (and the Orthodox, if we judge from their Actions, have ever since thought; (that all the Precepts of the Gospel of this Nature were design'd only to draw Jews and Gentiles into the Church, as Gallants gain their Mistresses by Obsequiousness; and that after they were once in, the Church (as all Sects and Parties term themselves) had a Right to murder, not only private Persons, but even their Sovereigns, for not holding the orthodox Faith; and that this is the only Way to reconcile the Old and New Testament; is a Notion highly injurious to the Christian Religion.

'Tis, no doubt, the Interest of wicked Priests, to have God represented under opposite Characters; and to give in one Testament Rules contrary to those in the other; that they
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they, as it serves their Turn, may make Use of either: But is it not astonishing for Saints and Confessors upon the first Occasion, to renounce their former Principles; and in Defiance of their Oaths of Allegiance, represent a Man inspird by the Holy Ghost, and say, that Christ spoke in him; when he declares it the Duty of Christians to murder an heretical Emperor?

B. Those holy Fathers, I suppose, thought, they saw Things of the greatest Consequence, tho' commanded in the Old, forbidden in the New Testament; and that to make the Old and New Testament to contradict each other in these Things, was to destroy the Authority of both; and therefore concluded, this Expedient was the only Way to support both.

B. By reasoning thus, instead of reconciling both, they destroy'd both, and natural Religion too; in supposing Things are not good and evil in themselves; but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being, which might endlessly change. But,

If there's a Law of Nature, with the observing of which God can't dispense either in himself, or in his Creatures; and no Religion can be true, that in the minutest Circumstances is contrary to it's Righteousness; and the Gospel inculcates all such Precepts of Natural Religion, as require doing Good to Jew and Gentile, even the same we expect from them; and that we are indispensably bound to allow all others the same Right of judging for themselves, as we claim for ourselves; must we not, if we will support the Credit of the Old Testament, suppose it to contain nothing inconsistent with this natural Right confirm'd by the Gospel? If this be not so, pray shew me my Mistake; but if it be just Reasoning, tell me how You can account for the Conduct of the Jews, in invading, and that too without any Declaration of War, the

See Frideaux's Lett. to the Deists, p. 127. Edit. 7. 8vo.
the Canaanites, a free and independant Nation, and against whom they had not the least Cause of Complaint; and on Pretence of their being Idolaters, destroying not only the Men and Women, but Infants incapable of Idolatry, or any other Crime. This, You know, has given great Advantage to the Enemies of our Religion, who represent the whole Proceeding, as an unparallel’d Piece of Injustice and Cruelty; and therefore, I should be glad to know what our Divines, if they do not interpret this Fact allegorically, or as only done in Vision; say, to shew ’tis not contrary to the Law of Nature, and those Precepts of the Gospel which are founded on it.

B. I wonder you can be ignorant, with what Ease our Divines solve this seeming Difficulty, by having Recourse to a positive Command for treating the Canaanites as they did.

A. Such a Command is pleaded in vain, except it can be shewn, that the Thing suppos’d to be commanded, is not inconsistent with the Law of Nature; which if God can dispense with in any one Case, he may in all; nor cou’d his Wisdom then prescribe any certain Rule of Conduct, either for himself or his Creatures; but all wou’d depend on an uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary Will.

B. MAY not a Thing, which is unlawful for Men to do of themselves, become lawful, by the Command of the Supreme Being?

A. SUPPOSE any shou’d now plead that they had a divine Commission to destroy their next Neighbours, whom they judg’d to be Idolaters, Man, Woman and Child, in Order to possess their Country; wou’d not our Divines say, no Man cou’d be as certain he had any such positive Command from God; as he was, that God had forbid it him by the Light of Nature? Nor cou’d Miracles be a Proof of any such Com-
Commission; since we can only know from the Nature of the Things themselves, whether Miracles are done by a good, or evil Being; and we are to compare what we are told of God, with what we know of him; otherwise we believe in Men, and not in God. And if the Light of Nature, (the Voice of God himself) teaches us, even to Demonstration, that God is infinitely wise and good; does it not likewise demonstrate, that no Command, not stamp'd with these Characters, can come from him; much less a Command inconsistent with all those Duties that Men as Men owe to one another?

B. May not God punish some wicked Nations with Death, to fright others from committing the same Crimes?

A. God has a thousand Ways of doing this, without commanding Men to do any Thing, which, by the Law of Nature, he had forbid them; and if God design'd what he did to be a Terror to others, wou'd he not act after such a signal, and super-natural Manner, as all shou'd see it was his own doing; and the Reason of his so doing: And in Order to it, distinguish between the guilty, and the innocent?

If God wou'd punish the Canaanites, for acting contrary to the Law of Nature; wou'd he, in Order to do this, require the Israelites to act contrary to the same Law; in murdering Men, Women, and Children, that never did them the least Injury?

Besides, were not the Jews, considering their Circumstances upon their coming out of Egypt, the most improper People to convince the World, that they did not act out of a private Interest; but purely to execute God's Vengeance on an idolatrous Nation? Wou'd God, in such a Case, choose People as prone to Idolatry as the Canaanites themselves? Some question, whether, in this Case, the Plea of a divine

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Command, if taken literally, will not destroy all the internal Proofs of the Falseness of any Religion; for can that, say they, which is consistent with the Truth of any one true Religion, prove another Religion to be false? And do not all our Divines, when they are speaking against other Religions, maintain, that their commanding, or approving any Thing contrary to the Law of Nature, is a Demonstration of their Falseness? since it destroys all the internal Proofs of the Truth of any Religion, and confounds all the essential Marks, by which we discern Good from Evil; and supposes God may command a Son to sacrifice his Father; or do any Thing, tho' ever so repugnant to the Light of Nature.

B. These Men carry their Reasoning too far; for has not Providence frequently made use of ill Men, not only to punish ill Men, but for other good Purposes?

A. In the Course of Things, it can't but happen, that some ill Men may be a Scourge to others; yet that can't excuse them, if in so doing they act against the eternal Rules of Justice and Equity. Tho' a Thing may be said to be done by the determinate Council of God, yet that will not justify, or excuse those that did it, if not consistent with the Law of Nature. St. Peter, speaking of the holy Child Jesus, says, — The People of Israel were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy Hand, and thy Counsel determined before to be done: And yet were not they, and their Posterity punish'd for that Fact, which God's Hand and Counsel had determin'd thou'ld be done? Besides,

If the Israelites had a divine Commission to extirpate the Canaanites, ought not the Canaanites to have known it, to prevent their resisting Men acting by a divine Commission? Otherwise would there not be two opposite Rights...
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at the same Time; a Right in the Jews by Revelation, to take away the Lives of the Canaanites; and a Right in the Canaanites by the Law of Nature, to defend their Lives?

B. Was not the Sun's standing still for a whole Day to gether, at the Command of Joshua, that he might have Light enough to destroy his Enemies, a sufficient Proof they ought to have offer'd up their Throats?

A. That did not happen till they were defeated before Gibeon; and consequently till then, it cou'd be no Direction to them; and even after that, the Lord harden'd their Hearts, c. 11: 26. that they should come against Israel in Battle; and tho' 'tis said, that the living God is among you, and that he will not fail to drive out before you the Canaanites, &c. yet Israel cou'd not drive them out of several Places: And in one Instance 'tis said, The Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the Inhabitants of the Mountain, but could not drive out the Inhabitants of the Valley, because they had Chariots of Iron.

A Reverend Author, to solve the Difficulties attending this Matter, says, "The Criticks and Rabbins take Notice, that it is not said by the Historian, that Joshua commanded the Sun and Moon to stand still; but he recites the Words of a certain Book (supposed to be a Poem, written by one Jasher) in which the Poet, because of the great and long Slaughter, that Joshua made of the Amorites, introduces Joshua, as requiring the Sun and Moon to stand still, while he, and his Army destroy'd the Enemies of the Lord. Which, indeed, was an elegant Fiction, and very proper in a Poem that was written on such an Occasion.

And now let me ask You, Whether the very endeavouring to reconcile this, or any other Facts mention'd in the Old Testament, with the Light of Nature and the Evangelical
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I think, I cou'd not say less than I have, in Vindication of the Precepts of the Gospel; by shewing that they were not design'd merely to draw People into the Profession of the Christian Religion, and then to be laid-aside; except where they serv'd the Interest of the local Orthodoxy; but that they are Rules in their own Nature obligatory, which, from their internal Excellency, always bound Mankind; and consequently, all Men, even tho' of the meanest Abilities, must have been capable of knowing them; and out of Danger, were it not their own Fault, of being misled by any Precedents whatever.

If what has been already said, may not be sufficient to shew, that it can't be imputed to want of Wisdom, or Goodness in God; or to any Defect in Reason, which he has at all Times given Mankind for the Discovery of his Will; that the Nature of Religion is so little understood; and so many Things, which do not shew themselves to be the Will of God, are mix'd with it; let me ask You, whether God has a greater Kindness for the brute, than the rational Creation?

B. THAT
B. That, certainly, must be a needless Question.

A. If God, then, in the very Frame and Make of those Animals we term irrational, has implanted the Sense of every Thing necessary to answer the End of their Creation; can we imagine, he has not as great a Care of his Creatures endow'd with Reason, and made after his own Image; and for Ends infinitely more noble than the brute Creation? when we see with what Skill and Contrivance, Birds, without being taught by any, but the God of Nature, build there Nests; and how artfully the Spiders frame their Webs; the Bees their little Cells; and the Beasts avoid all noxious Herbs; And not to multiply Instances, how all Animals are endow'd with sufficient Sagacity, for preserving themselves and Species; must we not own, that what we call Instinct, is a certain and infallible Guide for inferior Animals? and can we doubt, whether Man, the Lord of the Creation, has not from his superior Reason, sufficient Notices of whatever makes for his greatest, his eternal Happiness?

If we can't charge God with acting thus partially, must we not be oblig'd to own, that Reason is as certain a Guide for rational Creatures, as Instinct is for irrational? And consequently, that those Men are below Brutes, who, wanting Instinct, will not govern themselves, nor suffer others to be govern'd by Reason? And

Tho' they place the highest Value on themselves for being rational, and by Virtue of it religious; yet are ever contriving how to hinder the free Exercife of Reason in religious Matters; as if Reason and Religion were irreconcileable; and that the Method God proposes for this Discovery of all other Truth, was a most certain Way to confound religious Truth; and endlessly to multiply Error. But,

Tho'
Tho' Divines in all Ages have, for the most Part, shewn themselves mortal Enemies to the true Exercise of Reason; yet now, God be thank'd, there are those among them, who dare do it Justice.

That eminent Divine, Mr. S. Nye, tho' writing in Defence of Revelation, says, "'Tis obvious to every One, that Natural Religion intimates to us, and comprises the whole Duty, that we owe to God or Men: Whatever is to be believ'd, or done by us, is declar'd and comprehended in Natural Religion; God has instructed all Men every where, in the whole of their Duty, by a connate Light, even by the Talent of Reason common to all. And,

The judicious Mr. Butler says, "That nothing can be more evident, than that exclusive of Revelation, Mankind can't be consider'd as a Creature left by his Maker to act at random — but from his Make, Constitution, or Nature, he is in the strictest and proper Sense a Law to himself. There are as real, and the same Kind of Indications in human Nature, that we were made for Society, and to do Good to our Fellow-Creatures, as that we were intended to take Care of our Life, Health, and private Good.

B. If what You, and these reverend Authors say, be true; the Principles, on which all Religion is founded, must be so obvious, that all Men, even of the meanest Capacity, may from thence discern their Duty both to God and Man.

A. You shall confess there are such Principles, by my asking You a Question, or two: Is not the Foundation of all Religion, the believing there's only one self-existent Being, to whom all others owe their Being, and their Continuance in Being? And is it not as certain, as there is such a Being, that he did not create Mankind to supply any Wants of
of his own; or give them Rules for their Conduct, but to
oblige them to act for their common Good? If then an Ac-
tion is for their Good, is not that alone an infallible Test of
its being approv'd by God? And if it tends to their Hurt,
is not That as certain a Mark of its being disapprov'd by
him? But if it tends to neither, does not That sufficiently
shew it to be neither approv'd, nor disapprov'd? Since it is
as inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to punish Men
for not doing an indifferent Thing, as it is with his Wis-
dom, to reward them for doing it.

B. Tho' all rational Creatures, who, to their utmost,
imitate their great Creator and Benefactor, in communica-
ting Happiness to each other, do all that God requires of
them; yet 'tis on Supposition, that they do not judge wrong
in relation to their common Good?

A. If Men, according to the best of their Understanding,
act for their common Good, they then govern themselves by
the same Rule God governs them; their Will is the same
with his, and they concur in the same Design with him;
and should they, in some nice and difficult Cases, mistake in
applying the Rule; yet in being entirely govern'd by it,
they have done all that God requires; who, having made
Men fallible, will not impute to them Want of Infallibi-
licity. And the best Way not to mistake, in applying this
Rule, is to consider duly all Circumstances, and follow what
upon the whole seems best. As this is the Rule both of
God and Man, so is it in common to the unlearned as well
as learned; for have not all alike Faculties given them by
God, to distinguish between Good and Evil; Right and
Wrong; and to know, that, as they would not suffer Wrong
themselves, so they ought not to do Wrong?
B. The common People may have sufficient Abilities to know their Duty to Man; but can they as well know what they owe to God?

A. In what Point is it, that Men of the meanest Abilities may not know their Duty; whether it relates to God, or Man? As to the first, can’t they tell what Sentiments inspire them with Love and Reverence for the Deity? And need they much Reflection to know, that the more any Sentiments do This, the more they ought to be cherish’d? And that every Notion, which tends not to raise in them the highest Conceptions of the divine Being, is derogatory to his Perfection; and that the highest Honour and Worship they can render him, is solemnly to own him to be what he is? And that as they ought themselves to have the highest Ideas of Love and Veneration for their Creator and Benefactor; so they should on all proper Occasions endeavor to excite the same in others? And that as they cannot but see, it would be in them affronting God, to offer him a Worship, which they believe he abhors; so they must think it the same in others?

As to their Duty to one another; can’t they perceive, that ’tis fit in the Nature of Things, and agreeable to the Mind of their Creator, (who has endow’d them with Reason for this End) to introduce into his Creation as much Happiness as they can; by being ready to assist, and prevent one another in all good Offices? And indeed, the reciprocal Duties are so very evident, that even Children are sensible of doing as they would be done unto; and the Mind, with the same Ease, sees the Agreeableness or Disagreeableness of moral and immoral Actions; as the Eye discovers Agreeableness, or Disagreeableness in outward Objects. And,

The
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The meaner People are, and the lower their Station, the fewer are the Things their Duty consists in; and those so very plain, that they cannot well mistake, with Relation either to God, or Man; were they not impos'd on by artful Men; who, in all Ages and Places, have mix'd with pure Religion, Thing tending, indeed, to their own Honour, and their own Good; but far from being consistent with the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; and then pretended they were necessary to influence the common People, who wou'd not be satisfy'd with plain, simple Truths: And from this Source have issu'd out most of those Absurdities, which, to the Scandal of human Nature, have over-run Mankind; and which, for the most Part, were too subtle, and metaphysical for the common People, if left to themselves, ever to have thought of; much less to have rais'd Commotions about them: They, it must be own'd, Peace and Quiet being their Interest, are naturally good Subjects and good Neighbours; and upon all Accounts most useful Members of the Community; except when their Priests, on Pretence of the Good of the Church, work them up to Tumults, Mutiny, Sedition, and Rebellion; because their Governours presume, without their Leave, to give equal Protection to all their Subjects, notwithstanding their different Opinions. And if we consult Ecclesiastical History, we shall find the worst of Princes, have been most sure of their Assistance, even in carrying on the vilest Designs; provided the Church found their Interest in so doing; And the best, of their Opposition, when they design'd the Interest of pure Religion, free from Priestcraft and Superstition. And the Laity, certainly, can't be too much on their Guard, when they find extraordinary Favours, (such as those in a former Reign,) are design'd for the Clergy.
I do not wholly confine this Remark to the Priests of any one Religion; since by the Influence they have on the Multitude, they have at all Times done sufficient Mischiefs.

Hence *Grotius* says, "That, as *Curtius* observ'd of Old, the Multitude, ensnark'd by Superstition, are more apt to be govern'd by their Priests than Princes; and that the Kings and Emperors have learnt this at their Cost; insomuch that to produce Examples of this Kind, woul'd in a Manner, be transcribing the History of all Nations.

They, I think, woul'd do no Small Service to Mankind, who woul'd improve this Hint of *Grotius*, and shew how the Priests in all Religions, and in all Times, have impos'd on the Credulity of the People; nor cou'd it but be very acceptable to a Clergy, who abhor all such vile Methods.

**B.** You all along argue, that the Rule of Action, in Order to human Happiness, being every where the same; as founded on the Nature of God and Man, and the Relation we stand in to him, and one another; True Religion, in all Places and Times, must ever be the same; Eternal, Universal, and Unalterable: And such as every intelligent Creature, must have sufficient Understanding to discover, and Abilities to comply with; except we suppose a Being perfectly wise, and infinitely good, requires of his Creatures, Things which he has not enabl'd them to know, or perform. And hence You conclude, that external Revelation can only be a Republication of this unchangeable Rule of Life; but Divines, You are sensible, for the most Part, are of a different Sentiment; nay, highly complain of the Imperfection and Insufficiency of this Rule.

**A.** In Order to shew the Absurdity of such Complaints, let me ask You, had Mankind, before any traditional Religion commenc'd, any Religion, or not?

**B. I**
B. It must be own'd, that they had a Religion, which, as coming from the Author of all Perfection, must, as worthy of its divine Original, be wholly perfect; nor could there be a greater Mark of its Perfection, than that of its being universal, unchangeable, and indelibly implanted in human Nature.

A. I will not ask You, whether any Religion, that wants those Marks of Perfection, can come from a Being of infinite Perfection; but desire to know wherein the Perfection of this universal, and unchangeable Religion consists?

B. It can't be deny'd, that the End for which God implanted this Religion in human Nature, was to make Men happy here as well as hereafter; (God's Will in Relation to Man and human Happiness being equivalent Terms) and therefore, he cou'd not, at any Time, leave them destitute of the most proper Means to answer this End.

A. Does not the undeniable Perfection of this universal Religion, sufficiently expose all your Pretences to a New Religion, giv'n by God to any small Part of Mankind in these last Ages?

B. We say, there was Need of a New Religion, tho' the Old was ever so perfect; because Men did not observe it.

A. If that was a Reason for a New Religion, we might expect New Religions daily; "But, as the present Bishop of Bangor observes, tho' the World was the worse for abusing the Religion of Nature, and might want to be reform'd by a divine Instructor; yet the Religion of Nature was not the worse for being abus'd, but still retain'd its first Purity and Simplicity;" and consequent-ly, its native Efficacy to make us happy: But Men not paying a due Regard to this most perfect Religion, but
mixing with it human Inventions, it might, then, be agreeable to the divine Goodness, to send Persons to recall them to a more strict Observation of it; which, had it been observ'd, must have destroy'd all Contentions, but of outvying one another in all good Offices; as the corrupting it has done the contrary.

Which Hypothebs, think You, is most for the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; (those certain Tests by which we are to judge of the Truth of all Matters relating to Religion;) that all God's Laws shou'd carry with them such evident Marks of Goodness and Kindness for the whole Race of Mankind, as that Men of the meanest Capacities, even tho' they can't read in their own native Language, may know their Duty? Or that their Religion, and the Proofs on which it depends, shou'd be originally writ in Languages they understand not; which, by putting all traditional Religions on a Level, obliges them in every Country, to pin their Faith on Men, who are but too apt to abuse the Peoples Credulity to their own Profit?

B. There can be no Doubt, but 'tis for the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, that all his Laws shou'd have such a Signature impress'd on them, as may shew his infinite Wisdom and Goodness; but can You say, all his Laws bear this Character?

A. Yes, if they are all of a Piece: And since God had no other End in creating Mankind, but their Good; or in giving them Laws, but as they conduce to that Good; and has given, and requires 'em to use their Understanding to distinguish between Good and Evil; Men, in doing all the Good they can, whether they know any Thing of the Institutions, which prevail in this, or that Age or Country, or not, fully answer the End of their Creation; and do in the
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best Manner recommend themselves to the Favour both of God and Man.

Without the common People are govern'd by those plain, obvious Principles I contend for, they would always be in a State of Uncertainty; since as Bishop Taylor justly observes, and all History confirms, "There's no Church that is in Prosperity, but alters her Doctrine every Age; either by bringing in new Doctrines, or by contradicting her old; which shews they are not satisfy'd with them-selves, nor with their own Confessions." "Let none of the Heathen, says an antient Church-Historian, deride us, because the latter Bishops depose the former, and al-B.

ways find out something which they add to the Faith.

B. Is there nothing in Theology, but what Divines have alter'd?

A. Mr. Le Clerc observes, that "Theology is subject to Revolutions as well as Empires, but tho' it has undergone considerable Changes, yet the Humour of Divines is much the same.

Whatever Noise Ecclesiastics make about Creeds, or other Fundamentals, there's very often something else at the Bottom; as whoever is conversant in Church History must know: However to give one Instance, "When the Eastern and Western Churches in the 9th Century, fell into an Humour of quarrelling upon the Account of Jurisdiction, after some Time of Anger, in which they seem'd to be searching for Matter to reproach one another with; they found out this Difference. The Greeks reproach'd the Latins, for adding to the Faith about the Procesion of the Holy Ghost; and corrupting the ancient Symbol; and that too contrary to the Decree of a General Council. The Latins on the other Hand, charg'd them for"
 detracting from the Dignity of the Son. And this be-
came the chief Point in Controversy between them." I
can't but mention Bishop Burnet's Remark on this Dispute,
"We of this Church, says he, tho' we abhor the Cruelty of
condemning the Eastern Churches for such a Difference,
yet do receive the Creed according to the Usage of the
Western Churches." Which is in Effect, damning that
Creed, which damns the Eastern Churches.

And it's plain from Church History, that Creeds were
the spiritual Arms, with which contending Parties com-
bated each other; and that those who were the Majority
invented such unscriptural Terms, as they thought their Ad-
versaries wou'd most scruple, in Order to the stripping
of their Preferments; and it wou'd have been well if they
had stuck there, and not made use of more cruel Methods.

None, who consider how differently the Circumstances
of human Affairs, which are continually changing, affect
Men; but must see 'tis scarce possible, that the Doctrines
which were originally taught, or the Practice originally
us'd in any Institution, shou'd long continue the same; no-
thing being more easy than to vary the Signification of
Words: The infinite Divisions which prevail'd, even in the
primitive and apostolical Times, sufficiently prove this;
without having Recourse to those Alterations and Additions,
which the Clergy have since been continually making in
Christianity; especially in the Greek and Latin Churches.
But we need go no further back than the Reformation; did
not the whole Body of the People, Laity as well as Clergy,
in the Compass of twelve Years, change their Religion three
Times? And it wou'd make no small Book, to shew how
since that Time, our Clergy, tho' their Calvinistical Arti-
cles continue the same, have vary'd, both as to Doctrines
and
and Discipline. What a quick Change have we seen of those passive Principles, once the Characteristick of the Church? And if we judge by the present Disputes now on Foot, the Clergy are not like to be more fix'd for the future. But of all Clergy-men, they, certainly, are not upon any Account to be rely'd on; who, tho' by their whole Conduct they shew their great Zeal for Persecution; yet talk against an implicit Faith, and recommend Christianity as requiring no further Favour, than a fair, and impartial Inquiry into its Grounds and Doctrines. This not only shews their great Hypocrisy, but that they are more cruel than those, who expressly forbid all Examination; since they first tempt Men to examine, and then punish them for so doing, if they presume to differ from their Leaders; and those that forbid all Examination can do no more. And herein they act the Part of Satan, first tempt People, and then punish them for being tempted; so that, strict speaking, 'tis not always true, that Priests of all Religions are the same; such hypocritical, persecuting Priests are worse than all others; who, while they charge the Papist, and Mahometan, with a Consciousness of his Religion's being a Cheat, because he will not permit it to be examin'd; not only practise the same themselves, but contend 'tis necessary for the Support of the true Religion.

How easily the Sense of Words may be mistaken, the Apostles themselves are a sufficient Instance; for had they the same Ideas of the Words which Jesus spake, as Jesus himself had, 'tis impossible that after three Years Converse they shou'd be ignorant of the End of his Mission: And if his familiar Friends, who daily convers'd with him in the same Language, and had every Minute an Opportunity of being satisfy'd of their Doubts, cou'd yet so grossly mistake;
well may we at this Distance of Time, if we are to be go-
vern'd by Words, and not by the unalterable Reason of
Things: And how long was it, till they understood the
Meaning of Teach all Nations, Preach the Gospel to every
Creature? And St. Peter himself needed a Miracle to open
his Understanding, to comprehend a most evident Truth.
Then Peter opened his Mouth, and said, Of a Truth, I per-
ceive that God is no Respeector of Persons: But in every
Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is
accepted with him. Till this happen'd, he, tho' fill'd with
the Holy Ghost, confin'd Salvation to the Name of a Per-
son; viz. the Name of Christ. There is none other
Name under Heaven given amongst Men, whereby we must
be saved.

Had there been but one Language, and a Book writ
in that Language, in indelible Characters, (so that there
could be none of those thirty thousand various Readings,
which are own'd to be crept into the New Testament) and
all could have Access to it; yet even then, considering how
uncertain the Meaning of Words are; and the Interest of
designing Men, to put a wrong Sense on them; it must be
morally impossible this Religion could long continue the
same. And,

On Galat. 1. “If, as St. Jerom says, a false Interpretation of the Gos-
pel of Christ, may make it become the Gospel of Men,
nay, which is worse, of Devils;” how can they, who,
not understanding the Original, must trust to the Interpre-
tation of Others, be certain; had they not a sufficient in-
ward Light to direct them, what Doctrines are from God,
what from Men, and what from Devils?

Is it not notorious, that Papish Priests, not to mention
other persecuting Priests, have propagated such destructive
Notions,
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Notions, as if the Devil himself had been to contrive a Religion, he cou’d not have invented more pernicious?

Words are the arbitrary Marks of Mens Ideas, and the Meaning of Words, as well as the Words themselves, are perpetually changing; and ’tis as impossible to fix one as the other. We see by the innumerable verbal Disputes, which happen even among learned Men, how different their Ideas are; and perhaps, there are not three Persons, who, when they talk abstracedly, have precisely the same Ideas, tho’ they use the same Words. No One can doubt of this, who considers how much the Divines of the same Church differ in explaining what they mean by Divine Person, Essence, Trinity, Messiah, Incarnation, Hypostatical Union, Original Sin, Satisfaction, Justification, Predestination, Grace, Free-will, and all other Technical Terms, if I may so call them. Bishop Taylor quotes Osander for saying, “There are twenty several Opinions concerning Justification, all drawn from the Scriptures by the Men only of Polem. Disc. P. 452. the Augustine Confession; and there are sixteen several Opinions concerning Original Sin; and as many Distinctions of the Sacraments as there are Sects of Men that disagree about them.

That excellent Critick Daille says, “We have, in deed, these Words Pope, Patriarch, Mass, Oration, Station, Procession, Mortal Sins, Penance, Confession, Satisfaction, Merit, Indulgence, as the Ancients had, and make use of an infinite Number of the like Terms; but understand them in a Sense almost as far different from theirs, as our Age is remov’d from theirs.

To give one remarkable Instance of this Nature, the primitive Fathers did not believe a Spirit to be immaterial; but only a thinner Sort of Body: And this they did

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not only apply to the Souls of Men and Angels, (who, they suppos'd, lay with Women, and got Children in Abundance;) but they thought that God himself was corporeal. 

Melito, who was believ'd to be a Prophet, and flourish'd about 170, wrote a Book about the Imbodied God. And Tertullian says, Quis negabit Deum corpus esse, et si Deus Spiritus est? And again, Nibil incorporale nisi quod non est. And St. Hilary, even in the fourth Century affirms, There's nothing but what is corporeal. And 'tis very probable, that from some Words of our Saviour, they thought that a Spirit was a thinner Sort of Body, that cou'd be seen, but not felt. And from St. Paul's saying, In him dwelleth the Fulness of the Godhead bodily, and talking in several other Places of a spiritual Body, they concluded that That was the same with a bodily Spirit; tho' our Divines now very well know how to distinguish between a bodily Spirit and a spiritual Body.

In short, there are scarce any Words in any one Language, except of such Things as immediately strike the Senses, that are adequately answer'd in another, so as exactly to comprehend the same Ideas; and if the Ideas are only fewer, or more, what Confusion may not that occasion? How great, and frequent must the Mistakes then be, in translating the antiquated Languages of People, who liv'd at a vast Distance of Time, as well as in Countries far remote; and affected hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, and typical Ways of expressing themselves, as opposite to the Usage in other Parts, as East is to West? And not only this, but it will be likewise necessary to have an accurate Knowledge of their Manners, Customs, Traditions, Philosophy, Religious Notions, Sects, Civil and Ecclesiastical Polity; of all which the common People know as little, as they do of the Original Languages; who having very
very obscure, and incompetent Conceptions of the principal Words, and Phrases us’d in the Versions, their Religion must needs be a very odd Jumble of confus’d and inconsistent Notions, were it to depend on Words, and their precise Meaning; and not on the Things themselves, and their Relations, which are plain and obvious to common Capacities; they would be in a Manner entirely govern’d by Sounds; some of which, such as they us’d to hear spoken of with Respect, they would highly reverence; while others, tho’ of the same Signification, they would as much abhor, till Custom had made them familiar. And,

Were Men not to be govern’d by Things, but Words, the Consequence now would be much worse than what happen’d on the Confusion of Languages at Babel; because no written Religion, for Want of an universal Language, cou’d become universal; and People must, without a competent Skill in dead Languages, be oblig’d to take their Religion on Trust, from Men too, as subject to be deceit’d, as they are often ready to deceive: Nay, the Universality of Language, cou’d it have preserve’d Religion uncorrupt, would have done so in the Antediluvian World, and before that Confusion of Language, which happen’d at Babel.

If Skill in Languages cou’d make even the Learned certain, how comes it to pass, that what goes for Orthodox in one Age, shall be Heterodox in another? What is fundamental in one Church, be damnable Error in another? Nay, must not every One, if at all vers’d in Church-History, say with Mr. Chillingworth? “I see plain, and with my own Eyes, that there are Popes against Popes, Councils against Councils; some Fathers against others; the same Fathers against themselves; a Consent of Fathers of one Age, against a Consent of Fathers of another Age; the Church

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of
"of one Age, against the Church of another Age?" And do not the Clergy themselves think there's such Uncertainty in the Scripture-Language, even in Things of the greatest Moment; when they generally use unscriptural Terms to express those Things? And that they can't even here agree among themselves, there needs no better Proof than the Disputes of our Divines about Fundamentals; tho' they are, to prevent all Controversies of this Nature, enacted, guarded with penal Laws, and all the Clergy, at every Turn, oblig'd to subscribe 'em in the same Words. And,

I cou'd name Two eminent Bishops, who, if they were to give a true Account of their religious Tenents, 'tis thought, wou'd appear to differ very widely, even in what themselves term Fundamentals. But are not such Differences utterly unavoidable, as long as Men found their Religion on Words and Phrases thus dubious; and not on the eternal Reason, and unalterable Relations of Things, obvious to the meanest Capacity?

Notwithstanding the wide Difference there is between all Christian Sects, from the Papist down to the Quaker; I can't help thinking, that an infinitely wise and good God has adapted the Rules and Evidences, of what he really requires from Mankind, to their general Capacity; and that the Certainty of every Command, must be equal to the Importance of the Duty. How can we suppose some of the most necessary Duties of Religion, are only to be found in voluminous Books, which the greatest Part of Mankind have, perhaps, never heard of; and of those that have, not one in a thousand understands a Tittle of the Languages they are writ in; or is capable of examining into those Records, from which the Authority of these Books are to be deriv'd?
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Is not that an admirable Hypothesis, which, tho' it supposes God has endow'd Mankind with Reason to enable them to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; yet admits that almost all Mankind are incapable of doing it, but must alike, in all Countries, depend on the Authority of Men, her'd to maintain the traditional Religion of the Places where they live; who, perhaps, will tell them, that there was a Time (happy those who liv'd in it) when Religion was suited to the Capacities of the Vulgar; being preach'd by inspir'd Men in the Languages they understood, and Miracles for their Conviction wrought in their Sight; but that now the Scene was entirely chang'd, they had no Miracles, no infallible Men to have Recourse to, to set them right; and that their Religion by Distance of Time was not only become obscure, but that the whole of it, and the Proofs on which its Validity depends, are writ in Languages, of which the People understand not a Word; and that "the Evidence arising from particular Types and Prophecies, is now, by Length of Time, and Distance of Place, and Change of Customs, become obscure and difficult to the Generality of People, and cannot be thoroughly discuss'd without a great Variety of Knowledge concerning the ancient Jews' Customs, and the Authority of their Writings, and the exact Calculation of Time." Which is Effect to suppose, that the Religion of the Vulgar must consist, in taking the Words of their Teachers, however divided among themselves, for the Word of God; and their Translations, for Law and Gospel; and that believing in them, is having a divine Faith; tho' One would think, whatever depended on human Traditions, and Translations, cou'd be but a human Faith.

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B. Tho' something of this Nature is unavoidable, where Religion is writ in antiquated Languages; yet in the main, are we not now more certain of the Truth of our traditional Religion, than those who liv'd in former Ages; we having the Authority of every past Age in Confirmation of its Truth?

A. Mr. Locke, speaking concerning Assent in Matters, wherein Testimony it made use of, says, "I think, it may not be amiss to take Notice of a Rule observ'd in the Law of England; which is, That tho' the attested Copy of a Record be good Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy never so well attested, and by never so credible Witnesses, will not be admitted as a Proof in Judicature. This is so generally approv'd as reasonable, and suited to the Wisdom and Caution to be used in our Enquiry after material Truths, That I never yet heard of any One that blamed it. This Practice, if it be allowable in the Decisions of Right and Wrong, carries this Observation along with it; viz. That any Testimony, the further off it is from the original Truth, the less Force and Proof it has. The Being and Existence of the Thing itself, is what I call the original Truth. A credible Man vouching his Knowledge of it, is a good Proof: But if another, equally credible, do witness it from his Report, the Testimony is weaker; and a third that attests the Hear-say of an Hear-say, is yet less considerable. So that in Traditional Truths, each Remove weakens the Force of the Proof. And the more Hands the Tradition has successively passed through, the less Strength and Evidence does it receive from them."

This is certain, that what in one Age was affirmed upon slight Grounds, can never after come to be more valid in future Ages, by being often repeated?" I hope you
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You will pardon me, if I presume to think, that God, at all Times, is so good and impartial, that his Will, on which the Happiness of Mankind at all Times depends, is at all Times equally knowable; and consequently, must be founded on what is always alike discernable; the Nature and Reason of Things: Can a Religion, design'd for every One, not be within the Reach of every One? Or can That, which above all Things it concerns ALL Men to know, not be knowable by ALL?

\[ \text{id, quod} \]
\[ \text{Æque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æque;} \]
\[ \text{Æque neglegitum pueris senibusque nocbit.} \]
\[ \text{Hoc opus, hoc studium parvi properemus & ampli;} \]
\[ \text{Si patrice volumus, si nobis vivere cari.} \]

And certainly, nothing can be a greater Libel on the True Religion; than to suppose it does not contain such internal Marks, as will, even to the meanest Capacity, distinguish it from all false Religions; so as that a Man, tho' unable to read in his Mother-Tongue, may, without pinning his Faith on any Sett of Priests, know what God requires of him.

I have said nothing of the Plainness, Simplicity, and even Universality of Religion, but what is agreeable to the Description, which St. Paul, from the Prophet Jeremiah, gives of the Gospel Dispensation; the express Terms of which run thus, I will put my Laws into their Mind, and write them in their Hearts; and I will be unto them a God, and they shall be to me a People: And they shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. As these Words are too plain to need a Comment,
so I shall defer drawing any Consequences from them, till I have first endeavour'd to free the Scripture from that Obscurity, in which artful Men have involv'd it. And,

I shall, now, by Way of Recapitulation, mention what Mr. Barbeyrac, a Person of no small Note in the learned World, says concerning the Practical Science of Morality;

None can reasonably doubt, but that every Man, who will be happy, must needs, in Order to make himself so, regulate his Conduct after some certain Manner; and that God, as the Author and Parent of all human Race, does prescribe to all Men without Exception, the Duties which tend to procure them that Happiness, which they so passionately seek after. Now, from hence it necessarily follows, that the natural Principles of this Science are such as may be easily discover'd; and such too, as are proportionate to the Capacities of all Sorts of Persons: So that to be instructed in this Science, there will be no Occasion to mount up to Heaven; or to have from thence any extraordinary Revelation for that Purpose. — It must be own'd, to the eternal Glory of the supreme Legislator of Mankind, as well as to the utter Confusion of themselves; that none can complain without Injustice, that God has given him Laws, either impracticable, or inviron'd with such Obscurity, as cannot be penetrated by one who really has his Duty at Heart, notwithstanding all his Pains and Application. This the wisest Heathens have acknowledg'd; — (and) the Stoicks, who made Morality their principal Study, maintain'd, that their Philosophy was not above the Reach of Women and Slaves; and that as the Way to Virtue lies open to all Men without Distinction; so there is no Estate, or Condition, with peculiar Privileges exclusive of others, as to the Faculty of knowing
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"the Principles and Rules, as well of those Duties which are common to all; as of those which belong to each particular. — The Idea of a Creator, boundless in Power, sect. 3. p. 10. Wisdom and Goodness; and the Idea of ourselves, as intelligent, reasonable, and sociable Creatures: These two Ideas, I say, if well look’d into, and compar’d together in their whole Extent, will always furnish us with steady Grounds of Duty, and sure Rules of Conduct; notwithstanding it may sometimes so fall out, that, for Want of Care and Attention, we may, in some uncommon Cases, not know how to apply them; or cannot methodically demonstrate the necessary Connexion of some remote Consequences, with the first Principles of Morality. — sect. 33. p. 87. "’Tis certain, that the entire Conformity of the Christian Morality, with the clearest Dictates of right Reason; is one of the most convincing Proofs of the Divinity of the Christian Religion; as has been acknowledg’d by all, who have wrote with any Solidity on that Subject. — And if we duly weigh, and consider it, we shall find, that this is the Proof, which of all others is the most affecting; and the best proportion’d to the common Capacities of the Bulk of Mankind. — [Who] When they come at length to consider the Evangelical Morality, and find it intirely conformable both to their true Interests; and to all those Principles, of which every Man has by Nature the Seeds in his own Heart; they cannot then help concluding, that the Author of it must necessarily be that very Being, who has giv’n Life, and brought ’em into this World only to make ’em happy; provided they will not be wanting to themselves, but contribute on their Part, all that lies in their own Power, towards the Attainment of their own Felicity.

Q q
I might here commend to your Perusal, what he, in several Sections, affirms of the "Extreme Negligence of the Publick Ministers of Religion, in cultivating the Science of Morality; which, as he says, being by them almost banish'd out of the World, took Sanctuary among the Laicks, or undignify'd Men of Letters; who gave it a much better Reception. — No sooner did that admirable Treatise of Grotius, of the Right of War and Peace, appear in the World, but the Ecclesiastics, instead of returning Thanks to the Author for it, every Where declar'd against him; and his Book was not only put into the expurgatory Index of the Roman Catholick Inquisitors, but many, even Protestant Divines, labour'd to cry it down. And thus it fare'd too with Mr. Puffendorf's Book of the Law of Nature and Nations, the Jesuits at Vienna caus'd it to be prohibited; and many Protestant Divines, both of Sweden and Germany, did their best, to make this excellent Work share every where else the same Fate?

B. If these great Men were thus dealt with, for setting the Science of Morality in its due Light; can You, who place Religion in the Practice of Morality in Obedience to the Will of God; and suppose there can be no other Distinction between Morality and Religion, than that the former is acting according to the Reason of Things consider'd in themselves; the other, acting according to the same Reason of Things consider'd as the Will of God? Can You, I say, hope to escape being pelted by some of the same Profession for such a Crime as This?

A. That, I must own, would be a Favour I neither hope, nor wish for; since I am sensible, the shewing Religion to be no arbitrary Institution, but founded on the Na-
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Nature of Things, and their Relations, obvious to the Capacity of all that dare use their Reason; must provoke all Ecclesiasticks of what Denomination soever, who expect a blind Submission from the Laity; tho' was it not for the Authority that the High Church Clergy among the Reform'd lay Claim to, when from Protestant Principles they draw Popish Conclusions; the Pretences of the Popish Priests for the Necessity of an Infallible Guide, wou'd appear ridiculous.

The Substance of what the Papists say, is, in short, "That if the Principles of Protestants, relating to private Judgment, are true, the Bulk of Mankind can't go beyond such plain Rules of Religion, as carry their own Evidence with them; since otherwise they wou'd be oblig'd to admit Things, about which they are incapable of judging?"

"If the Religion of Peasants and Mechanicks, Men and Maid-Servants, the ignorant and illiterate, must depend on Books written in antiquated Languages, of which they understand not one Word; and are incapable of judging of the historical Evidences of remote Facts, on which the Authority of those Books is founded; nor can know whether a Religion thus founded, has been faithfully convey'd down to them; must they not either be of that traditional Religion, which obtains in the Country where they live, (as none is without one)? Or else must there not be some Persons appointed to judge for them in Matters of Religion, in whose Determination they may safely acquiesce? If this be Popery, there can be no Mean between Popery and Natural Religion.

"If, in the earliest Times, Christians were split into many Sects, and each Sect had their particular..."
Scriptures; are the common Christians now (when all
the historical Evidence is lost but of one Side only, and
That too they understand not) competent Judges in this
Matter? Or to condescend to Particulars, are they ca-
uble of judging in the Controversies between Catholicks
and Protestants, about the Number of Canonical Books,
Oral Tradition, the Authority of the Church, the un-
interrupted Succession, and a thousand other Things; es-
pecially such as relate to Mysteries; about which they
are so far from being competent Judges, that they are
not capable of understanding even the Terms, in which
the Learned choose to express themselves, when they en-
deavour to explain their inexplicable Mysteries?

Ought not the illiterate, if they had a just Sense
of their own Ignorance, to have been frightened, upon
their pretended Reformation, at the very Thoughts of
leaving a Church, to which their Ancestors had been so
long united; (and which most of their Adversaries own'd
to be a true Church, and deriv'd their Authority from
her;) upon the Account of Opinions, they were no more
capable of judging; than they were of judging, after they
had left the Church, to which of the numerous Sects
they shou'd join themselves?

All Protestant Churches, have taken the same
Methods to make People pay an absolute Submission
to their Decision, as the Church of Rome, by excom-
municating, and condemning, when they had Power,
to perpetual Imprisonment; or otherwise punishing those
who wou'd not renounce their private Opinions, when
contrary to their Decisions; which is either condemning
their own Principles, or their own Practices so directly
opposite to their Principles; but if this Power of judging
for
for the People is, as the Protestant Clergy pretend, so necessary to preserve Unity, that it must belong to every particular, and Protestant Church, tho' founded on the Breach of Catholick Unity; how came the Church itself, before the pretended Reformation, to want this Power so necessary to preserve itself?

B. Protestant Divines, when press'd on this Head, usually distinguish between a just Authority, and an absolute Authority.

A. Can the Church of Rome, say its Votaries, claim a greater Authority, than the Church of England does in her Canons of 1603; where she declares, "All are ipso facto Can. 3. excommunicate, who shall affirm She is not an Orthodox and Apostolical Church; not to be absolv'd, but by the Archbishop, after having publickly renounce'd this their impious Error; and after the same Manner excommunicates. All, who shall affirm the Articles of 1562, made Can. 5. to avoid Diversity of Opinions, ulla ex parte superstitiosos aut erroneos existere; "All that speak against her Rites and Ceremonies, or condemn her Ordination, and her Discipline (tho' she herself complains of Commination. 'Want of godly Discipline') by Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, &c.; All Schismatics, and all Congregations not establish'd by Law, if they assume to themselves the Name of a True, and Lawful Church": Does not this, say the Papists, shew, That tho' the Principles of the Church of England were anti-papist; yet that her Practices, her Laws Civil as well as Ecclesiastical, before the Revolution, were popish; since the Laws against all Separatists then extended to the Losers, not only, of Estate and Liberty; but even of Life itself?

From
From these, and such like Reasons, the Papists concluded, that if the People are oblig'd to go a Step beyond the plain and obvious Rules of Natural Religion, there is, in the Judgment of all Churches whatever, a Necessity for them to have Recourse to Others to judge for them; unless there are to be as many Religions as Judges.

B. How did our Reformers answer these Objections?

A. They being chiefly concern'd for the Authority of the Scripture, and withal willing in their Disputes with the Papists to support private Judgment, said, "That the Scriptures themselves, from their innate Evidence, and by the Illumination of the same holy Spirit which indited them, sufficiently shew'd themselves to be the Will of God."

The Dutch Confession publish'd in 1566, in the Name of the Belgian Churches, after having recited a Catalogue of the Books of Scripture, says, "These we receive as the only sacred and canonical Books; not because the Church receives them as such; but because the holy Spirit witnesses to our Consciences, that they proceed from God; and themselves testify their Authority.

The Gallican Churches, in their Confession, go somewhat further, not only "declaring their Faith in the Scriptures, to depend on the Testimony of the internal Persuasion of the Spirit; but that thereby they know the Canonical from the Ecclesiastical, i.e. Apocryphal Books. And,

The Assembly of Divines at Westminster, maintain'd, that "Our full Persuasion and Assurance of the infallible Truth thereof (the Scriptures); is from the inward Work of the Holy Spirit, bearing Witness by, and with the Words in our Hearts.

As
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As to foreign Divines, I shall only mention that great Reformer Calvin, who says, "All must allow, that there are in the Scriptures manifest Evidences of God speaking in them. — The Majesty of God in them will prevail."

"...fently appear to every impartial Examiner, which will extort our Assent: So that they act preposterously, who endeavour by any Argument to beget a solid Credit to the Scriptures. — The Word will never meet with Credit in Mens Minds, till it be seal'd by the internal Testimony of the Spirit who wrote it.

Our learned Whittaker, in his Controversy about the Scripture against Bellarmine, gives this Account of the Doctrines of the Church; "The Sum, says he, of our Opinion is, that the Scriptures have all their Authority and Credit from themselves; that they are to be acknowledg'd and receiv'd, not because the Church has appointed or commanded so, but because they came from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the Church, but from the Holy Ghost? And,

Indeed, our Church supposes no Man can be a good Christian, without being inspir'd; by saying, Works done before the Grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasing to God: — yea, — we doubt not, but that they have the Nature of Sin. And,

As to the Dissenters, I shall only quote Dr. Owen, a Man not long since very eminent among them, who is as zealous in maintaining this Opinion as any of the first Reformers; his Words are, "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament do abundantly, and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the Word of the living God; so that merely on the Account of their own Proposal to us, in the Name & c. 4, 5.

"...Majesty of God as such, without the Contribution of..."
of Help, or Assistance from Tradition, Church, or any
Thing else without themselves, we are oblig'd upon the
Penalty of eternal Damnation, to receive them with that
Subjection of Soul, which is due to the Word of God.
The Authority of God shining in them, they afford unto
us all the divine Evidence of themselves, which God is
willing to grant us, or can be granted to us, or is any
Way needful for us." And lest the Quakers should take
it amiss, if while I quote other Sects, I shou'd overlook them;
Prop. 3. p. 70. R. Barclay says, "How necessary 'tis to seek the Certainty
of the Scripture from the Spirit, the infinite Janglings,
and endless Contests of those who seek their Authority
elsewhere, do witness to the Truth thereof:" And then
proceeds to prove those infinite Janglings, and endless Con-
tests.

The Reform'd wou'd have argu'd unanswerably, had
they contented themselves with saying, that there are no
Doctrines of a divine Original contain'd in the Gospel Dis-
penation, but what by their innate Excellency are knowable
to be such; as being writ in our Minds, and put into our
Hearts by God himself; as is expressly declar'd by the Pro-
phet Jeremiah, and repeated and reafferted by the Apostle,
and by Christ himself. But,

Our Divines, it seems, at last found out, that the Re-
formers, and their Successors, had embrac'd Christianity on
such Grounds, as they believ'd wou'd equally serve any other
Religion, where there was a strong Persuasion; and being
zealous for certain Things, which do not carry any internal
Marks of their Truth, or in other Words, of being taught
of God, they fell into strange Inconsistencies; sometimes
talking like Hobbits, of the Power of the Magistrate; some-
times like Papists, of the Authority of the Church in re-
ligious
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Religious Matters; and sometimes maintaining both, and private Judgment too, in the same Discourse, if not in the same Section; which made their Adversaries treat them as a Pack of tricking, chicaning Wretches, who had no Regard to Truth, or Consistency, or any Thing but their private Interest.

The Opinion, now, which seems to be espous'd by some, who would be thought the only True Church-men, is, what the late learned Dr. Rogers maintains; who, tho' he agrees with the Papists, that the People are incapable of judging for themselves in most Points of Religion; yet, to do him Justice, he puts the Church of Rome but upon a Level with all other Churches of what Religion soever, that chance to be uppermost; for he lays it down as a Principle, "That tho' no Man ought upon any Authority to believe Contradictions, or profess an Assent to evident Fallhoods, yet in Questions, where he must in the Event be determin'd by some Authority or other, may reasonably prefer the Authority appointed by publick Wisdom, and may justly be requir'd so to do." — The Bulk of Ib. p. 58;

"Mankind are manifestly unable to form a Judgment either of the Arguments by which he (his Antagonist) endeavour to subvert our Religion, or establish his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they must unavoidably rely on his, or our Authority for the Truth of the Suggestions on which their Conclusion depends; and we presume our Word will go as far as his." This is Affording that People are oblig'd to take their Religion on Trust, and then to change it as often as there's any Change in the State-Religion; or as often as they change their Residence; and in all these Changes to be govern'd by Men, who are his'd not to find out Truth, but to make that Reli...
ligion, to which their Preteniements are annex’d, to pass for true. And if People will not be govern’d, the Legislature, or in the Doctor’s Phrase, Publick Wisdom may justly require them to do. Nor is the Matter mended, by excepting Contradictions and evident Falshoods; since here too, if private Persons and Authority differ, publick Wisdom will certainly be on the Side of the Authority it sets up; and 'tis in such Things that the publick Wisdom in most Christian Countries has exerted itself with the utmost Cruelty. So that the whole Question between the Papist and the Doctor (both Sides agreeing that Men can’t believe Contradictions and evident Falshoods; and that there are Things, which the People are incapable of knowing, or if known, can’t judge whether they are true or not;) is, on whom the People in these Points must pin their Faith? Whether there are certain, standing Judges appointed by Christ, who shall infallibly lead them into the Truth? Or whether in every Christian Country, the People are bound to be of the Religion of those fallible, not to say, self-interested Guides. Publick Wisdom has authoris’d. Here it must be confess’d, the Doctor is against the Pope of Rome, but 'tis to set himself up in his stead; and he accordingly maintains, that those who are committed to his Care, are in Things of which they can’t judge, to follow his Judgment; and says, "tho’ he may mistake, and in Consequence of it mislead them; yet they will have this Defence before Christ, That they have fought his Will in the Methods which he has directed; and, where they wanted a Guide, preferr’d one appointed to that Office according to his Institution." But why may not a Parish-Priest appointed by Publick Wisdom in North-Britain, France, or any other Country, say the same to People, incapable of judging in these Points?
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Is not this supposing, that the Christian Religion in many Points, is so fram'd, that in every Parish the People must follow the Judgment of their Parish-Priest; because they are to seek (and what more can be requir'd of them) Christ's Will in the Manner the Parish-Priest tells them Christ directs. And is not this Popery, even worse than Roman Popery, as it is setting up a Pope in every Parish? And obliging the People as often as any of them change their Parish; or be his Parish, or his Mind; to change their Religion too, in every Thing that is not self-evident, or a manifest Contradiction, in Compliance with their present Parish-Pope?

I can't but remark, how good Wits, tho' they liv'd in very distant Times, and seem of very different Religions, have luckily hit on the same Thought; I mean Vergerius, who, in Luther's Days, was Nuncio to the Pope; and Dr. Rogers, late Chaplain to a Protestant King, at the Head of the Protestant Interest. The former said to Luther, If you would have bad any thing innovated in the Faith, in which you were bred up for 35 Years, for your Conscience and Salvation sake, it was sufficient to have kept it to yourself. The latter affirms, "That in the Christian Religion, the Apostle's Rule is, Haft thou Faith, have it to thyself? And yet 'tis plain, the Apostle was persecuted by the Rogerians of those Days, for not keeping his Faith to himself.

B. Whatever Vergerius might deserve from Popish Publick Wisdom, for misapplying this Text, to put a Stop to the Reformation; a Protestant Divine could deserve nothing but Contempt from Protestant publick or private Wisdom, for so notoriously perverting its Meaning, and openly bantering our first Reformers; and not only condemning them, for not keeping their Religion to themselves; but asserting, that all, who (without a special Commission) from

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the Beginning of the World to this Day, have "labour'd
" by publick Preaching, or Writing, to withdraw Mens Sub-
" mission to the establish'd Religion, whether Pagan, Ma-
" bemetan, or Popish, and gather Congregations in Opposi-
" tion to it, contrary to the Command of the Magis-
" trate;" have been guilty of the damnable Sin of Disobe-
dience and Sedition. So that if Popery had been establish'd
by Law in King James's Reign, all Protestants must have
kept their Religion in their own Breasts; since publickly
professing a Religion can't but be unlawful, where there's no
coming at it, but by unlawful Means. The Papists, sure,
need no other Arguments, to shew the Unlawfulness of the
Reformation in most Places, than what this Reverend Di-
vine has furnish'd them with. And tho' he declares himself
an Enemy to all Persecution, and owns, "that if there
" be no publick Worship, there must be all the Appear-
" ance that can be of absolute Irreligion;" yet the chief
" Design of his Vindication of the Civil Establishment is to
" prove, that all Magistrates, of what Religion soever,
" have a Right to oblige all, but those of their own Com-
munion, to keep their Religion to themselves." Which is
declaring for Persecution as well as Irreligion; since all
Men believe 'tis their Duty publickly to worship God, tho'
contrary to all human Commands; and he himself dares not
say he would obey such Commands.

And his Distinction between Mens acting with, or with-
out a special Commission, is impertinent in Relation to a
Magistrate, who owns no such Commission; and the whole
is inconsistent with that Authority, which, in another Place,
he gives to the Church or Clergy, of prescribing what Doc-
trines shall be taught, and what not: But if the Magistrate,
for the sake of the State, can forbid the publick Profession
of
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of all Religions but one; why not that one? since I believe, there's scarce any Instance where the Profession of but one has been permitted, but that Religion soon degenerated into Priestcraft, to the entire Destruction of Mens Civil Liberties; and the Magistrate, as well as his Subjects, has been forc'd to submit to the arbitrary, and vile Impositions of his own Priests.

In short, this noble Scheme, if there's any Consistency in it, is, that in all Matters of Religion, where People are capable of judging; they must not, if the Magistrate thinks fit, openly profess their Religion; and in all other Things, which depend on Book-Learning, they are to be govern'd by their respective Parish-Popes. And if such a Scheme as This, cou'd recommend the Person that publish'd it, to a much larger Parish-Popedom than he had before; 'tis high Time for the Laity to consider, whether all the Blood and Treasure which have been spent to keep out but one Pope, has not been spent in vain; if, instead of That One, we are now to have thousands?

I do not find, that the Apostles taught there was any Thing in Religion, of which People were incapable of judging; for tho' Men cou'd not well be lower in point of Understanding, than those to whom the Gospel was first preach'd; yet even these are commanded to judge for themselves; to prove all Things; to take heed to what they hear; to try the Spirits; to avoid false Prophets, Seducers, and blind Guides. And if this was their Duty in the Apostolick Times, it was, certainly, so in all After-Ages; and if there are now any such Things, by what Authority foever introduc'd, as make the Apostolical Rule impracticable; I shall, with Submission to Dr. Rogers, venture to affirm, they are no Part of the Christian Religion.
gion; and that Those who teach them are false Prophets, Seducers, and Deceivers; and as such, are to be shunn'd by all Christians.

St. Chrysostom thinks Religion so very plain, that he says, "Were it not for our Sloth, we had no need of Teachers." And we do not find that even the Fathers thought the People, as not being able to judge for themselves, were to believe in their Parish-Priests. Lactantius, for Instance, says, "That in those Things, especially which concern our Life eternal, it becomes every Man to search, and examine the Truth of them by his own Sense and Judgment, rather than to expose himself by a foolish Credulity, to the Hazard of being seduc'd into other Mens Errors." And St. Basil tells us, "It is the Duty of Auditors not to believe implicitly, but to examine the Words of those that instruct them." And all our Divines, I mean such as are, what they pretend, Protestants; shew they have not so mean an Opinion of the Understanding of the People, by frequently exhorting them to judge for themselves; and telling them, "They have no Reason to expect Heaven, if they will not be at the Pains of examining what wou'd bring them thither; and that the Luckiness of the Accident, shou'd they stumble on Truth, wou'd not atone for the Neglect of this grand Duty.

A judicious Divine of our Church very justly observes, That they, who have a good Cause, need no disingenious Arts; they will not fright Men from considering what their Advertaries say, by denouncing Damnation against them; nor forbid them to read their Books, but rather encourage them so to do; that they may see the Difference between Truth and Falshood, between Reason and Sophistry.
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"Philistry, with their own Eyes. — And whencesoever
Guides of a Party do otherwise, they give just Cause to
those who follow them to examine their Doctrines so
much the more carefully, by how much they are unwil-
ning to have them examin'd. 'Tis a bad Sign, when Men
are loth to have their Opinions seen in the Day, but love
"Darkness rather than Light.

The Fault of the People, even from the Beginning, has
been, as the memorable Mr. Hales observes, that "'They, Tract of
thr' Sloth and blind Obedience, examin'd not the Things
they were taught; but, like Beasts of Burden, patiently
couch'd down, and indifferently underwent whatever
their Superiors laid upon them.

Happy wou'd the Laity have been, if they had giv'n no
just Occasion for this infamous Character; tho' if they had
follow'd the Example of their Clergy in this one Thing, of
being as true to their common Interest; as these have al-
ways been to the separate Interest of their own Order;
That alone wou'd have preserv'd Religion in its native Sim-
plicity; as being a Thing wholly design'd for their general
Good; and then it wou'd have been out of the Power of
the Priests to corrupt it.

B. Is not this supposing; most, if not all, the Corruptions
of Religion, which have prevail'd in any Church, are owing
to their Impositions, and the blind Deference of the Laity?

A. If you think I speak this without just Grounds, ex-
amine into the present, and past State of Christendom;
and see whether all those gross Deprivations, and Perver-
sions of Religion, which have prevail'd in most Places,
were not contriv'd to advance the separate Interests of
the Ecclesiastics; and Religion been corrupted, in an
exact Proportion to the Number, Riches, Influence, and
Power.
Power of these Reverend Gentlemen? Now these Corruptions being calculated for their Interest, cou'd a Majority without a Miracle, (as Bishop Burnet says, in relation to our Reformation) agree in correcting those Abuses? And I may add, that in all Countries, where People have not had the Liberty to judge for themselves in religious Matters, no other Liberty has been preserv'd; but Men have been Slaves both in Body and Mind: Such Power has the united Force of Ecclesiasticks!

A Judicious Author says, "It was not unreasonable in the Beginning of the Reign of Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth, to think the Lords and Commons better Judges of Religion than the Bishops and Convocation. The whole Body can have no sincerer Interest to blind them; but the whole Clergy, which is but a Part of the whole Body, may; and therefore the whole Body is to judge of this. The meanest Man is as much interested, and concern'd in the Truth of Religion, as the greatest Priest; for tho' his Knowledge thereof be not in all Respects equally easy, yet in some Respects it may be easier. For Want of Learning does not so much hinder the Light of the Layman, as wordly Advantage and Faction sometimes does the Priest; and the Examples of these are infinite. Corruption in the Church before our Saviour, and in our Saviour's Days, and ever since; has oftener begun among the greatest Priests, Rabbies, and Bishops, than among the meanest Laity.

What St. Paul says to the Christians of Corinth, in relation to false Apostles, has been verify'd in all Ages:

Ye suffer Fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. ——
Ye suffer if a Man bring you into Bondage; if a Man devour you, if a Man take of you, if a Man exalt himself.
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self, if a Man finite you on the Face. And, indeed, the Laicks have so seldom thought of asserting their Natural Rights in religious Matters, that they have generally sacrific'd to the Malice of the Priests, all, who have endeavour'd to maintain these Rights; and if the People threw off one Set of Ecclesiastical Tyrants, 'twas only to be Slaves to another; and were ever ready to join against any one, that endeavour'd to set them free from all Ecclesiastical Tyranny; under which the whole Christian World would still have groan'd, had not so many Acci-
cidents concurr'd at the Reformation.

We pray against being led into Temptation; but do we not lead the Clergy into almost irresistible Temptation, to impose what they please on the People? What may not Men, who, in a Manner, engross the Teaching of the Young, and Instructing the Old; and have great Powers, and vast Revenues, and those too daily increasing; bring about by their joint Endeavours; and that much more easily, than when they had nothing to depend on but the Alms of the People? What is it, that such a Confederacy, so modell'd, may not effect; especially where they are care'd for by all Parties; nay, even by That, which is by too many of them despis'd, and hated for their unpardonable Crime of being against Persecution? Are the Clergy less selfish, and designing, than they were in those Times some call the purest? Or, are the Laity grown wiser, and by the Experience of so many Ages, more upon their Guard?

People Abroad were surpris'd to find a Nation, in former Times so miserably oppres'sd by the Ecclesiasticsticks, capable, even under a Whigg Administration, of repealing that Statute of Mortmain; which their Predecessors thought
absolutely necessary to prevent an All-devouring Corporation from swallowing every Thing; and at the same Time to see the First Fruits and Tenths, granted at the Reformation to the Crown, as a just Acknowledgement of the Regal Supremacy, to be given for ever to this infatiable Corporation; and at a Time too, when their Revenues were daily encreasing. These surprising Favours made foreigners very inquisitive to know, how the Conduct of the Clergy had merited more since the Revolution, than it did at the Restoration; or any other Time since the Reformation? But begging Pardon for this necessary Digression, I shall now shew, from the Confession of that great Divine and Philosopher, Dr. H. More, how little Reason the Laity, tho' of the meanest Capacity, have to depend upon the Authority of Church-men: His Words are,

"There's scarce any Church in Christendom at this Day, which does not obtrude not only plain Falshoods, but such Falshoods as will appear, to any free Spirit, pure Contradictions and Impossibilities; and that with the same Gravity, Authority, and Importunity, as they do the holy Oracles of God." If this be true, what a miserable Condition must the People be in, if they are to depend on this Gravity, Authority, and Importunity of their respective Priests; who, 'tis possible, may not believe the Creeds and Articles they subscribe, and yet be against making the least Change; for fear of putting the People upon examining into other Things, wherein the Interest of the Clergy is more nearly concern'd; which may occasion them to assume to themselves the unpardonable Crime of seeing with their own Eyes, and judging with their own Understandings. That Convocation very well knew what they did, which in 1689 with so much Indignation
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...tion rejected those Proposals, that some of our most eminent Divines were by the Crown authoris'd to offer them, for making Alterations in the *Liturgy*; particularly, in leaving the Clergy at Liberty with Relation to the *Athanasian* Creed.

In short, Whoever in the least reflects, must needs see, that in most Churches, many of their Fundamental Articles are design'd to impose on the credulous Laity; and that the Priests themselves can't believe them. Can the Pope of *Rome* any more believe himself infallible, than the Tartarian Pope, or *Lama*, believes himself immortal? Or than *Protestant* Priests (whose Churches are founded on private Judgment) can believe they have a Right to make *Creeds* and *Articles* for the People? Can even the *Romish* Priests any more believe they can pardon Sins, than the *Bonzees* believe the Money they borrow in this World, shall be repaid to their Creditors in the next? Or can the *Popish* Priests, tho' they made the Laity for many Ages renounce their Senses, have different Ideas of the *Bread* and *Wine*, after they have mumbl'd over certain Words, than they had before? Or can the *Lutheran* Priests believe they have the Power of *Consubstantiality*? Or the *Calvinistical* Priests think, they can make the Body and Blood of Christ to be, not figuratively, or, not indeed; but *verily*, and *indeed, taken by the faithful*? Or can any of these Priests believe they give the Holy Ghost? Or that they have an *Indelible Character*? Or that there can be *Imperium in Imperio*? Or can the *Popish* Priests any more believe their *Legendary Traditions*, than the *Pagan* Priests did their Oracles? Or some other Priests the Doctrine of *Passive Obedience*? Or the *Calvinistical* Articles they so solemnly subscribe? *Or that*...
Ams on one Hand, and Bribes on the other, is the Way to promote the Protestant Principle, of every Man's being oblig'd to judge for himself in all religious Matters, without Prejudice and Partiality? Or an hundred other Things, which, with this same Gravity, Authority, and Importance, they impose on the People?

If Men, notwithstanding they pretend to be inwardly mov'd by the Holy Ghost, go into Orders as they take to a Trade, to make the best of its Mysteries (and all Trades have their Mysteries); and are bound for the sake of their Maintenance, to maintain those Doctrines which maintain them; and lest they shou'd not do so, are shackle'd with Subscriptions upon Subscriptions; can these Men, I say, under all the Prejudices this World affords, be proper Persons for the Laity to depend on in the Choice of their Religion? Or, are they, who are not permitted to choose their own Religion; fit to choose a Religion for others? In this Case, wou'd not the blind lead the blind into the Ditch of Popery, &c.? And I think, I may venture to say, that Men may as safely trust the Choice of their Religion to the Chance of a Dye, as to the Chance of Education; considering who, for so many Ages, have had the Cooking up of Religion. And every One must see, that those Things, which are brought into Religion, contrary to the End of it, as they are inconsistent with the Interest of the People; so they favour more of Art and Learning, than to belong to simple Men; especially in those Times they were introduc'd. And as Adam said to God,

Gen. 3: 14; The Woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the Tree, and I did eat; so might the People say of their Priests, did they believe them jure divino; "The Priests gavest us, deceiv'd us, and we have been deceiv'd."

B. This is too severe. A. You
Chap. 13. Christianity as old as the Creation.

A. You know, that those few good Men among the Ecclesiastics, have said as much of their own Body; and therefore, I shall only mention what *Picus Mirandula* had the Courage to say to Leo the Tenth, and the Lateran Council; he, after having complain'd, that all Orders of Men were debauch'd by the Clergy, says, *Nec sane mirum, quando malum omne prodire de Templo John-*

nes Chrysostomus censet; & Hieronimus scribit, se invenerisse nominem qui seduxerit Populos, praetertquam Sacerdotes. Tho' it was not always they cou'd corrupt them; for the celebrated St. Ambrose says, *Plerumq; Clerus erravit, Sacer*-

*Ambro. Scir* 17. To. 4.

dotis nutavit Sententia, *Divites cum feculi iisius terreno* rege senerunt, *Populus idem propriam reservavit.*

This can be no Reflection on the Ecclesiastics among us, who abhor all these Principles, by which their Predecessors enslav'd Men both Body and Soul; and who maintain no Opinions, however advantageous to the Order, that are against the publick Good; and are so far from promoting Persecution, that by their Example as well as Writings, they have highly contributed to that Humanity, Charity, and Benevolence, which, to the great Grief of others, is daily increasing among Men of the most different Persuasions. Thus, where the Clergy are good, the People of Course will be so; and therefore, such Clergymen (of which, perhaps, we now have more, than have ever been in the Church since Constantine's Time;) can't be too much esteem'd, for conquering the strong Prejudice of Education, and the stronger of Interest. And they, certainly, ought to be as much valu'd by the Laity for so unusual a Generosity, in defending the common Rights of Mankind; as they are hated by their Brethren, for giving up those Claims, by which they have at all Times commanded the Purses, as
as well as the Consciences of the People; when too, they cou’d not but be sensible, what they were to expect from their restless Enemies; whenever they shou’d be permitted to exert themselves.

And here I can’t omit saying, That, if he, who best defends the Church, best deserves to rule it; Justice has eminently appear’d in the Promotion of that Person, now happily presiding over it; who so early put a Stop to the boasted Triumphs of the ablest Adversary our Church ever had; and has since protected it against its worst, its domestick Enemies, treacherously undermining the Constitution; who, as he treats all with that condescending Goodness inseparable from true Greatness, so he encourages Piety and Virtue, without Distinction of Parties; and tho’ he has with equal Prudence expos’d both Popish and Protestant Persecution; yet both the Sorbonne and Geneva, however differing in most other Things, agree in owning so illustrious a Merit. And I may challenge all Church-History to show Three such Bishops, as to the Honour of the Revolution, have, since that blessed Time, succeeded one another at Lambeth.

I must beg your Patience for adding, on this inexhaustable Subject, one Reason more, for Mens being govern’d by Things, rather than Words: It has been a general Practice with the Introducers of Civil Tyranny, tho’ they chang’d the Form of Government, to retain the old Names; the better to hinder People from being sensible of the Change: And may not This have happen’d in Church-Matters? And may not Ecclesiastical Tyranny be brought in, and supported by the same Means? Has not this very Term Church, had a different Meaning put on it, from what it has in the Original? And is not the Greek Word sometimes
times translated *Assembly*, sometimes *Church*; the better to confound the *Rights of the Church*, or *People*, as that Word in Scripture always signifies? In one of our Articles, *the Church* is defin'd to be a *Congregation of the Faithful*, &c. yet is it not every where else taken for the *Clergy*? When 'tis said in the very next Article, "The "Church has Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, "and Authority in Matters of Faith;" is it meant of the *Congregation of the Faithful*? And is it not a constant Practice with some Men, to talk of the Power and Authority of the Church, when they only mean their own; in Hopes to make That, which otherwise People might start at, go down under its sacred Name?

Are the People now taught to conceive the same Thing by the Word *Bishop*, as it means in the Original; where *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are synonimous Terms? Is it not to prevent their seeing it, that we translate the Greek Word sometimes by *Overseer*, sometimes by *Bishop*? For the first three, or four Centuries, every Congregation had its own Bishop, who was constantly oblig'd to reside, and to officiate in the Parish Church: And as among the *Jews*, the *Ruler of one Synagogue* had nothing to do in any other; so among the primitive Christians (whose Discipline was accommodated to that of the *Jews,* it would have been thought highly anti-christian, and invading the Rights of his Brethren, for one Bishop to have more than one *Altar*, or *Communon-Table*. But Things continually changing, a Parish-Bishop, maintain'd by the Alms of his Congregation, commenc'd a Bishop, not only of many Parishes, but of a whole Province; nay, of many Provinces, with the Titles, Pomp, and Grandeur of Princes; and at last, to an *Universal Bishop*, *Pope*, or *Vice God.*

**The**
The only Church that has now any Pretence to primitive Episcopacy, is That of North Britain; where since the Blessed Revolution, a Parity of Parish-Bishops has been established: If You want fully to understand the Constitution of the primitive Church, in this, and all other Points, You need only read the Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church, &c. written by the greatest Critick, Divine, and Lawyer of this, or, perhaps, any other Age.

What other Reason can be assign'd, why ἰδιωσις, Rom. 16. 1. is not render'd Deaconesis, as well as elsewhere Deacon; but Servant of the Church; except it be to hinder the People from perceiving, that there was in the Days of the Apostles, an Order of Women, who had something more to do in the Church than to sweep it; and who, even at the Council of Nice (Can. 19.) are reckon'd among the Clergy? Did Heresy, or Schism, (those religious Scare-Crows, as the memorable Mr. Hales calls them;) signify any such Thing in the Days of the Apostles, as afterwards, to the infinite Prejudice of Christendom, they were made to mean? Why do we give the Name of Priest to the Jewish Sacrificer, as well as to the Christian Elder (Things so widely different); but to make People believe the latter have a Divine Right to every Thing, which, under the Theocracy, belong'd to the former? And as in the New Testament the Preachers of the Gospel are never term'd ἵππος, or Priests; so Scaliger remarks that the Word so apply'd, is not to be met with till after Justin's Time.

Has the Word Clergy the same Meaning now, as in the New Testament, where 'tis taken in Opposition to those we now call so? And did not Ecclesiastical Tyranny, and the Ingrossing that Name by the Ministers of the Church commence together?
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Nor is it difficult to see the Reason, why the Word, βαπτισμός, was not translated but naturaliz'd; since the People would then have perceiv'd, that, not Sprinkling, but Dipping, or Immerging, was meant by it; but should any now (so much Custom has prevail'd) say John the Dipper, instead of John the Baptist, the People would think it profane.

If Words have been thus artfully manag'd in relation to Things; have not People much more Reason to suspect the same Management in relation to speculative Points, where Words allow a greater Latitude? If Zeal had had the same Meaning in After-Times, as in the Scripture, it had never occasion'd so much Mischief. And what Mischief have not those two misinterpreted Words, Zeal and Church, by the artful Management of designing Men, occasion'd? Nay, Is not Religion made to signify something very different from what it does in Scripture? How few, when they hear that Word, think of the Description given by St. James, of pure, and undefil'd Religion? What Absurdities have not People brought into Religion, by fixing a Sense on the Word Mystery unknown to the Scripture? Nay, have not some People, if the University of Oxford is a good Judge, advanc'd false, impious, and heretical Doctrines concerning the Godhead, in declaring the Three Persons are three distinct, infinite Minds, or Spirits; tho' now reviv'd by Dr. W----d, with the Applause of those who before condemn'd it? And did not they, who espous'd those Doctrines, represent their Adversaries as absurd Sabellians; in either making the three Persons in the divine Being, to be analogous to three Postures in a human Being; (for this was the utmost Dr. South's Divinity could reach to): Or with Dr. Wallis, Three Somewhats; of which they themselves had no Idea?  

T. e. Godd
Good God! what Pains Men take to deface the Idea, which the Light of Nature as well as the Scripture gives of God; and which every One conceives, when he hears him mention'd on either a natural, political, or religious Account.

In short, was it not running too far from our present Purpose, it would not be very difficult to shew, that there are very few Terms in Scripture, which have Things of Moment depending on them, but what have lost their Original Meaning, to become Orthodox.

If They, who have the Translating any old Book capable of vastly different Sense, make it speak what is most for their Interest; must not others be very good Men indeed, who will find Fault with a Translation in such Points as make for their common Advantage; or be at the Pains in such Case, to discover any favourable Additions, Subtractions or Alterations that might have been made in the Scriptures, or other antient Writings? especially if it be true what Mr. Whiston complains of, "That it is frequently in the Mouths of the Writers for the Church, that some Things are to be conceal'd for fear they gratify Atheists and Deists; and says, Certainly, nothing prejudices them more than such Procedure and Expressions, while they thereby perceive Remains of pious Frauds every where, and suspect it has been so from the Beginning. They see they are not to be let plainly into the Truth of Facts, but to be manag'd with Cunning and worldly Prudence, for fear of being disgusted at Christianity.

Must not the People be at a Loss, when they see how differently the Texts in the most momentous Parts are interpreted? Dr. S. Clark has reckon'd up more than 1250 Texts relating to the Doctrine of the Trinity; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending Parties?
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Tis chiefly owing to these different Interpretations, that, where Force has not interpos'd, it has from Age to Age been disputed, whether we have but One, or more than One Object of supreme Worship. A Point, which, was Reason allow'd to be a competent Judge, would not meet with the least Difficulty; and had we a Bible translated by Unitarians, many Texts would be very differently translated, from what they are at present; and some left out as forg'd. When so judicious a Divine and Critick as the now Bishop of A--- says, "We should have more of the true Text by being less tenacious of the printed One;" must not that give great Uneasiness to those, who have nothing to trust to, but the printed Text? And will this Uneasiness be abated by his affirming, "that it may with great Truth be said of Chillingworth, (the greatest Champion of the Protestant Cause ever had) that he was able at pulling down than building up; towards which little can be expected from One, who is by his own Arguments push'd so hard in the Defence he would make of Protestantism; that he has nothing left, but to cry out, "The Bible, I say, The Bible is the Religion of Protestants." Nay, must not that Uneasiness be very much increas'd by Divines, perpetually endeavouring to mend by their Criticisms several capital Places in the sacred Writers; nay, who pretend daily to make new and momentous Discoveries? How must their Hearers be edify'd, when they tell them 'tis Thus or Thus, in such an antient Manuscript, Father, or Assembly of Fathers; or cry, 'tis render'd more agreeable to the Mind of the Holy Ghost in the Septuagint, Vulgar Latin, Syriack, Chaldaick, Ethiopick, Coptick, Gotbick, or some other Version,
If no Court of Judicature, tho' in a Thing of small Moment, will admit of a Copy, tho' taken from the Original, without Oath made by a disinterested Person of his having compar'd it; because, the least Mistake, a various Pointing, a Parenthesis, a Letter misplac'd may alter the Sense; how can we absolutely depend in Things of the greatest Moment, on voluminous Writings, which have been so often transcrib'd by Men, who never saw the Original; (as none, even of the most early Writers pretend they did): And Men too, who even in the earliest Times, if we may judge by the Number of forg'd Passages, and even forg'd Books, would scruple no pious Frauds. And tho' there have been innumerable Copies of the New Testament lost, which, no Doubt, had their different Readings, yet as it stands at present, we are told, there are no less than 30,000 various Readings.

B. Tho' there are so many various Readings; yet does not that great Critick, Doctor Bentley, in his Proposal for Printing by Subscription, a New Edition of the New Testament, assure the World, "That out of a Labyrinth of 30,000 various Readings, which croud the Pages of our present best Editions, all put upon an equal Credit to the Offence of many good Persons, that his Clue, as he calls it, so leads and extricates us, that there will be scarce 200 out of so many Thousands, that can deserve the least Consideration.

A. Has this Critick lost his Clue, and so forc'd to drop the noble Design of ascertaining the Text of the New Testament, and let the 30,000 various Readings remain on an equal Foot to the Offence of many good Persons? who will now as much despair of seeing it done, as they do of Mr. Whiston's restoring the true Text of the Old Testament;
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"which, he says, has been greatly corrupted both in the " Hebrew and Septuagint by the Jews, to make the Read-
"onings of the Apostles from the Old Testament incon-
"clusive and ridiculous.

Dr. Bentley, certainly, ought to go on with his Proposal, because the World will hardly take the Doctor's Word, that in a Book, where most Things are own'd to be of the greatest Moment, there should be so many various Readings of no Moment; tho' one, or two, may be of That Conse-
quence, as to destroy the Design of the whole Book. In a Pre-
scription where there are ever so many wholesome Drugs, yet if a poisonous One happens to be mix'd, it may turn the Whole into rank Poison. If the Doctrine of the Trinity is of the greatest Moment, was not the Church highly concern'd to prevent various Readings in that impor-
tant Point, as well as some forg'd Texts?

Had the Scripture been better guarded in many other Matters of Consequence, there could not have been so many Texts seemingly clashing with one another; that there are such, is deny'd by none; Dr. Scot lays it down as certain, that "That Opinion is false, or of little Moment, "that has but one, or two Texts to countenance it; and "That very dubious, which has none but obscure Texts "to rely on; but when there are more, and much plainer "Texts for it than against it, it must be false.

And another judicious Divine says, that "Our Faith is not to be built on single Texts, because they may "have been corrupted; tho' we have no Manuscript to "point out to us, that the other Manuscripts have been "so corrupted in these Passages." But, If we can't depend on single Texts; and where there are several, the plainest are to carry it; the Difficulty will be
be to know which are the plainest; since the different Sects of Christians have ever pretended, that the plainest Texts are on their Side; and wonder'd how their Adversaries cou'd mistake their Meaning.

The plain Texts from St. Austin's Days, at least in the West, were all in Favour of Predestination; and upon those plain Texts the Articles of our most excellent Church, and all other Protestant Churches are founded: It's true in Queen Elizabeth's Reign, there were some few among the inferior Clergy for Free-will; but then those incorrigible Free-will Men, as they were call'd, were, by the Direction of the Bishops, sent to Prison; there to live on hard Labour, till they repented of their Errors: But since the Court in Charles I's Reign, help'd to open the Eyes of our Divines, they, no longer blinded by their Articles, clearly see, that all those plain Texts (and what a Number are muster'd up on both Sides) are all for Free-will; against which, now, there are none but are look'd on as incorrigible.

B. Tho' those Books, which contain the traditional Religions of other Nations, have, notwithstanding all the Care taken to prevent it, been mix'd with Fables and monstrous Tales; yet we say, that the Scripture, especially the New Testament, tho' there are ever so many various Readings, must needs be free from all Errors of Consequence; because that being design'd by God for a plain, and unalterable Rule, for the Actions of Mankind, cannot but be so guarded by Providence, as to hinder any Mistakes of Moment.

A. Your Reasoning, I grant, holds good in relation to the Law of Nature, which equally obliges, at all Times and Places, the whole Race of Mankind; but then That depends not on the Knowledge of any Language dead, or living;
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living; or on the Skill, or Honesty of Transcribers, or Translators; but on that, which as it is apparent to the whole World, so it is not in the Power of Mortals to alter; viz. the unchangeable Relation of Things, and the Duties resulting from thence.

"The Transcribers of Books (as that learned and judicious Critick Daille observes) "have been guilty of innumerable Mistakes; and that St. Jerom (the most learned of the Fathers) complains, "they wrote not what they found, but what they understood;" and he gives Instances of Attempts made on the New Testament by the Orthodox themselves; particularly St. Epiphanius, for sayings, "that in the true, and most correct Copies of St. Luke, it was writ, that Jesus Christ wept; and that this Passage had been alleg'd by St. Ireneus, but that the Catholics had blotted out the Word, fearing that the Heretics might abuse it. The same St. Jerom says, the last twelve Verstes in the last Chapter of Mark were left out in most Greek Bibles; Omnibus Graecis Libris pene hoc capitulum non habentibus. Grotius imputes this Omission to the Transcribers: But Maldonat will not allow of Grotius's Reason, because he says, Luke and John differ more with Matthew than Mark does. Major enim inter illos & Mat. Maldonat. in loc.

Hilary, speaking of Christ's bloody Sweat, and the Angel sent to comfort him, says, Nec sane ignorandum nobis de Trin. eft, in Graecis & Latinis codicibus compluribus, de adventien Angelo, vel de sudore sanguineo nil Scriptum reperiri. This St. Jerom seems to confirm.

For my Part, I think, that at least, till we are extricated by Dr. Bentley's Clue, the best Way not to be mistaken,
ken, it to admit all for divine Scripture, that tends to the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; and nothing which does not. This Clue, I think, will extricate the Learned as well as unlearned out of many otherwise insuperable Difficulties; and make the Laws of God, which Way soever reveal'd, entirely to agree; and destroy that absurd Notion of God's acting arbitrarily, and commanding for Commanding-fake: And does not St. Paul suppose no Scripture to be divinely inspir'd, but what is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness? And if this be the Text, ought we to admit any Thing to be writ by Inspiration, tho' it occurs ever so often in Scripture, till we are certain it will bear this Text? And, indeed, was it otherwise, we should be in a sad Condition, since there's scarce any Opinion, tho' ever so absurd, or ridiculous, but has its Vouchers, who quote Texts on Texts, for its Support. Good Lord! what a Load have the different Parties laid on it, by their not observing this Rule? But,

Could we suppose any Difference between Natural and Traditional Religion; to prefer the latter, would be acting irrationally; as that Prophet did, who went contrary to what God had commanded him by an immediate Revelation; because a known Prophet affirm'd him, he had afterwards a different Revelation for him. A Crime so heinous in the Eyes of the Lord, that he destroy'd this Prophet after a most signal Manner; tho' he had to plead for himself, that the Prophet, who spoke to him in the Name of the Lord, could have no Interest in deceiving him; and that there was nothing in the Command, but might as well come from the Lord, as what himself had receiv'd. And 'tis worth observing, that the lying Prophet was so far from
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from being punish’d, that the Lord continu’d to him the Gift of Prophecy; nay, pronounce’d by his Mouth the Doom of the Prophet, he so fatally deceiv’d.

B. Why is this more worth observing than the Case of Abimelech, who, upon both Abraham’s and Sarah’s lying to him, took Sarah, as the Lord himself owns, in the Integrity of his Heart; and tho’ he sent her back un-Gen. 20:6 touch’d, and gave considerable Presents both to Wife and Husband; yet neither He, nor His, were to be pardon’d, till Abraham (the offending Person) being a Prophet, was to pray for him; so Abraham pray’d unto God, and God 1b. ver. 17. heal’d Abimelech, and his Wife, and Maid-servants; and they bare Children: And yet this holy Prophet was soon after guilty of a very barbarous Action, in sending our Hagar, whom Sarah had giv’n him to Wife, and his Son Gen. 16:3. Ishmael, to perish in the Wilderness; for no other Reason, but because Sarab had seen the Son of Hagar mocking; and Gen. 21:9. ’tis likely they had both perish’d, had not an Angel, calling out of Heaven, directed Hagar to a Well of Water. And perhaps, the same Angel, who, when she before fled from Sarah, who had dealt hardly with her; bid her re- Gen. 16:6. turn, and submit: But in this last domestic Quarrel, God v. 9. himself miraculously interposes, and says, In all that Sarah Gen. 21:12. hath said unto thee, hearken unto her Voice. But begging Pardon for this Interruption, pray go on.

A. We, certainly, ought to adhere strictly to the Light of Nature; if, (as a Learned and Reverend Critick observes) "It must be allow’d by the judicious and impartial, that many Corruptions are found in our present Copies of the holy Bible; and that we have not now 99. this blessed Book in that Perfection and Integrity, that it was first written. It is alter’d in many Places, and..."
in some of the greatest Moment. — I cou’d prove, I think,
by undeniable and unavoidable Instances, what Mr. Gre-
gory of Oxford says in his Preface, to some critical Notes
on the Scripture, that he publish’d. There’s no Author
whatsoever says this learned Critick, that has suffer’d
so much by the Hand of Time as the Bible has.” If
this, I say, must be allow’d, ought we not, in Order to
prevent all Mistakes, in the first Place to get clear Ideas
of the moral Character of the Divine Being; and when by
Reasons much stronger than any drawn from human Tra-
dition, we have discover’d this Character, ought we not
to compare what we are told of him, by what we already
know of him, and so judge of what Men teach us con-
cerning God, by what God himself teaches us; for we
are all taught of him: And then we shall be as certain,
as there is a God perfectly wise, and infinitely good, that
no Doctrines can come from him that have not these
Characters stamp’d on them. Thus were there more false
Readings crept into the Scripture than these Divines sup-
pose, yet we might still know our Duty; and be certain
that by doing our best to promote our mutual Happiness,
we answer the End of our Creation; and that if we
deviate from this Rule for the sake of what depends on
human Tradition, we quit Certainty for that, which is not
pretended to amount to more than Probability.

And it is no small Incouragement for us to observe this
Rule, since we find, that Men, if like Pedants, or School-
Masters, they read Books, not to examine the Force and
Cogency of the Arguments they meet with; but for
the sake of Words and Phrases, without considering the
Nature, Reason, and Tendency of Things; understand
very little of Things. Have not great Numbers from Age
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To Age, tho' Men of good Natural Parts, had their Understandings confounded by thus injudiciously employing them; and instead of clearing Doubts increas'd them, and fill'd the World with useless Criticisms, and trifling Disputes? while they, who made Words give Place to Things, and argu'd from the Relation Things bear to each other, have shewn themselves able Cautionists; and inrich'd the World with most useful Discourses, for promoting the Honour of God, and the Good of Man. And, therefore, we are often caution'd by the best Authors, not to stick too close to the Letter in reading the Scripture; since they say the Style of Holy Writ is far from being exact; and that the laying too great Stresses on Words, has been the Occasion of most of the Disputes among Christians.

To them how little we are to depend on Words and Phrases; they say, a Number of Texts might be produc'd to prove Moses to be a God: "For he is call'd (a) God, Exod. 7. 1. and Lord; and pray'd to, under that Appellation, "to forgive Sin (b); has attributed to him the same Num. 12: miraculous Work of bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt, as is ascrib'd to God (c); that the Israelites did believe in him, as well as in the Lord (d), Exod. 10. 16. Exod. 32. 7. Exod. 14: ult. Exod. 1. 1. Esr. 1. 14. 15, &c. and were requir'd so to do; that he promis'd Rain in due Season to such as kept his Commandments (e); and to Joshua, that he would be with him in carrying the People into Canaan (f); altho' as a Man, he was to die f Deut. 31. 23; before; that he did great Works; yea, Miracles in the Sight of the Israelites, on purpose that they might know that he was the Lord their God (g); that Aaron is said to be his Prophet (h), which is proper to the true God only; 7. 11. and in fine, that the Israelites were baptiz'd unto, or into 1 Cor. 10, Moses (i).
These Authors tell us, that in the Ethics of Aristotle, in the Offices of Tully, in the Moral Treatises of Grotius, Puffendorff, &c. the Nature and Reason of our Duties, the Connexion between them, and the Dependance they have on one another are plainly seen; but in the Scripture, Things, say they, are not generally so treated, as that Men may precisely know the Nature, and Extent of their Duty. Are they not, say they, for the most part, deliver'd in such a general, undetermin'd, nay, sometimes parabolical, and hyperbolical Manner, as did we not consult our Reason, and learn our Duty from thence, the Letter might lead us wrong; nay, the Apostle himself says, the Letter killeth.

B. I can't believe Things of any Moment are thus represented; because, as God cou'd have no other End in giving us a Revelation, than the rightly directing our Minds; so that End cou'd not have been answer'd, except it was deliver'd in a Way most plain, and easy to be understood in all Times and Places; for if there are Propositions in Scripture, which naturally tend to mislead us; or if the Use of Languages is perverted in some Instances, how can we be certain, but it may be in others?

A. Is not the New Testament full of Parables, nay, is it not said, that Without a Parable Jesus spake not to the Multitude; and for this remarkable Reason, That seeing they might see, and not perceive; and hearing they might hear, and not understand; left at any Time they shou'd be converted, and their Sins be forgiven them. Is not St. John's Gospel, for the most part, writ after an obscure, allegorical Manner, especially in relation to the Person of Christ? And do not Commentators own, we labour under much the same Difficulties in Interpreting St. Paul? The honourable Mr.

Boyle says, 'That sometimes in St. Paul's Writings many
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"Passages are so penned, as to contain a tacit Kind of a Dialogue; and that unskillfully by Readers, and even Interpreters, taken for an Argument, which, indeed, is an Objection. It's said it was the Way of the East make use of dark, and involv'd Sentences, figurative and parabolical Discourses, abrupt, and maim'd Ways of expressing themselves, with a Neglect of annexing Transitions.

As for hyperbolical Expressions, it was customary among the Eastern Nations to express themselves after a most pompous, and high-strain'd Manner. This Way of speaking was a main Part of Learning, taught in the Schools of the Prophets among the Jews; and happy was he, who cou'd most excel in this elevated, romantick Way; and both the Old and New Testament abound with Expressions of this Nature. Isa. 13:10, says, The Stars of Heaven shall not give their Light, the Sun shall be darkned. —— I will shake the Heavens, and the Earth shall remove out of her Place, in the Wrath of the Lord of Host, and in the Day of his fierce Anger. And the Destruction of the City of Jerusalem in the New Testament is describ'd after such a Manner, as if Nature was unHING'd, and the Universe dissolving.

Bp. Fleetwood on Psalm 18, says, "That without remem bring David's History, One wou'd imagine Heaven and Earth were mov'd on his Behalf; and that the Course of Nature had been overthrown, and his Life ever'd by continual Miracles:" And he there observes, that the Jewish Expressions, and the Expressions of all People that dwelt Eastward are full of Pomp, and Amplification of Fancy and Hyperbole." And, I think, under this Head we may reckon these Texts, that All the Kings Chronicles."
of the Earth sought the Presence of Solomon. That If the Things which Jesus did were written, the World itself could not contain the Books. And are not most of the Expressions of St. John as figurative, as Eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of the Son of Man? And what monstrous Practices did those Words, taken literally, produce, even in the primitive Times; and what senseless Disputes since? And,

Must we not put under this Head a Number of other Texts; Whatsoever you shall ask in my Name, that will I do. If Two of you shall agree on Earth, touching any Thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in Heaven. If you have Faith as a Grain of Mustard Seed, you shall move Mountains, and nothing shall be impossible to you. And you may say to this Sycamine Tree, Be thou plucked up by the Roots, and be thou planted in the Sea, and it shall obey you. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven. He that is spiritual, judgeth all Things; (which the Papists say is the Pope) yet he himself is judged of no Man. Things present, and Things to come; all are yours. St. John’s little Children are said to have an Unction, and to know all Things. And what more cou’d be said of the

Anointed, or Christ himself? Men are bid to be Partakers of the divine Nature; and to be as perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. What Blessings are not Christians promised, even in this Life? Is it not said, Christ has made us Kings and Priests unto God; and we shall reign on the Earth? And are not the Meek to inherit the Earth? And, is not every One that hath forsaken Houses, or Brethren, or Sisters, or Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands, for my Name sake, to receive an hundred Fold, and to inherit everlasting Life? What One is sent to declare
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cclare is to be done, That he is said to do: So Jeremiah
is said to be set over the Nations, and over the Kingdoms, Jer. 1. 10.
to root out, pull down, and destroy. What is design'd to
be done, shall be said to be actually done: As the Lamb Rev. 12. 8.
was I was; or as we (to make it more mysterious) render
it, I am: Nay, a Creature not born long before, is said to Col. 1. 15.
be the First-born of every Creature. Advice is call'd Sub-
m ission, Subjection, and Obedience; Ye younger submit 1 Pet. 5. 5.
yourselves to the Elder; yea, be subject to one another. Obey Heb. 13. 17.
them that have the Rule over you; and submit yourselves.
Persuasion is call'd Compulsion, as Compel them to come Luke 14. 13.
in. And what rooting Work have not the Papists made
from this Text; Every Plant my heavenly Father hath Mat. 15. 13.
not planted shall be rooted up; and such other misapply'd
Places? Is not God's permitting Evil, call'd doing it?
Shall there be Evil in a City, and the Lord has not done Amos 3. 6.
it? Nay, is not the Lord said to have created Evil? Isaiah 45. 7.
And to have harden'd Men's Hearts; and then to punish
them for their being harden'd? And to tempt Men? Are
we not to pray against God's leading us into Temptation?
Nay, is not God, if the Words are to be taken literally,
represented as an arbitrary Being, hating Children not yet Rom. 9. 11.
born; neither having done any Good, or Evil? Jacob have — Ver. 13.
I loved, but Esau have I hated. — Therefore hath be
Mercy on whom he will have Mercy, and whom he will be

Are not Things in Scripture absolutely condemn'd,
which are only so conditionally: As the Jewish Rites
and Sacrifices are, in the Old Testament, represented as
an Iniquity, and an Abomination to the Lord. Things com-
manded are positively said not to be commanded; As I
spake
Jer. 7:22. spake not to your Fathers, nor commanded them in that Day I brought them out of the Land of Egypt, concerning Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices. What can be more figurative than Jesus's saying, If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters; yea, and his own Life also, he can't be my Disciple. Things spoken in an unlimited, are to be taken in a restrained Sense: Swear not at all. Children and Servants, obey your Parents and Masters in all Things. The Love of Money, is the Root of all Evil. Whatso- ever the Pharisees bid you do, that do, and observe. Rejoise evermore. Pray without ceasing. Prove all Things. And sometimes a short Duration is express'd by the Words for ever; or for everlasting; or for the End of the World: So Jonah, after he came out of the Fish's Belly, says, The Earth with her Bars was about me for ever; and an hundred other such Texts: So that whether any Duration is: to be everlasting, (in the Sense we take that Word-) can't be known from the Words of Scripture; but it must be judged of from the Nature of the Things that are said; thus to endure. But,

What can be more surprising, than Christ's declaring in most express Terms, he came to do That, which we must suppose he came to hinder: Think not, (says he) I am come to send Peace; I come not to send Peace, but a Sword. For I am come to set a Man at Variance with his Father, &c. And, Suppose ye, I am come to give Peace on Earth, I tell you nay; but rather Division. And again, I am come to send Fire on Earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled. And has not that Fire burnt outrageously ever since, being blown up by those, whose Business it was to have extinguish'd it; and have they not so acted as if this was a Pro-
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Prophetick Saying, they were at all Times bound to see fulfill'd; tho' to the Destruction of all moral Duties whatever.

Another Difficulty in understanding both the Old and New Testament, is, that most Things, tho' owing to second Causes, are referr'd immediately to God. In the New Testament, Pilate is said to have his Power from John 19. 11. Above, even while he was condemning Jesus. And there Rom 13. 1. is no Power but of God; the Powers that be, are ordained of God: Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the Acts 20. 28. Flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers. Nay, every good Motion is imputed to the Spirit, whether with, or without Understanding. I will pray with 1 Cor. 14. 15; the Spirit, and with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and with the Understanding also. Or, if a Man talk'd in an unknown Tongue, and cou'd not interpret what he said; or any of the Congregation understood him; yet it was Prophefying, and the Gift of the Spirit. And St. Paul calls a Heathen Poet a Prophet. And is not Spirit, nay, the Spirit of God, taken, at least, in twenty different Senses in the Scripture.

In Short, the Words of Scripture, on which Things of the greatest Consequence depend, are, as is shewn by a learned Author, sometimes taken, not only in a different, but contrary Sense. However, to give one Instance, Nature in Rom. 2. 14. and Nature in Eph. 2. 3. if rightly translated, are taken in opposite Senses; and that Word in 1 Cor. 11. 14. is taken in a Sense different from both.

How can we know from Scripture, what Things are owing immediately to God, or to second Causes; since every Thing that was thought to be good, not only the Powers and Faculties of Mens Minds, but voluntary Actions...
tions themselves, are immediately acrib'd to God. For
Exod. 31. 3, 4 instance, Bezaleel is said to be fill'd with the Spirit of
God in Wisdom, and Understanding; because he cou'd de-
vise cunning Works of Gold, and Silver, &c. And the
Prophet Isaiah, after he had describ'd the whole Art of
Masah 28. 26. Plowing and Sowing, lays of the Plowman, His God does
instruct him to Discretion, and teach him. — And speak-
ing of the Art of Threshing, he says, This also comes
from the Lord of Host, which is wonderful in Counsel, and
excellent in Working. Can the Clergy have a better Pre-
tence to a jure-divino-fiat, than the Plowman and Thres-
sher? Where is it said of them, that their God in-
struc'ts them to Discretion, and teaches them? Or, that
their Art comes from the Lord of Host, which is wonder-
ful in Counsel, and excellent in Working?

As some Things are immediately referr'd to God, so
others are as immediately referr'd to Satan; nay, the
same Action is imputed both to God and Satan. These
few, among numberless Instances, I mention, to shew ; that
the Scripture suppose's, that from our Reason we have such
infallible Tests, to judge what is the Will of God, that we
are safe from being misl'd by any Expressions of this Na-
ture.

B. Surely, the moral Precepts deliver'd by our Saviour,
are not express'd thus obscurely.

A. These, no doubt, are the plainest; yet even These,
generally speaking, are not to be taken in their obvious and
Mat. 5. 40.
Luke 6. 30. literal Meaning: As for Instance, Lend, hoping for nothing
again. He that takes away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak
also. Of him, who takes thy Goods, ask them not again. And
shou'd we not, without having Recourse to the Reason of
Things, be apt to think, that the Poor, as such, were the only
only Favourites of Heaven: Blessed be ye Poor; for Yours...

is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are Ye that hunger, for Y...shall be filled. And shou'd we not likewise be apt to imagine, that the Gospel was an Enemy to the Rich as such; and consequently, to all those Methods which make a Nation rich: As, Woe unto you rich; for you have receiv'd... your Consolation. It is easier for a Camel to pass through the...Eve of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingd...om of God. And that no Man might be rich, it was a general Precept, Sell what ye have, and give Alms: Nay,...the Woman that cast into the Treasury her two Mites is commended; because she cast in all she had, even all...her Living. And to shew that none were exempt from this Precept, Jesus says to the Man, who had observ'd all the Precepts from his Youth, One Thing thou lackest, fell...whatsoever thou hast, and give to the Poor. This Precept is impracticable in a Christian State, because there cou'd be no Buyers where all were to be Sellers; and so is a Community of Goods, tho' in Use among the Essenes, and the Christians at first.

'Tis certain, that such Passages, as Blessed are they...that mourn; Blessed are ye that weep; Woe unto you that...laugh now, ye shall mourn, and weep. And other Texts about Self-denial, and taking up the Cross; and Take no...Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink. Take no Thought for the Morrow; Consider the Ra...vens, for they neither sow, nor reap.——Consider the Lillies, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not; and yet, I say,...Solomon, in all his Glory, was not array'd like one of these.

'Tis certain, I say, that such like Texts have, by being interpreted literally, run Men into monstrous Absurdities?
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Mat. 5. 39. From this Text, Refit not Evil; but whoever shall smite thee on thy right Cheek, turn to him the other also; and some others of the like Nature, not only the primitive Fathers, but a considerable Sect, even now among the Protestants, think all Self-defence unlawful.

Mat. 19. 12. From these Sayings of our Saviour, There are some Eunuchs, which were so born from their Mothers Womb; and there are some Eunuchs, which were made Eunuchs of Men; and there be Eunuchs, which have made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake; the primitive Fathers, who thought they ought not to put a different Meaning on the Word Eunuch in the latter End of the Verse, from what it had twice before; believ'd it a Piece of heroick Virtue for Men to castrate themselves: And tho' by the Roman Law, no One cou'd be castrated without Leave of the President, as Apol. Sect. 37. Justin observes; yet he commends a Youth, who perform'd this Operation on himself without it. And You know, that the Bishop of Alexandria highly approv'd this Action in Origen, as an Instance of heroick Virtue; tho' afterwards, when he became his Capital Enemy, he as much condemn'd it. Do not these Things sufficiently shew, that we must not deviate one Tittle from what our Reason dictates in any of these important Points. Nay, even the Pres.

Mat. 18. 22. except of forgiving Injuries, not only seven, but seventy Times seven, except interpreted consistently with what the Light of Nature dictates to be our Duty, in preserving our Reputation, Liberty, and Property; and in doing all we can in our several Stations, to hinder all Injury and Injustice from others, as well as ourselves; wou'd be a Doctrine attended with fatal Consequences: So that the Expediency, or even Lawfulness of forgiving Injuries, depends on such Circumstances as human Discretion is to judge of.

As
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As I am a Member of the Common-wealth, I can’t be a Judge in my own Cause; and tho’ I may legally prosecute a Man who has injur’d me; yet if the Injury be but slight, and by my over-looking it, he may become my Friend; common Prudence will oblige me to forgive him. But, if he, taking Advantage of my good Nature, injures me the more, and more frequently, because he may do it with Impunity; the Precept of forgiving, tho’ it forbids me to punish for Punishment-false; does no more in this Case bar me of a legal Remedy, than it does Nations of resenting National Injuries: And all good Governments oblige People, for the sake of the Common Good, to prosecute those who have injur’d them by robbing, stealing, or any other Ways cheating, or defrauding them. So that ’tis the Reason of Things, which, in all Circumstances, must determine us how to act; and consequently, when this Precept is truly stated, there is nothing new in it: But if it be not truly stated, it is such a new Doctrine, as may be attended with fatal Consequences.

Celsus, says, that “the Doctrine of forgiving Injuries, was not peculiar to the Christians, tho’ they taught it after a großer Manner.” And Confucius thus expresses this Doctrine, “Acknowledge thy Benefits by the Return of Benefits; but never revenge Injuries.

B. Confucius, tho’ he forbids the revenging Injuries, yet he did not carry Things to that State of Perfection, as to teach the loving our Enemies; but on the contrary maintains, “We may have an Aversion for an Enemy without desiring Revenge; the Motions of Nature are not always criminal; and ’tis only the good Man, who can love, and hate with Reason.

A. Are
A. Are not the Passions of Love and Hatred given us by God, to be exercis'd on proper Objects? Actions, abstrac-
tedly consider'd, are not the Objects of Love and Hate, but Persons for the sake of their Actions; and are not the Ac-
tions of some Men too detestable to create in us any Sent-
iments, but of Aversion; so as to oblige us to bring them to con
dign Punishment? Nay, must we not learn to hate our-
selves, before we can learn to love those that hate us?

If we ought not, nay, cannot love the Devil, because our Enemy; how can we love those Devils incarnate, those Enemies of God and Men, who hate, and persecute Men for shewing their Love to God, in following the Dictates of Conscience? If Love carries with it Complaisance, Esteem, and Friendship, and these are due to all Men; what Distinction can we then make between the best, and worst of Men? Tho' God, it's true, makes the Sun to shine, and the Rain to fall on the evil, and the good; and, indeed, how cou'd it be otherwise in the present State of Things? yet, certainly, he does not love evil Men, tho' he bears with them for a Time.

I am so far from thinking the Maxims of Confucius, and Jesus Christ to differ; that I think the plain and simple Maxims of the former, will help to illustrate the more ob-
cure Ones of the latter, accommodated to the then Way of speaking. Our Saviour's saying, Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy; Divines have, in vain, puzzl'd themselves to find out that Text in the Old Law; for cou'd they find it as they do other Texts, that our Saviour in the same Chap-
ter, by this Way of speaking, refers to; it wou'd only shew, that the Divine Precepts were not consistient with one another. Indeed, St. Paul says, If thy Enemy hunger, feed

him;
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him; if he thirst, give him Drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap Coals of Fire on his Head: But treating him Psal. 18, thus, can't sure be an Argument of Love; since 'tis in 120. 4.
Order to have Divine Vengeance fall on his Head.

B. Commentator agree, that these Precepts of our Saviour are not to be taken in the plain, obvious, and grammatical Meaning of the Words; but are to be so explain'd, limited, and restrain'd, as best serve to promote human Happiness.

A. Suppose those Precepts are capable of being thus paraphras'd, yet how do we know this was the Design of the Preacher? The Essenes (a Sect our Saviour never found fault with) had, as is plain from Philo and Josephus, Rules much the same; which they interpreted according to the plain and literal Meaning; and the Christians, as I shall shew hereafter, for some Centuries, understood most of these Precepts after the same Manner; believing that the Nature of moral Rules requir'd they should be thus interpreted; especially such as are design'd to govern the Actions of the most ignorant and illiterate; and taught too by a Person, whose infinite Knowledge must enable him so to express himself, as that his Words should not be liable to the least Misconstruction.

B. However, Christians at first depending on the grammatical, and obvious Meaning of the Words, might mistake; yet Reason taught them afterwards how they were to be interpreted.

A. Reason, then, must be our Guide; and we must know our Duty from the Light of Nature, antecedently to those Precepts; otherwise we cou'd never know it was our Duty to put such Senses on Words, as they otherwise seem not to bear. Besides,
Shou'd not Rules concerning Morality, be suited to Mens particular Circumstances, plainly describing that Conduct which they require? Is not this the Design of the Municipal Laws in every Country? What Benefit cou'd Subjects have, from Laws written in such a loose, general, and undetermin'd Manner; as Lend, hoping for Nothing again; If any Man will sue thee at Law, and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak also: Of him who takes away thy Goods, ask them not again; or those other Texts, which seem to condemn the Rich as such; and require, not the setting the Poor at Work, but the selling All, and giving to the Poor; or those other Precepts, which seem to forbid Self-defence; or require us to take no Thought for our Life; or for the Morrow? And that too by Arguments drawn from Lillies, neither toiling, nor spinning? The same may be said of all general, and undetermin'd Rules in the New Testament, tho' more plainly deliver'd: As for Instance, tho' tis said, Servants, obey your Masters in all Things; and please them well in all Things; yet is the Measure of Obedience due from Servants to Masters any otherwise to be learnt, than from the Agreement of the Parties, or the Custom of the Country? 'Tis said, We are to render to Cæsar, the Things that are Cæsar's; but must we not learn from the Laws in every Nation, who is Cæsar? And what is his Due? Otherwise we shou'd act like those wicked Priests, who, not long since, from general Words of Obedience, wou'd have destroy'd our happy Constitution; and treacherously invested the Prince with an absolute Power. We are to render all Men their Dues; but what those Dues are, we are to learn from the Reason of Things, and the Laws of the Country.
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In a Word, 'tis the Tendency of Actions, which makes them either good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good; and those that have a contrary Tendency are always bad. And 'tis the Circumstances Men are under, by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions. As for Instance, the killing a Man, consider'd without its Circumstances, is an Action, neither good or bad; but by the Magistrate, when the publick Good requires it; or by a private Man, when necessary for Self-defence; is an Action always good: But done when the publick Good does not require it, when there is no such Danger, and with Malice prepene; 'tis always evil. Taking up Arms against a Person entrusted with the Protection of the Common-Wealth, can't be determin'd to be good, or bad, without considering Circumstances; if he has not abus'd his Trust, it will be Rebellion, the highest of Crimes; but if he has betray'd that Trust, and oppress'd the Community, then a just and necessary Defence. Injoying a Woman, or lufting after her, can't be said, without considering the Circumstances, to be either good, or evil; that warm Desire, which is implanted in human Nature, can't be criminal, when persu'd after such a Manner, as tends most to promote the Happiness of the Parties; and to propagate and preserve the Species. What we call Incest, is now for many good Reasons not to be allow'd of; yet it was a Duty in the Children of Adam and Eve: And if the nearest of Kin were now thrown on a desert Island, I see no Reason, but that they might act as the first-born Pair did.

Tho' there were ever so many Texts in the New as well as Old Testament against Usury, and those too back'd by the unanimous Authority of all the Fathers; yet the forbidding it, especially in Trading Nations, would now be immoral;
moral; since without it Industry wou’d in a great Measure be discourag’d, Arts unimprov’d, and Trade and Commerce, consisting chiefly in Credit, destroy’d: Besides, what Reason can be assign’d, why a Man shou’d any more lend his Money, than lett his Lands for Nothing. And even that common Rule of doing—as we would be done unto, supposes an Action fit to be done; or at least, without any ill Tendency. Nay, to go a little further; was not the Command of abstaining from Blood, given after the Deluge to the then whole Race of Mankind; and often repeated in the Law? And in the New Testament, is not this same Precept enjoin’d the Gentile Converts, by the unanimous Decree of the Apostles, and by the Holy Ghost too, as necessary; nay, equally so with the abstaining from Fornication; and thought by all Christians, for many Ages, to be of perpetual Obligation? yet, who is now so ridiculous, as out of Religion to abstain from Black-Puddings? Who now, to give another Instance, thinks it a Duty to wash his Neighbour’s Feet? tho’ a Thing, not only commanded by a dying Saviour, after the most solemn Manner, and under no less Penalty than having no Part in him; but enforce’d, and inculcated by his own Example. Our Saviour commands Men not to swear at all; and St. James impresses the same Precepts, by saying, Above all Things, swear not; and by the Manner of its being introduc’d by our Saviour, it seems chiefly to relate to Oaths taken on solemn Occasions; It is said of Old, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine Oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all. —And yet, who now, besides Quakers, refuse to swear at all? By these, you see, tho’ several other Instances might be produc’d, how Christians have, in the main, taken the Tendency of Actions to be the Rule, to judge of their Lawfulness or Unlawfulness, Goodness or
or Badness: And in those few Things Superstition has made them judge otherwise, has it not always been to their Prejudice?

B. Is there no Exception to this Rule? Must Men, at all Times, make their Words and Thoughts agree; and never speak, but just as they think?

A. The Rule I have laid down holds even here; for tho' Speech was given Men to communicate their Thoughts, and 'tis generally for their common Good, that Men shou'd speak as they think; yet this common Good prescribes certain Restrictions: Deceiving an Enemy in a just War, either by Words or Actions, if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace, is certainly a Duty; and the same Reason obliges People not to keep those Promises, tho' sworn to, which they have been forc'd to make to Robbers and Thieves: And some go so far, as to think, that those who wou'd force others to declare their Opinions to their own Prejudice, in such Matters where the Government has no Concern; have no more Right to Truth than Robbers, and other publick Enemies.

Friendship will sometimes oblige Men to deceive People, when it manifestly tends to their Good, and none are prejudic'd by it; and all practise it with Relation to Children, sick People, and Men in Passion: Must he not be an ill Man, indeed, who would not save an innocent Person, by telling his Pursuer a Falsity? This is a Duty he owes to both, the Pursuer and persou'd. And if Men, (as none scruple it) may bid their Servants say, They are not at Home; and do several other Things of this Nature; why may they not, when Silence will be interpreted to their Prejudice, deceive impertinent People, in such Matters where they have no Concern? Thus, you see, there are certain Ex-
ceptions to this Rule, which, as well as the Rule itself, are built on the Good of Mankind; and yet these Exceptions will by no Means justify mental Reservations, or Equivocations.

The Children of Israel, in the Time of the Judges, were certainly none of the best Casuists; who, when in a Quarrel, Judges 21:1 (the oddest that ever was) having sworn before the Lord at Mispath, not to give any of their Daughters to Wife to Benjamin; and, in Pursuance of this Quarrel, destroyed them with their Wives and Children, except 600, who escap'd by flying to a Cave; and then reflecting that a whole Tribe would be lost, if they did not give them Wives; and their Oaths, accompany'd with a Curse, violated, if they did; found out these two Expedients: The Men of Jabesh Gilead, not concerning themselves in this Quarrel, nor coming to the general Assembly, they destroy'd with their Wives and Children, except 400 Virgins; whom they gave for Wives to these Benjamites; but these not being a sufficient Number, they advis'd, nay, commanded them, to seize on some of their Daughters as they were dancing, and to carry them off: Thus these merciful, and religious People preserv'd their Oaths, and their Brother Benjamin.

B. The Hebrew Midwives, no doubt, acted according to your Rule in deceiving Pharaoh, by not destroying the Hebrew Male Children; because they said, They feared God, and God dealt well with them, and made them Houses; but there's another Precedent in the same History, which seems very surprising: The Lord, tho' he told Moses, and the Elders of Israel, his real Design of bringing his People out of Egypt into the Land of the Canaanites, yet bids them say to the King of Egypt, Let us go three Days Journey into the Wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us.
us with Pestilence, or with the Sword: We can't sacrifice in the
Land, for we shall sacrifice the Abomination of the Egyptians;
Our Cattle must go with us, for thereof we must serve the—- 10. 26.
Lord. And at last, when Pharaoh, whose Heart God had
frequently harden'd, comply'd with their Request, he bids
them go serve the Lord, as ye have said; and upon this Oc—- 12. 31;
casion, they borrow'd of the Egyptians, as the Lord order'd
them, Jewels of Gold and Silver, and Raiment, even to the
spoiling of them; and when Pharaoh (who all along seem'd
jealous of their Design, and bids them not go far away;)—- 8. 28;
found that this solemn Sacrifice was a meer Pretence, and
that they really fled with all they had borrow'd of his People.
he persw'd the Fugitives; the Consequence was, that the
Egyptians, instead of obtaining Restitution, were miracu-
ously destroy'd, and Pharaoh lost his Life as well as his
Subjects; and those who had dealt thus treacherously with
them, were as miraculously preserv'd.

A. As to this Point, I can only advise You to consult
our learned Commentators, who will satisfy You in this
Matter, as well as why the Terror of the Lord hinder'd Ju-
Gen. 35. 5;
stice to be done upon the two Sons of Jacob, for the vilest
Piece of Cruelty and Treachery, they committed on the
Shechemites. But not to meddle with Things foreign to our
Purpose,

I will venture to say, that this Rule of acting according
as the Circumstances we are under, point out to us, to be
for the general Good, is a Rule without Exception; whereas
all other general Rules are of little Use, when apply'd
to particular Cases; because of the many Exceptions to
them, founded on other Rules, equally general: And fur-
ther, that this universal, and unexceptionable Rule is highly
necessary, in explaining all the Precepts of our Saviour;
especially those relating to loving of Enemies, and forgiving Injuries. And the rather, because

The Ecclesiastics, tho’ they cry up the Precepts of Mens loving their Own Enemies; yet they effectually evade this, and all other moral Precepts, by telling them ’tis their Duty to hate God’s Enemies; and those to be sure, are God’s Enemies, who refuse blindly to submit to their Dictates; especially in Matters relating to their Power and Profit: And have too found out many Ways of making the Precept of forgiving Injuries useless; more particularly by telling Men, that ’tis for the Correction of Manners, for the Good of their own, as well as their Neighbours Souls, that the Spiritual Courts are erected; where People, for such haughty and angry Words, as no Action (there being no real Damage) will lye for at Common Law, are to be cenfur’d: And thus Numbers of ordinary People are, on this Pretence, to the great Benefit of those Courts, frequently undone; and spiteful Persons gratify their Malice, without any Satisfaction, but that of ruining their Neighbours, and very often themselves.

I might shew You, in Support of my never-failing Rule of judging of Actions by their Tendency, that we are carefully to distinguish between the Actions of Jesus himself; since in some (these being no otherwise to be accounted for) he, as Divines themselves own, acted by Virtue of his Prophetical Office; these, consequently, can be no Precedent for us; but of this hereafter.

B. You have already, I must own, taken a great deal of Pains, to shew, that God, in creating Mankind, had no other Design than their Happines; and that all the Rules he gave them (it being repugnant to his Nature to have any arbitrary Commands) cou’d have no other Tendency; and that by making them moral Agents, he made them capable
capable of knowing wherein their Happiness consists; or in other Words, of discovering whatever the Relations they stand in to God, and their Fellow-Creatures make fit to be observ'd. And from thence You conclude, Mens Happiness, at one Time as well as another, consisting in the same Things; that the Gospel (which can make no Alteration in the Relations Men stand in to God, and one another; or the Duties that flow from thence;) cou'd only be a Republication, or Restoration of that Religion, which is founded on the eternal Reason of Things; which, You suppose, is what we are still govern'd by; since we are oblig'd to recede from the Letter, tho' the Words are ever so plain, if that recedes from the Reason of Things; as all own the Letter does, in innumerable Places relating to God him- self; by imputing human Parts, human Infirmities, and human Passions, even of the worst Kind, to him; and making those the Cause of many of his Actions: And that as in the Old Testament there are several Things, either commanded, or approv'd, which wou'd be criminal in us to observe, because we can't reconcile our doing them with the Reason of Things; so in the New Testament, its Precepts are for the most Part deliver'd either so hyperbolically, that they wou'd lead Men astray, were they govern'd by the usual Meaning of Words; or else express'd in so loose, general, and undetermin'd a Manner, that Men are as much left to be govern'd by the Reason of Things, as if there were no such Precepts: And the Scripture not distinguishing between those Precepts which are occasion- nal, and which are not, we have no Ways to distinguish them, but from the Nature of Things; which will point out to us those Rules, which eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not. These Sentiments You so strong-
strongly in force, that I shou'd find it difficult not to yield, had I not so able a Combatant as Dr. S. Clark, for my Second; who, in his Excellent Discourse of the unalterable Obligation of Natural Religion, and the Truth, and Certainty of the Christian Revelation; not only shews, that they are distinct Religions; but the infinite Advantage the latter has above the former: And tho' this good, as well as great Man is dead, whereby the Church has sustain'd an irreparable Loss, yet he will for ever live in this Immortal Work.
CHAP. XIV.

Dr. Clark's Discourse of The Unchangeable Obligation of Natural Religion, and the Truth, and Certainty of the Christian Revelation, considered; and from thence is shown, how inconsistent soever with the Design of that Discourse, that nothing can be a Part of Religion, but what is founded on the Nature, and Reason of Things.

[own, the Dr. got immortal honour by that Discourse; how 'tis admired, the seventh Edition shews: And we may well imagine, an Author, who usually exhausts the Subject he writes on, has here omitted nothing that makes for his Purpose. And, therefore, since 'tis your Pleasure, I will fully consider this Discourse, and begin with the Character he gives the Law of Nature; and see whether he does not represent it so absolutely perfect, as to take in every Thing that God requires of Mankind: And then examine what he says in Behalf of Revelation, in Contradistinction to the Religion of Nature.]
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The Dr. not only maintains, that "the Law of Nature is eternal, universal, and absolutely unchangeable;" but has two sections to prove, "That the Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things; and that all rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in all their Actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason;" which supposes, that all rational Creatures are not only capable of knowing this eternal Rule of Reason, but likewise of knowing there can be no other Rule, for the Actions both of God and Man. In his previous Discourse of the Being of a God, he affirms that "They, who are not govern'd by this Law, are for setting up their own unreasonable Self-will; in Opposition to the Nature, and Reason of Things. -- acting contrary to their own Reason and Knowledge; attempting to destroy that Order, by which the Universe subsists; and by Consequence, offering the highest Affront imaginable to the Creator of all Things, who himself governs all his Actions by these Rules, and cannot but require the same of all his reasonable Creatures." And in this Discourse he says, "The All-powerful Creator, and Governor of the Universe, who has the absolute, and uncontrollable Dominion of all Things in his own Hands, and is accountable to none for what he does, yet thinks it no Diminution of his Power, to make this Reason of Things the unalterable Rule, and Law of all his own Actions in the Government of the World, and does nothing by mere Will and Arbitrariness." And indeed, if God does nothing by mere Will and Arbitrariness, 'tis impossible there can be any other Rule but the Reason of Things. And accordingly he says, "The eternal and unchangeable Nature, and Reason of the Things..."
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"themselves are the Law of God; not only to his Creatures, but also to himself, as being the Rule of his own Actions in the Government of the World." "And, as a learned Prelate of our own has excellently shewn, "not barely his infinite Power, but the Rules of this eternal Law, are the true Foundation, and the Measure of his Dominion over his Creatures. Now, for the same Reason, that God, who hath no Superior to determine him, yet constantly directs all his own Actions by the eternal Rule of Justice and Goodness; 'tis evident all intelligent Creatures in their several Spheres and Proportions, ought to obey the same Rule according to the Law of their Nature." Which is supposing it would be Tyranny in God to have any arbitrary Commands, or give Man any other Rules, but the Rules of this eternal Law, the true Foundation, and Measure of his Dominion over his Creatures. And again, "God, who is infinitely self-sufficient to his own Happiness, cou'd have no Motive to create Things at all, but only that he might communicate to them his Goodness and Happiness." If so, They, who do all the Good they can to themselves, and Fellow-Creatures, answer the End of their Creation. "And, be says, that in Matters of Natural Reason and Morality, that which is holy and good is not therefore holy and good, because it is commanded to be done; but it is therefore commanded by God, because it is holy and good:" Which supposes that all God's Commands, if they are all holy and good (between which, I think, the Distinction is only verbal;) are founded on the Nature, and Reason of Things. And accordingly he says, "that God has made (his intelligent Creatures) so far like himself, as to endue them with those excellent Faculties of Reason and Will, whereby
whereby they are enabl’d to distinguish Good from Evil, 
and to choose the one, and refuse the other.” Which
supposes those are the only Things which God commands, 
or forbids; otherwise these excellent Faculties wou’d only 
enable them to know but Part of the Will of God; tho’
God can will nothing but what is for their Good, that be-
ing the sole End of his creating them.

And he supposes, That “this Law of Nature is not
founded in the positive Will of God, but arises from the
different Relations and Respects which Things have to
one another, which makes some Things fit, and others un-
fit to be done.” And says, that “the Law of Nature has
its full obligatory Power, antecedent to all Considerations
of any particular private, and personal Reward or Pun-
ishment, annex’d either by natural Consequence, or by
positive Appointment, to the Observance, or Neglect of
it. This also is very evident: Because if Good and Evil,
Right and Wrong; Fitness and Unfitness of being practi-
ced, be (as has been shown) originally, eternally, and
necessarily, in the Nature of the Things themselves; it is
plain, that the View of particular Rewards or Punish-
ments, which is only an After-Consideration, and does
not at all alter the Nature of Things, cannot be the ori-
ginal Cause of the Obligation of the Law, but is only an
additional Weight to enforce the Practice of what Men
were before oblig’d to by right Reason.” And to prove
this he says, that “the Judgment and Conscience of a
Man’s own Mind, concerning the Reasonableness, and
Fitness of the Thing, that his Actions should be con-
formed to such, or such a Rule, or Law; is the truest,
or formallest Obligation, even more properly, and strictly
so, than any Opinion whatsoever of the Authority of the

con-
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"Giver of a Law, or any Regard he may have to its Sanctions by Rewards and Punishments. For whoever acts contrary to this Sense, and Conscience of his own Mind, is necessarily self-condemned; and the greatest, and strongest of all the Obligations is That, which a Man cannot break through without condemning himself." And, He likewise affirms, that "these eternal moral Obliga-

otions, as they are really in perpetual Force, merely from their own Nature, and the abstract Reason of Things; so also they are moreover the express and unalterable Will, and Command of God to his Creatures, which he cannot but expect should, in Obedience to his supreme Authority, as well as in Compliance with the natural Reason of Things, be regularly, and constantly observ'd thro' the whole Creation." Which not only supposes, that the Reason of Things, and the divine Commands are inseparable; but that 'tis the Reason, or the Fitness of the Thing, that makes it a divine Law; and consequently, that they who never heard of any external Revelation; yet if they knew from the Nature of Things what's fit for them to do, they know all that God will, or can require of them; since his Commands are to be measur'd by the antecedent Fitness of Things; and Things can only be said to be fit, or unfit, but as they are for, or against the common Good. And if the Creator will do every Thing, the Relation he stands in to his Creatures makes it fit for him to do; and expects nothing from them, but what the Relation they stand in to him, and one another, makes likewise fit for them to do; how can they be ignorant of their Duty? Especially, if, as the Dr. demonstrates, "All the same Reasons and Argu-

ments, which discover to Men the natural Fitnesses, or Un-

fitnesses of Things, and the necessary Perfections, or Attri-

butes
butes of God; prove equally at the same Time, that That,
which is truly the Law of Nature, or the Reason of
Things, is in like Manner the Will of God." And,
He justly observes, that tho' "This Method of deducing
the Will of God from his Attributes; is of all other the
best and clearest, the certainest and most universal, that
the Light of Nature affords; yet there are other collateral
Considerations, which prove, and confirm the same."
And that

The same may be prov'd from the Tendency, and
Practice of Morality, to the Good and Happiness of the
whole World:" Which, indeed, wou'd be no Proof, were
any Thing commanded that had no such Tendency; for such
Things, according to the Penalties they were to be enforc'd
by, wou'd be more, or les to the Hurt of Mankind.

To shew the natural Connexion there is between all the
Parts of Religion, he says, "Who believes the Being, and
natural Attributes of God, must of Necessity confess his
moral Attributes also. Next, he who owns, and has just
Notions of the moral Attributes of God, cannot avoid
acknowledging the Obligations of Morality, and Natural
Religion. In like manner, he who owns the Obligations
of Morality and Natural Religion, must needs to support
those Obligations, and make them effectual in Practice,
believe a future State of Rewards and Punishments. And
he affirms, that "the Certainty of a future State of Re-
wards and Punishments, is in general deducible, even
demonstrably, by a Chain of clear, and undeniable Rea-
soning;" nay, he says, "'tis a Proposition in a Manner
self-evident." And speaking of some Argument he had
before mention'd, he says, "These are very good, and
strong Arguments for the great Probability of a future
State;
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"State; but That drawn from the Consideration of the moral Attributes of God, seems to amount even to a Demonstration: Nay, to a compleat Demonstration.

In short, the Dr's Hypothecis is, That upon God's framing Mankind after the Manner he has done, there are certain Things resulting from thence, which naturally, and necessarily conduce to their Good or Hurt; and that the Way to know the Will of God, is to know what those Things are, in Order to do the one, and to avoid the other. For which Reason God gave Mankind Understanding, which (without blaspheming the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God) must be allow'd to be sufficient to answer the End for which it was given. And that a Being, infinitely wise and good, as well as wholly disinterested, can require nothing of Men, but what they, for the sake of their own Interest, tho' there were no positive divine Commands, were oblig'd to do; and consequently, that whoever acts for his own Good, in Subserviency to That of the Publick, answers the End of his Creation: As this Scheme of Things, to do the Doctor Justice, gives us the highest Idea of the Goodness, Wisdom, and Perfection of the divine Being; so to compleat his moral Character, the Dr. represents the Laws of God, by which Mankind are to govern all their Actions, most plain and obvious, and even impress'd on human Nature. And therefore says, that

"All rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves, pag. 48; in all their Actions, by the eternal Reason of Things, is evident from the Sense, all, even wicked Men, unavoidably have of their being under such an Obligation; and from the Judgment of Mens Consciences on their own Acts. And that the most profligate of all Mankind, however industriously they endeavour to conceal,
and deny their Self-condemnation, yet cannot avoid making a Discovery of it sometimes when they are not aware of it." And that no Man, but " by the Reason of his Mind, cannot but be compell'd to own, and acknowledge, that there is really such an Obligation indispensably incumbent upon him." And "They who do Evil, yet see, and approve what is good, and condemn in others what they blindly allow in themselves; nay, very frequently condemn even themselves also, not without great Disorder, and Un-easiness of Mind in those very Things wherein they allow themselves." And herein, give me Leave to say, consists the Excellency of the Law of Nature, that tho' a Man is so brutish as not to observe it himself, yet he wou'd have all others religiously observe it; and no Rule can be calculated for the general Good, but what is so fram'd; and if Men wou'd make this a Test of the Will of God, how happy wou'd they be? 

The Dr. more fully to prove his Point, says, That " the Mind of Man naturally, and necessarily affents to the eternal Law of Righteousness, may still better, and more clearly, and more universally appear, from the Judgment that Men pass on each Others Actions, than what we can discern concerning their Consciousness of their own." And there he shews, That "the unprejudic'd Mind of Man as naturally disapproves Injustice in moral Matters, as in natural Things it cannot but differ from Falshood, or dislike In-congruities." And again, "The Case is truly thus, that the eternal Differences of Good and Evil, the unalterable Rule of Right and Equity, do necessarily, and unavoidably determine the Judgment, and force the Assent of all that use any Consideration, is undeniably manifest from the universal Expe-
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"rience of Mankind. For no Man willingly, and deliberately transgresses this Rule in any great, and considerable Instance; but he acts contrary to the Judgment, and Reason of his own Mind, and secretly reproaches himself for so doing: And no Man observes, and obeys it steadily, especially in Cases of Difficulty and Temptation, when it interferes with any present Interest, Pleasure, or Passion; but his own Mind commends, and applauds him for his Resolution, in executing what his Conscience cou'd not forbear giving his Assent to, as just, and right. And this is what St. Paul means, when he says, (Rom. 2. 14, 15.) that When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law. And in another Place he says, "No Man does good, brave, and generous Actions, but the Reason of his own Mind applauds him for his so doing; and no Man, at any Time, does Things base, vile, dishonourable, and wicked; but at the same Time he condemns himself."

And he says, that "the eternal Rule of Right ought as indispensably to govern Mens Actions, as it cannot but necessarily determine their Assent.

One would be apt to think, that the Dr. believ'd that Man without Reflection, cou'd not but know the Law of Nature, and be in Love with it; since he says, "That in reading Histories of far, and distant Countries, where 'tis manifest we can have no Concern for the Event of Things, nor Prejudices concerning the Characters of Persons; who is there that does not praise, and admire; nay, highly esteem, and in his Imagination love, as it were, the Equity, Truth, Justice, and Fidelity of some Persons; and with the greatest Indignation and Hatred, detest the Barbarity, and Injustice of Others? Nay, fur-
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ther, when the Prejudices of corrupt Minds lye all on
the Side of Injustice, as when we have obtain'd some very
great Profit, or Advantage, thro' another Man's Trea-
chery, or Breach of Faith; yet who is there, that upon
that very Occasion, does not (even to a Proverb) dislike
the Person, and the Action, how much soever he may
rejoice at the Event.

These Reasons shew the infinite Goodness of God, by
not only thus deeply impressing that Law on human Nature,
by which God expects all Men shou'd govern all their Actions;
but in making the very observing this Law, to carry with it,
distinct from the Good it produces, the highest Satisfaction,
and rational Enjoyment; and the contrary, that Sorrow, Re-
morse, and Self-condemnation, which are the unavoidable
Consequence of acting against it: And of this the Philo-
sophers of Old, and I believe, all since, who do not adulterate
Religion with Things that are not moral, and conse-
quently, carry no Satisfaction with them; must be sensible:
But as it wou'd be endless, to mention all the Dr. says of
the irresistible Evidence, as well as the absolute Perfection
of the eternal, and immutable Law of Nature; I shall re-
cite but one Passage more, which he supports by the Authori-
ity of Bishop Cumberland. "This, says he, is that Law of
"Nature, to which the Reason of all Men, every where, as
"naturally, and necessarily assents, as all Animals conspire in
"the Pulse, and Motion of their Heart and Arteries; or as
"all Men agree in their Judgment concerning the Whiteness
"of Snow, or the Brightness of the Sun.

B. This, indeed, is so full and home, that no ancient,
or modern Deist cou'd have said more in Praise of the unlimited Wisdom, and universal Goodness of God; than in
supposing the common Parent of Mankind, has given all
his
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his Children, even those of the lowest Capacities, and at all Times, sufficient Means, of discovering whatever makes for their present, and future Happines; and that no Man can plead Ignorance of a Law as evident as that the Sun is bright, or Snow white; and as inseparable from rational Nature, as the Pulse of the Heart and Arteries are from animal Nature.

A. If this be talking like a Deist, all who write on this Subject talk thus; since they all maintain, that "there must be a Law of eternal Rectitude flowing from the Nature of Things, otherwise there could be no Actions good, or lovely in themselves; no real Distinction between Virtue and Vice; Good or Evil; and that God can't dispense with his Creatures, or with himself, for not observing it; otherwise an arbitrary Will, which might change every Moment, would govern every Thing;" and that "this Law of eternal Rectitude is implanted in Man at his very Creation; and that no Man can act contrary to it, but does Violence to himself, and sins against his very Make, and Constitution." And can it be otherwise, when the only innate Principle in Man is the Desire of his own Happines; and the Goodness of God requires no more than a right cultivating this Principle; in preferring a general, or publick; to a particular, or private Good? And where there are two Evils, and both can't be avoided, to choose the least sub ratione boni.

The latter Part of the Dr's Discourse is chiefly levell'd against those he calls the True Deists; and that You may know what Sort of Men they are he combats, he gives You their Creed.

"These Deists, says he, did they believe what they pretend, have just, and right Notions of God, and..."
of all the divine Attributes in every Respect, who declare they believe there is one Eternal, Infinite, Intelligent, All-powerful, and Wise Being; the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all Things; That this supreme Cause is a Being of infinite Justice, Goodness and Truth, and all other moral as well as natural Perfections; That he made the World for the Manifestation of his Power and Wisdom, and to communicate his Goodness and Happiness to his Creatures; That he preserves it by his continual all-wise Providence, and governs it according to the eternal Rules of infinite Justice, Equity, Goodness, Mercy and Truth; That all created, rational Beings, depending continually upon Him, are bound to adore, worship, and obey Him; To praise Him for all Things they enjoy, and to pray to Him for every Thing they want; That they are all obliged to promote in their Proportion, and according to the Extent of their several Powers and Abilities, the general Good and Welfare of those Parts of the World wherein they are plac'd: In like manner, as the divine Goodness is continually promoting the universal Benefit of the Whole; That Men, in particular, are every Where oblig'd to make it their Business, by an universal Benevolence to promote the Happiness of all others; That in Order to this, every Man is bound always to be have himself so towards others, as in Reason he would desire they should in the like Circumstances deal with Him; Wherefore, he is oblig'd to obey, and submit to his Superiors in all just, and right Things, for the Preservation of Society, and the Peace and Benefit of the Publick; To be just and honest, equitable and sincere in all his Dealings with his Equals, for the keeping
"inviolable the everlasting Rule of Righteousness, and "maintaining an universal Trust and Confidence, Friend- "ship and Affection amongst Men; and towards his Infe- "riors to be gentle and kind, easy and affable, charitable "and willing to assist as many as stand in Need of his "Help, for the Preservation of universal Love and Bene- "volence amongst Mankind; and in Imitation of the Good- "ness of God, who preserves, and does Good to all his "Creatures, which depend entirely upon him for their "very Being, and all that they enjoy; That in respect of "Himself, every Man is bound to preserve, as much as in "him lies, his own Being, and the right Use of all his "Faculties, so long as it shall please God, who appointed "him his Station in this World, to continue him therein; "That therefore, he is bound to have an exact Government "of his Passions, and carefully to abstain from all Debauch- "eries and Abuses of himself, which tend either to the "Destruction of his own Being, or to the Disorders of his "Faculties, and disabling him from performing his Duty, "or hurrying him into the Practice of unreasonable, and "unjust Things: Lastly, That according as Men regard, "or neglect these Obligations, so they are proportiona- "bly acceptable, or displeasing unto God; who being "supreme Governor of the World, cannot but testify "his Favour, or Displeasure, at some Times; or other; "and consequently, since this is not done in the present "State, therefore there must be a future State of Re- "wards and Punishments in a Life to come.

The Deists, no doubt, will own, that the Dr. has done "them Justice; since all their Principles, as he represents "them, have a direct Tendency to make them good Men; "and contain nothing to divert them from entirely attend-"
ing to all the Duties of Morality, in which the whole of their Religion consists; and which leaves them no Room for those endless Quarrels and fatal Divisions, which Zeal for other Things, has occasion'd among their Fellow-Creatures; and whom they pity upon the Account of that insupportable Bondage, which Superstition has, in most Places, laid them under: And must not a Religion, which the Dr. has prov'd to be demonstrably founded on the eternal Reason of Things, have a more powerful Influence on rational Beings, than if it was laid on any other Bottom. How can a Religion, which, as the Dr. describes it, carries in all its Parts, such evident Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail to make Men in Love with their Duty; when they must plainly see, That, and their Interest to be inseparable? If Princes requir'd no more of their Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours, than to be govern'd by these Principles; how happy wou'd the World be, thus govern'd?

I do not perceive the Dr. himself finds any Defect in their Principles; but only objects to their Manner of taking them as they are discoverable by the Light of Nature, and the Reason of Things.

B. Is not That a very just Objection?

A. Not from One who supposes, that "the eternal Reason of Things ought to be the Rule by which all Men should govern all their Actions;" and who, among other Things of the like Nature, affirms, that "the original Obligation of all is the eternal Reason of Things; That Reason, which God himself, who has no Superior to direct him, or to whose Happiness nothing can be added, or any Thing diminish'd from it, yet constantly obliges himself to govern the World by: And"
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"the more excellent, and perfect his Creatures are, the more cheerfully, and steadily are their Wills determin'd by this supreme Obligation, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the most perfect Will of God.

B. Why do You think This favours Deism?

A. Because, if the eternal Reason of Things is the supreme Obligation, must not that, if there's any Difference between it and External Revelation, take Place? And must not that Rule, which can annul any other, be not only the supreme, but the sole Rule; for as far as Men take any other Rule, so far they lose of their Perfection, by ceasing to be govern'd by this Rule, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God. And if this most perfect Will of God is to be thus known, can Things that have another Original, and are of a later Date, be any Part of the most perfect Will of God? Or, can the eternal Reason of Things extend to Things that do not belong to Reason; or, as Divines love to speak, are above Reason? Or, can the Dr. suppose, there's any other Rule, than the Nature, or Reason of Things, when he makes no Medium between Mens being govern'd by it, and by their own unreasonable Will?

In short, 'tis the View with which an Action is done, that makes it moral: He, who pays his Debts out of a Principle of Honesty, does a moral Action; while he, who does the same for Fear of the Law, can't be said to act morally: And can he, who does a Thing to avoid being punish'd, or in Hopes of being rewarded hereafter; and for the same Reason is ready to do the contrary; merit, at least, equally with him, who is in Love with
with his Duty, and is govern'd, not by servile Motives, but by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things; in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God. This the Dr. will not deny to be true Deism; and that they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of True Deists.

The Doctor, after he has himself, giv'n us a consistent Scheme of Deism, says, "There is now no such Thing, as "a consistent Scheme of Deism: That which alone was "once such — ceases now to be so, after the Appearance "of Revelation." If Christianity, as well as Deism, consists in being govern'd by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God, then they both must be the same; but if Christianity consists in being govern'd by any other Rule, or requires any other Things, has not the Dr. himself giv'n the Advantage to Deism?

These True Christian Deists, as I think, the Dr. ought to call them, say, that tho' the Dr's Discourse is chiefly levell'd against them; yet he can't differ with them, without differing from himself; and condemning in one Part of his elaborate Treatise, what he has approv'd in the other. For,

If Christianity has not, say they, destroy'd Mens moral Agency, or forbid them to act as moral Agents, they must now, as well as formerly, judge of the Will of God, by that Reason given them by an All-gracious God, to distinguish between Good and Evil; the only Things to which the Precepts of a Being, who, as the Dr. owns, is incapable of acting arbitrarily, can extend; and these Deists agree with the Dr. in his two first Propositions, upon which, the whole of his Reasoning is built: "That "from the eternal, and necessary Differences of Things, "there
there naturally arise certain moral Obligations; which are of themselves incumbent on all rational Creatures; antecedent to all positive Institution, and to all Expectation of Reward and Punishment." And,

"THAT the same eternal moral Obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural Differences of Things, are moreover the express Will and Command of God to all rational Creatures:" And accordingly they judge of the positive Will of God, from those eternal moral Obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural Differences of Things; which being incumbent on all rational Creatures, antecedent to all positive Institution, can't but be so knowable by them; and having, agreeable to the Dr’s Direction, thus chosen their Religion; they say, 'Tis impossible for them (since there can’t be two Originals of the same Thing) to choose that Religion from external Revelation, which they have already chosen from internal Revelation; and if external Revelation can’t alter the Nature of Things, and make that to be fit, which is in itself unfit; or make that necessary, which is in itself unnecessary; it can only be a Transcript of the Religion of Nature; and so every Thing it says, is to be judg’d of by the Reason, and Nature of Things; otherwise, say they, we might be oblig’d to admit Things, which, for ought we know, are as necessarily false, as God is true; since "all Doctrines in consistent with Morality, are, as the Dr. justly observes, as certainly, and necessarily false, as God is true.

BESIDES, if these moral Obligations, which of themselves are incumbent on all rational Creatures, and which likewise shew themselves from their internal Excellency, to be the Will of God; are as evident, as the Sun is bright: How can Men, say these Deists, believe
believe on lesser Evidence, what they know before to be certain on the greatest; in this Case, must not Faith be swallow'd up by Knowledge; and Probability by Demonstration?

These Deists entirely agree with the Dr, when he affirms, pge. 113, that "Some Doctrines are in their own Nature necessarily, and demonstrably true; such as are all those which concern the Obligation of plain moral Precepts; And these neither need, nor can receive any stronger Proof from Miracles, than what they have already (tho' not, perhaps, so clearly indeed to all Capacities;) from the Evidence of right Reason. Other Doctrines are in their own Nature necessarily false, and impossible to be true; such as are all Absurdities and Contradictions, and all Doctrines that tend to promote Vice; and these can never receive any Degree of Proof from all the Miracles in the World." But as to what the Dr. adds, pge. 114, "That Other Doctrines are in their own Nature indifferent, or possible, or, perhaps, probable to be true; and those cou'd not have been known to be positively true, but by the Evidence of Miracles, which prove them to be certain." Here these Deists beg Leave to differ with him, as to any Doctrines, in their own Nature indifferent, being the Will of God; for that wou'd be to suppose what the Dr. has prov'd to be impossible, that God acts arbitrarily, and out of meer Wilfulness. And here they wou'd ask him, since, as he owns, "Evil Spirits can do Miracles, pge. 312, and the Nature of the Doctrine to be prov'd to be divine, must be taken into Consideration; how Miracles can prove a Doctrine, relating to indifferent Things, to be from God? Or, how there can be any such Doctrines in the Christian Religion, if what he says be true; "That every one
one of the Doctrines it teaches, as Matter of Truth, has
a natural Tendency, and a direct powerful Influence to
reform Mens Lives, and correct their Manners. This,
adds be, is the great End, and ultimate Design of all
true Religion: And 'tis a great and fatal Mistake to
think that any Doctrine, or any Belief whatever, can
be any otherwise of any Benefit to Men, than as it is
fitted to promote this main End.

This supposes Men, by their Reason, are not only able
to know, that it is repugnant to the Nature of God, to
require any Thing of them, except it has a natural Tend-
cy, and a direct powerful Influence to reform their Lives,
or correct their Manners; but likewise to discern what
Doctrines have this Tendency; and that, if, upon Exami-
nation, they find every Doctrine contain'd in Scripture has
this Tendency, they may, then, safely pronounce them all to
be divine; this previous Examination, therefore, is highly
necessary to prevent what he justly calls a fatal Mistake.

The Difference between those, who would engross the
Name of Christians to themselves, and these Christian Deists,
as I may justly call them; is, that the former dare not exa-
mine into the Truth of Scripture Doctrines, lest they shou'd
seem to question the Veracity of the Scriptures; whereas
the Latter, who believe not the Doctrines, because contain'd
in Scripture; but the Scripture, on Account of the Doc-
trines; are under no such Apprehension: For having cri-
tically examin'd those Doctrines by that Reason, which God
has giv'n them to distinguish Religion from Superstition; they
are sure not to run into any Errors of Moment; notwithstanding the confes'd Obscurity of the Scriptures; and those
many Mistakes that have crept into the Text, whether by
Accident, or Design.

B b b 2

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The Dr. says, "The moral Part of our Saviour's Doctrine would have appear'd infallibly true, whether he had ever work'd Miracles, or no. The rest of his Doctrines was what evidently tended to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness amongst Men. Therefore that Part also of his Doctrine was possible, and very probable to be true; but yet it could not from thence be known to be certainly true; nor ought to have been receiv'd as a Revelation from God, unless it had been prov'd by undeniable Miracles.

Here the Deists can, by no Means, come into the Dr's Distinction, between the moral Part of our Saviour's Doctrine, and that Part which evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness; it being manifestly a Distinction without any Difference: And if the whole of Religion consists in the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, which he is far from denying; nothing can more effectually strike at the Certainty of all Religion, than the supposing, that Mankind cou'd not be certain, that whatever evidently tended to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, was the Will of God, 'till they were convin'd of it by undeniable Miracles.

'Tis possible, say they, a Man may doubt, whether there is a God; but none sure, who believe One, can doubt, but that 'tis demonstrably fit, just, and reasonable for Men, to do every Thing, that evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness. And, if the Mind of Man, as the Dr. says, can't avoid giving its Assent to the eternal Law of Righteousness;" can the Mind of Man avoid assenting to the Practice of Righteousness as his indispensible Duty? But if it be but probable, that whatever evidently tends to promote the Honour of God,
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God, and the Practice of Righteousness, is from God; it can't be more than probable, that Miracles done in their Behalf are from God. Does not the Dr. here destroy the Certainty of these Doctrines, which he had before demonstrated; and this too only to prove their Probability?

These Christian Deists own the Dr. is in the right, for contending, that the necessary Relation that is between Things, makes some Actions moral, and others immoral; but then they would ask, Whether there be any other Way to distinguish them, but from their Nature and Tendency; for they can't but conclude, that those which evidently tend to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, are plain moral Duties, and perpetually oblige. And,

"If no Miracles, as the Dr. owns, can prove a Doctrine\textsuperscript{315}!" that's vicious in its Tendency and Consequences, to be from God;" must not, say they, that Doctrine, which has the contrary Tendency and Consequences, be from God; tho' ever so many Miracles are done in Opposition to it? And,

They likewise say, As evidently as God is not only a good and perfect, but also the only perfect Being; so evident is it, that every Doctrine, that carries any Degree, much more the highest Degree of Goodness and Perfection in it, has the Character of Divinity impress'd on it; and therefore, can't agree with the Dr; "That neither can any\textsuperscript{224}. Degree of Goodness, and Excellency in the Doctrine itself, make it certain, but only highly probable to come from God."

If no Miracles can prove any indifferent Thing to be the Will of God; and all that evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, are plain,
plain moral Duties, as the Dr. contends; and all such Duties neither need, nor can receive any stronger Proof from Miracles, than what they have already from the Evidence of right Reason; how can Miracles, say these Deists, have any other Use, than to make Men consider the Nature, and Tendency of a Doctrine; and judge from thence whether it be from God? But,

Allowing the Dr. what Hypothecis he pleases, in relation to Miracles; yet if the Doctrines themselves, from their internal Excellency, do not give us a certain Proof of the Will of God, no traditional Miracles can do it; because one Probability added to another will not amount to Certainty.

B. I thought the Dr. had built his Arguments in Favour of Revelation, upon the Obscurity of the Law of Nature; and would not have declar'd, that "the Reason of all Men, every where, as naturally, and necessarily assents to it, as all Animals conspire in the Pulse, and Motion of their Heart and Arteries; or as all Men agree in their Judgment concerning the Whiteness of Snow, or the Brightness of the Sun.

A. Have Patience, and You shall see, that Snow is no longer white, or the Sun bright; and in Order to it I'll shew You, that the Dr's New Scheme consists in supposing, that tho' in the original uncorrupted State of human Nature, right Reason may justly be supposed to have been a sufficient Guide; and a Principle powerful enough to have preserv'd Men in the constant Practice of their Duty; yet upon the Fall, Mankind were in a very bad State; as wanting greater Help, and Assistance, than the Light of Nature could afford them. And That there was plainly wanting some extraordinary, and super-natural Assistance, that was
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"was above the Reach of bare Reason and Philosophy to procure. There was plainly wanting a divine Revelation to recover Mankind out of their universally degenerate State, into a State suitable to the original Dignity of their Nature." And again, "There was plainly wanting a divine Revelation, to recover Mankind out of their universal Corruption and Degeneracy." And in the Margin, "A divine Revelation absolutely necessary for the Recovery of Mankind:" But if a divine Revelation was absolutely necessary to this End, Men were under an absolute Impossibility of recovering without it.

This is supposing, God had left all Mankind for 4000 Years together, and even the greatest Part to this Day, destitute of sufficient Means to do their Duty, and to preserve themselves from sinking into a corrupted and degenerate State; and that it was impossible for them when thus sunk, to recover themselves; and yet that God (their Duty being the same after, as before the Fall,) expected Impossibilities from them; viz. either to preserve themselves from thus falling; or if fallen, to recover themselves. But if they had not Power to do This, and it was not their Fault, that they at first were in; and after remain'd in what he calls a State of universal Degeneracy and Corruption, this must then be the State God design'd they shou'd be in: And it wou'd seem not only to be in vain, but a Crime in them, to endeavour to change that State, in which, God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, thought fit to place them. But,

If Men alike, at all Times, owe their Existence to God, they at all Times must be created in a State of Innocence, capable of knowing, and doing all God requires of them; and we must conclude from the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that he will at no Time command any Thing, not
fit for him to command, or for Man to do; and therefore, could we suppose some Things commanded by external Revelation, which were not commanded by the Light of Nature; we must conclude, that 'till then it was not fit for God to command them, or for Man uncommanded to do them.

The Dr. to shew the Fault was not in Mankind, but in the Guide God gave them, says, "The Light of Nature, "and right Reason, was altogether insufficient to restore "true Piety;" and as tho' this was not enough, he adds, "that the Light of Nature no where appear'd;" which Sentences seem inconsistent, since the first supposes a Light, tho' insufficient, appearing to Mens Minds; but the Dr. does not seem to know whether they had no Light at all; or "a Light, which, he says, has undeniable Defects in it.

B. MAY not the Law of Nature be very clear, tho' the Light of Nature may be so very dim, as to have undeniable Defects?

A. CAN the Law of Nature be clear, and the Light of Nature dim; when the Law of Nature is nothing, but what the Light of Nature, or Reason dictates? Or, as Dr. Scot expres's it, "Right Reason pronouncing such Actions good, and such evil, is the Law of Nature; "and those eternal Reasons, upon which it so pronounces them, are the Creed of Nature; both which together make Natural Religion.

The Dr. to persue this Point, and to shew that the Fault was not in the Creatures, but the Creator; says, that "Even those few extraordinary Men of the Philosophers, who "did sincerely endeavour to reform Mankind, were them- "selves entirely ignorant of some Doctrines, absolutely ne-
"cessary for bringing about this great End of the Reformation, and Recovery of Mankind: — Their whole Attempt to discover the Truth of Things, and to instruct others therein, was like wandering in the wide Sea, without knowing whither to go, or which Way to take, or having any Guide to conduct them?

And that you might be sure, that the Fault was in the eternal, universal, and unchangeable Law of Nature; he calls those Philosophers, who thus wander'd in the wide Sea, "wise, brave, and good Men, who made it their Business to study, and practise the Duties of Natural Religion themselves, and to teach, and exhort others to do the like;" nay, One would imagine he thought them, notwithstanding their unavoidable Ignorance, inspir'd; since he says, "There never was a great Man, but who was inspir'd; Nemo unquam Magnus Vir sine divino afflatu fuit: And for this he quotes the Authority of Cicero, who, if the Dr's Reasoning is just, was certainly inspir'd.

The Dr's Scheme outdoes That of the most rigid Predestination; for That at all Times saves the Elect: But here are no Elect; but all, for many Ages, are inextricably involv'd in a most deprav'd, corrupted, and impious State.

The Dr. justly says, "Let none-on Pretence of maintaining Natural Religion, revile, and blaspheme the Christian; lest they be found Liars unto God:" And for the same Reason, may not I say, let none blaspheme Natural Religion? Tho, if Natural and Reveal'd Religion can differ, it must be a greater Crime to revile a Religion, that is eternal, universal, and unchangeable, than a Religion that is not so. And,
Tho' I pay a due Deference to the Dr's deep Penetration in Matters of Religion, I dare not say, there's the least Difference between the Law of Nature, and the Gospel; for That wou'd suppose some Defect in one of them, and reflect on the Author of both; who, certainly, was equally good, and equally wise, when he gave the one, as when he gave the other (if it may be call'd another) Law. Nor dare I be so rash, as to charge the Light of Nature with undeniable Defects, as the Dr. presumes to do; since, if that Light was sufficient to answer the End design'd by God, which was to be a competent Guide to Men, in relation to their present, and future Happiness; there cou'd be no Deficiency: If not, then there must have been an undeniable Default in the Giver of it, in appointing Means not sufficient to answer their design'd Ends; tho' both Means and Ends were entirely in his Power. Nor dare I say, "There are several necessary Truths, not possible to be discover'd with any Certainty by the Light of Nature;" because God's Means of Information will, and must always bear an exact Proportion to the Necessity of our knowing what we are oblig'd to know; especially touching the Nature, and Attributes of God; which, he supposes, "were very difficult for the wisest Men to find out; and more difficult for them to explain." But here I must do the Dr. that Justice, as to observe, that he, in another Place, is so far from finding any such Defect in this Light, even with relation to the Nature and Attributes of God; that he says, "All the heathen World had certain Means of knowing God; for That which may be known of God, was manifest enough unto Men in all Ages." And if no Age can know more of God, than that which may be known; and if that which may be known of him was manif...
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...niseft enough in all Ages; what Advantage can one Age in this grand Point have above another? And, therefore, I must conclude,

It can't be imputed to any Defect in the Light of Nature, that the Pagan World ran into Idolatry; but to their being entirely govern'd by Priests, who pretended Communication with their Gods; and to have thence their Revelations, which they impos'd on the credulous as divine Oracles: Whereas the Business of the Christian Dispensation was to destroy all those traditional Revelations; and restore, free from all Idolatry, the true primitive, and natural Religion, implanted in Mankind from the Creation.

The Dr. however, seems afraid, left he had allow'd too much to the Light of Nature, in relation to the Discovery of our Duty both to God and Man; and not left Room for Revelation to make any Addition; he therefore, supposes, "there are some Duties, which Nature hints at only in general:" But, if we can't, without highly reflecting on the Wisdom and Goodness of God, suppose, that he has not, at all Times, giv'n the whole rational Creation a plain Rule for their Conduct, in relation to those Duties they owe to God, themselves, and one another; must we not suppose Reason, and Religion (that Rule of all other Rules) inseparable; so that no rational Creature can be ignorant of it, who attends to the Dictates of his own Mind; I mean, as far as 'tis necessary for him to know it. A ignorant Peasant may know what is sufficient for him, without knowing as much as the learned Rector of St. James's.

Tho' the Dr. says, "the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in Fact, by no Means, universal;" yet he affirms, that "Man is plainly in his own Nature an accom-..."
"table Creature;" which supposeth that the Light of Nature plainly, and undeniably teaches him that Law, for Breach of which he is naturally accountable; and did not the Dr. believe this Law to be universal, he could not infer a future Judgment from the Conscience All Men have of their Actions, or the Judgment they pass on them in their own Minds; whereby "They that have not any Law, are a Law unto themselves; their Consciences bearing Witness, and their Thoughts accusing, or excusing one another;" Which is supposing but one Law, whether that Law be written on Paper, or in Mens Hearts only; and that all Men, by the Judgment they pass on their own Actions, are conscious of this Law. And,

The Apostle Paul, tho' quoted by the Dr. is so far from favouring his Hypothesis of any invincible Ignorance, even in the wisest, and best of the Philosophers; that he, by saying, The Gentiles that have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law, makes the Law of Nature and Grace to be the same: And supposeth the Reason why they were to be punish'd, was their sinning against

Light and Knowledge: That which may be known of God was manifest in them, and when they knew God, they glorify'd him not as God: And they were likewise guilty of abominable Corruptions, not ignorantly, but knowing the Judgment of God, that they who do such Things are worthy of Death. Had the Dr. but consider'd this self-evident Proposition, that There can be no Transgression where there is no Law; and that an unknown Law is the same as no Law; and consequently, that all Mankind, at all Times, must be capable of knowing all (whether more, or less,) that God requires: It would have prevented his endeavouring to prove, that, 'till the Gospel Dispensation,
Mankind were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of their Duty in several important Points; and thus charging the Light of Nature with undeniable Defects.

I think it no Compliment to External Revelation, tho' the Dr. design'd it as the highest; to say, it prevail'd, when the Light of Nature was, as he supposes, in a Manner extinct; since then an irrational Religion might as easily obtain, as a rational One.

The Dr. to prove that Revelation has supply'd the Insufficiency, and undeniable Defects of the Light of Nature, refers us to Phil. 4. 8. which he introduces after this pompous Manner; "Let any Man of an honest, and sincere Mind consider, whether That practical Doctrine has not, even in itself, the greatest Marks of a divine Original, wherein Whatever Things are true, what-Phil. 4. 8. "ever Things are honest, whatever Things are just, "whatever Things are pure, whatever Things are love-"ly, whatever Things are of good Report, if there be "any Virtue, if there be any Thing praiseworthy; all "these, and these only, are the Things that are earnestly recommended to Mens Practice.

I would ask the Dr. how he can know what these Things are, which are thus alone earnestly recommended to Mens Practice; or, why they have, in themselves, the greatest Marks of a divine Original; but from the Light of Nature? Nay, how can the Dr. know, there are Defects in the Light of Nature, but from that Light itself? which supposes this Light is all we have to trust to; and consequently, all the Dr. has been doing; on Pretence of promoting the Honour of Revelation, is introducing universal Scepticism: And I am concern'd, and griev'd, to see a Man, who had so great a Share of the Light of Nature,
employing it to expose that Light, of which before he had giv'n the highest Commendation; and which can have no other Effect, than to weaken even his own Demonstration, drawn from that Light, for the Being of a God.

I shall mention but one Text more, which had not the Dr. thought it highly to his Purpose, for shewing the Insufficiency of the Light of Nature; he wou'd not have usher'd it in after this most solemn Manner: "When Men have put themselves into this Temper and Frame of Mind, let them try if they can any longer reject the Evidence of the Gospel: If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine; whether it be of God.

Is it not strange, to see so judicious a Divine write after such a Manner, as if he thought the best Way to support the Dignity of Revelation, was to derogate from the immutable, and eternal Law of Nature? and while he is depressing it, extol Revelation for those very Things it borrows from that Law? in which tho' he affords there are undeniable Defects, yet he owns, that God governs all his own Actions by it, and expects that all Men shou'd so govern Theirs. But,

I find the Dr's own Brother, the Dean of Sarum, is entirely of my Mind, as to those two Texts the Dr. quotes; viz. Rom. 2. 14. and Phil. 4. 8. As to the first, viz. Rom. 2. 14. he says, "The Apostle supposes, that the moral Law is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things; that every Man is endu'd with such Powers and Faculties of Mind, as render him capable of seeing, and taking Notice of this Law; and also with such a Sense and Judgment of the Reasonableness, and Fitness of conforming his Actions to it, that he cannot but in his own Mind ac-"
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"quit himself when he does so; and condemn himself when
he does otherwise." And as to the second, *viz.* Phil.
4. 8. where the same Apostle recommends the Practice of
Virtue, upon the fore-mentioned Principles of Comeliness
and Reputation: "These Principles, says he, if duly attended
"to, were sufficient to instruct Men in the Whole of their
"Duty towards themselves, and towards each other: And
"they would also have taught them their Duty towards
"God, their Creator and Governor, if they had diligently
"persuaded them: For according as the Apostle expresses it,
"Rom. 1. 20. The invisible Things of God from the Cre-
"ation of the World, are clearly seen, being understood by
"the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and
"Godhead. —— The same Fitness and Decency that ap-
"pears in Mens regular Behaviour towards each other, ap-
"pears also in their Behaviour towards God: And this,
"likewise, is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things;
"and is what the Circumstances and Condition they are in
"do absolutely require. Thus we see wherein Moral Vir-
"tue, or Good consists, and what the Obligation to it is
"from its own native Beauty and Excellency.

B. If God, as the Dr. affirms, doth abhor all arbitrary
Commands, and Natural Religion comprehends every Thing
that is not arbitrary; and withal, is so deeply impress'd on
Mens Minds, that they can't violate its Precepts without
Self-condemnation; I can't apprehend how these Philoso-
phers, who made it their Business to study, and practise
Natural Religion, could be entirely ignorant of any Doc-
trines absolutely necessary for the Reformation of Mankind:
Nay, that "their whole Attempt to discover the Truth of
"Things, was like wandring in the wide Seas, without any
"Guide; and therefore, I shou'd be glad to know, what are
those
these absolutely necessary Doctrines, they were thus entirely ignorant of.

A. "These Philosophers, the Dr. says, had no Knowledge of the whole Scheme, Order, and State of Things." This, I think, may be allow'd; since I believe there's none at present, who have, or pretend to have so extensive a Knowledge. "But they had no Knowledge of the Method of God's governing the World." Then they must be blind, if living in the World, they did not see how the Things of this World were govern'd by Providence. "Then they did not know the Ground and Circumstances of Men's present corrupt Condition." If so, they did not understand human Nature, and how Prejudices and Passions work on Mankind. "They did not know, says he, the Manner of the divine Interposition necessary for their Recovery, and the glorious End, to which God intended finally to conduct them." It must be own'd, they were not in the least acquainted with the Dr's glorious Scheme, of all Mankind's being for four thousand Years together, and the greatest Part too, at present, by the very Frame of their Constitution, and the Condition of their Being, plac'd, by God in a most deprav'd, degenerate State; without Possibility of recovering from it. "But they had, it seems, no Knowledge of God's Design in creating Mankind." Sure, the Dr. had forgot what he quotes from Cicero to this Purpose; "Ad tuendos conservandosque homines bominem natum esse. Hominem bominum causa sunt generati, ut ipsi inter se aliis aliis prodeste possint. Hominem, naturae obdentem, homini nocere non possit. And does not the Dr. maintain the same Thing, in saying, that "God cou'd have no Motive to create Things at first, but only that he might communicate to them his Goodness and Happiness.

"These
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"These Philosophers, he says, were ignorant of the original Dignity of human Nature." And because he frequently insists on it, I shall fully consider this Matter; and will confess, 'tis probable, they thought that human Nature, Men, at all Times, having the same common Faculties, was always the same. Had they known the sacred Story of Adam and Eve, that wou'd have confirm'd them in their Sentiments. The most they cou'd perceive by it wou'd be, that the first Pair came into the World in every Sense naked, destitute of all that Knowledge, Experience gave their Posterity; and therefore, God, the better to support them in this State of universal Ignorance, planted a Garden for them; that they might live on the Fruit of it: How weak was their Reason, how strong their Appetites! when they cou'd not abstain (the sole Command giv'n them) from the Fruit of but one Tree; in a Garden too, where must needs be an infinite Variety, and the choicest Fruit!

These Philosophers wou'd have been at a Loss, to conceive, how Eve cou'd entertain a Conference with a Serpent (incapable of human Voice) even before Consent had giv'n any Meaning to Sounds. And they wou'd be apt to ask, Why, tho' Custom had made it shameful to go without Cloaths in those Places where Cloaths are worn; the first Pair shou'd nevertheless, tho' they knew not what Cloaths were, be ashamed to be seen uncloathed by one another, and by God himself? So that, when they heard the Voice of God walking in the Garden, in the Cool of the Evening, (a strange Representation these Philosophers wou'd think of God!) they hid themselves from his Presence: Nay, God himself, their Fig-leave Aprons, which they, (having, it seems, all Things necessary for sewing) sew'd together,
ther, not being sufficient to hide their Shame, made them Coats of the Skins of the Beasts, newly created in Pairs. And they wou'd, likewise, desire to be inform'd, how Eve, before her Eyes were open'd, saw that the Tree was good for Food; and that It was pleasant to the Eyes, and a Tree to be defir'd to make one wife.

Upon the whole, I grant, that these Philosophers wou'd be so far from finding out this original Dignity in the first Pair, that they wou'd be apt to think, by the Serpent's so easily imposing on her, that the original serpentine Nature, was too subtil for the original human Nature; and that there being nothing done by any Serpent since the Fall, which cou'd occasion the Precept of Mens being bid to be as wife as Serpents, it must allude to this Transaction between the Woman and the Serpent; tho' they cou'd never come into the Belief of the Ophita (with whom the Marcionites may be join'd) who thought, that Wisdom herself was the Serpent, which they preferr'd to Christ, as teaching them to know Good and Evil; and designing for them Immortality and Deity; and foretelling that Adam, tho' threaten'd with certain Death on the Day be eat the forbidden Fruit, shou'd not then dye; who accordingly liv'd after that Sentence about 900 Years: And that Mofei's erecting the brazen, healing Serpent, was in Honour of this Serpent; who design'd so much Good to Mankind.

B. These Philosophers wou'd be grossly mistaken, did they believe this done by a Serpent: We say, it was the Devil, in the Shape of a Serpent, that tempted them.

A. These Philosophers, indeed, wou'd see, that the Christians are now asham'd of the literal Interpretation of this Story; tho' St. Paul was of another Mind, who expressly says, The Serpent deceiv'd Eve thro' Subtilty. And they, perhaps,
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haps, would ask, Whether it was the Devil, who is said to be more subtle than any Beast of the Field; since it was this subtle Beast that said to the Woman, Ye shall not surely die. And it was upon the Woman's saying, The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat; that the Lord said to the Serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all the Cattle, and above every Beast of the Field: Upon thy Belly thou shalt go, and Dust thou shalt eat—— Ver. 13.

cursed above all the Cattle, and above every Beast of the

all the Days of thy Life. Does this Character agree to an immaterial, immortal Being? Did he all the Days of his Life go upon his Belly, and eat Dust? Does not God, continuing his Discourse to the Serpent, say, I will put Enmity between thee, and the Woman; between thy Seed, and her Seed; it shall bruise thy Head, and thou shalt bruise his Heel? And is not this the Consequence of Serpents going on their Belly? Do they not frequently bite Men by the Heel; especially in hot Countries, where Serpents are numerous, and Mens Heels bare? Why shall thy Seed, not signify thy Seed; but the Seed of a Being not mention'd in all this Story; and who has no Seed, but metaphorical Seed; which, since the Woman's Seed is taken literally, would be immediately changing the Meaning of the Word Seed? Does this Text afford the least Argument, to imagine God did not as much speak to the Serpent, as to Adam and Eve?

If a Book is to be interpreted thus, especially in relation to historical Facts; how can we, these Philosophers would say, be sure of its Meaning in any one Place! Besides, would they not ask, Why the whole Race of Serpents should be curs'd for the Crime of a fallen Angel?

B. They might as well ask, Why all other Animals should bring forth in Pain, for the Fault of Eve? For had Nature form'd all Females at first, as they have been ever since
since Eve eat the forbidden Fruit, none of them, except by Miracles, cou’d be deliver’d without Pain; no more than Serpents, had they at first, been form’d, as at present, creep otherwise than they do.

A. Those Philosophers, perhaps, wou’d not think the Matter a Jot mended, by substituting ( did the Story afford Room for it ) a Devil, instead of a Serpent; since they cou’d not see, how an infinitely good God cou’d permit a most malicious cunning Spirit to work on the Weakness of a Woman, just plac’d in a new World; without interposing in this unequal Conflict, or giving Notice of any such wicked Spirit; Angels, neither good, or bad, being mention’d in the History of the Creation: And yet that after the Fact was commited, God shou’d thus revenge it on all their innocent Posterity for ever; by curst the Ground, &c.

What wou’d seem to them most unaccountable is, That God shou’d continue to suffer this subtil, and malignant Spirit, endow’d with an universal Knowledge of what is past, and a deep Penetration into Futurity; to range about deceiving, and circumventing Mankind; who, having a Capacity vastly superior to them, is continually sowing the Seeds of Mischief, and scattering the Poison of universal Discord; making use of those very Men as his Instruments, whose profess’d Business it is, to promote universal Concord.

The poor Indians, You know, when our Missionaries give such an Account of the Devil, say, “Is not your God a good God, and loves Mankind? Why does he then permit this Devil to be continually doing them such infinite Hurt? Why is he not put under Confinement, if not depriv’d of a Being, of which he has made himself unworthy? With us One, who does not hinder a Mis-
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"chief, when it is in his Power, is thought not much better " than he who does it.

But to return to the Dr, where is the Difference in Relation to the Goodness of God, and the Happiness of Man-kind, between God's creating them in a State, as he calls it, of universal Degeneracy and Corruption; or causing them by the Folly of Adam, which infinite Wisdom cou'd not but foresee, to fall unavoidably into this bad State? What Dignity, what Perfection cou'd Adam's Nature have, that the Nature of his Posterity has not? Are they not as much fram'd after the Image of their Maker? Are not their Souls as much immediately from God as Adam's? And are not their Bodies exactly made after the same Manner? Were not all other Animals at first created by God as well as Men? Had these any Dignity, or Perfection in their Animal Nature, which the same Creatures since have not? Besides, is not this suppos'd high State of Perfection in Adam, giving the Lye to the History? since this very perfect Man, notwithstanding all the original Dignity of his Nature, had no better Excuse for his yielding to the first Temptation, than that the Wo-Gen 3.12

man, whom Thou gavest to be with me, gave me of the Tree, and I did eat. How can we suppose his Understanding was in the least impair'd by this Crime, since God himself says (tho' to whom it does not appear) Behold the Man is become like one of us, to know Good and Evil; and to prevent his being so, both for Immortality as well as Knowledge, God placed Cherubims — ver. 22,

with a flaming Sword, which turned every Way to keep the Way of the Tree of Life. Wou'd it not be very strange, that his Posterity (while his Understanding receiv'd no Hurt,) shou'd suffer so greatly in theirs; as the Dr wou'd.
wou'd have it thought? Indeed, St. Austin supposes, that Adam before the Fall cou'd have erected his Membrum genitale ad voluntatis nutum; and that Motions of the Flesh were perfectly subordinate to his Will, like his Fingers. But this Notion not being orthodox at present, and the Loss of this Faculty no ways infers the Loss of Understanding; I may venture to say, that the Dr.'s Description of human Nature in all, but one Pair, (and that too, perhaps, but for a Day,) is a Libel on the Dignity of human Nature; and an high Reflection on the Wisdom and Goodness of its Author; in placing them, without any Fault of theirs, in an unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 Years together, and continuing the greatest Part still in the same State.

But let us see, whether the Dr. has better Success with his other Arguments, by which he endeavours to curtail the universal Goodness of God; and, therefore, I shall take Notice of two other Things, which he insists on to shew the gross, and unavoidable Ignorance of the Philosophers, in the most momentous Points of Religion: The first is, "That, which of all Things the best, and wisest of the Philosophers were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of; and yet was of the greatest Importance for sinful Men to know; viz. The Method, by which such as have erred from the right Way, and have offended God, may yet restore themselves to his Favour."

And here he concludes, "That there arises from Nature no sufficient Comfort to Sinners, but an anxious, and endless Solicitude, about the Means of appeasing the Deity.

To answer the Dr, I need only quote what another able Divine, writing on the same Subject of Natural, and Re-
Reveal'd Religion, says, "I affirm, it is an Article of Natu-
"ral Religion, that Forgiveness does certainly follow 
"Repentance. If God be a merciful, and benign Being,
"he will accept the Payment we are able to make; and 
"not insist on impossible Demands, with his frail, bank-
"rupt Creatures. No generous Man, but will forgive 
"his Enemy, much more his Child; if he disapproves 
"the Wrong he has done, is really griev'd for it, is de-
"sirous to make Amends, even by suffering for the Ho-
"nour of the Person injur'd. How much more shall God 
"forgive all Persons thus dispos'd, and reform'd; since 
"there's no Generosity in Man, but what is, with his 
"Nature, infus'd into him by God.

"Not only Mercy, but Wisdom will effectually dis-
"pose God to forgive the Penitent, because the Cre-
"ature reform'd by Penitence is such as it ought to be, 
"and such as God willeth it; which being so, it can 
"be no Wisdom in God to afflict it unnecessarily. 'Tis 
"not Justice, but Rage, to punish where the Person is 
"already mended. When we argue thus, from any of 
"the known, and certain Attributes of God, we are as-
"sured of the Conclusion, as if the Thing was to be dis-
cern'd by Sense; since no sensible Thing is more cer-
tain, than the Attributes of God.

Mr. Lock has the same Sentiments, and says, "God
"had, by the Light of Reason, reveal'd to all Mankind,
"who wou'd make use of that Light, that he was Good, p. 235, 236,
"and Merciful. The same Spark of the divine Nature,
"and Knowledge in Man, which making him a Man,
"shew'd him the Law he was under as a Man; shew'd 
"him also the Way of atoning the merciful, kind, com-
"passionate Author, and Father of him, and his Being,
"when
"when he had transgressed that Law. He that made Use of this Candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his Duty; cou'd not miss to find also the Way to Reconciliation and Forgiveness, when he had fail'd of his Duty. —

"The Law is the eternal, immutable Standard of Right. And a Part of that Law is, that a Man shou'd forgive, not only his Children, but his Enemies; upon their Repentance, asking Pardon, and Amendment. And therefore, he cou'd not doubt, that the Author of this Law, and God of Patience and Consolation, who is rich in Mercy, wou'd forgive his frail Off-spring; if they acknowledg'd their Faults, disapproved the Iniquity of their Transgressions, begg'd his Pardon, and resolved in earnest for the future, to conform their Actions to this Rule, which they own'd to be Just and Right. This Way of Reconciliation, this Hope of Atonement, the Light of Nature revealed to them.

Had the Dr. only said, that we can't know from the Light of Nature, that There's more Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repents, than over ninety nine just Persons, who need no Repentance; That, if strictly taken, might, perhaps, be better disputed; but nothing, sure, can be more shocking, than to suppose the unchangeable God, whose Nature, and Property is ever to forgive, was not, at all Times, equally willing to pardon repenting Sinners; and equally willing they shou'd have the Satisfaction of knowing it.

If God's Ways are equal, and he has, at one Time as well as another, the same Goodness for the Sons of Men, in relation to their eternal Happiness; how can we suppose he left all Mankind, for so many Ages, and the greatest
greatest Part, even at present, in a most miserable State of Doubt, and Uncertainty, about the Pardon of Sin; and consequently, about the Possibility of any Man's being fav'd? If this Notion, that even the best, and wisest of Mankind, were, not only absolutely, but most absolutely ignorant of That, which of all Things, it was of the greatest Importance for Mankind to know, be not inconsistent with the divine Goodness; I am at a Loss to know what is so.

If the Design of God, in communicating any Thing of himself to Men, was their Happiness; wou'd not that Design have oblig'd him, who, at all Times, alike desires their Happiness, to have, at all Times, alike communicated it to them? If God always acts for the Good of his Creatures, what Reason can be assign'd, why he shou'd not from the Beginning, have discover'd such Things, as make for their Good; but defer the doing it till the Time of Tiberius? since the sooner This was done, the greater wou'd his Goodness appear to be: Nay, is it consistent with infinite Benevolence, to hide That for many Ages, which, he knew, was as useful at first to prevent; as afterwards it cou'd be, to put a Stop to any Thing he dislik'd.

And, indeed, without denying that God, at all Times, intended Mankind That Happiness, their Nature is capable of; we must allow, that, at all Times, he has giv'n them the Means of obtaining it, by the Rules he has prescrib'd them for their Conduct; and consequently, these Rules must have been discoverable at all Times. For, if God acts upon rational Motives, must not the same Motives, which oblig'd him to discover any Thing that's for the Good of Mankind, have oblig'd him to discover every Thing that is so; and that too, after the same plain Manner: And not do
as it were, grudgingly, little by little; here a Bit, and there a Bit; and that to one favourite Nation only, under the Vail of Types, Allegories, &c. and at last, tho' he discover'd some Things more plainly, yet it was but to a small Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this Day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

B. Another Argument the Dr brings for the undeniable Defect of the Light of Nature is, that tho' it is evident from this Light, that God ought to be worshipp'd; yet " the Manner, in which he might be acceptably worshipp'd, the wisest, and best of the Philosophers were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of."

A. Who can forbear pitying these unhappy Philosophers, indispensible oblig'd to worship God acceptably; and yet, hard Fate! unavoidably ignorant how to perform this acceptable Worship? But,

If God cou'd not will to be worshipp'd, without willing some Way, or other, of being worshipp'd; and if he left it to the Light of Nature to discover how he wou'd be worshipp'd; cou'd That be for any other Reason, but because it was acceptable to him, to be worshipp'd as that Light directed? Is it not a Contradiction, to suppose God wou'd be acceptably worshipp'd, and yet let Men, even the best, be entirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how to worship him acceptably? Does not the Light of Nature tell us, that God is a Being of infinite Wisdom and Goodness; and that all his natural Faculties are directed by these two Attributes, to serve the Purposes of Benevolence? how then can we be ignorant, what Worship, what Service, we are to render him? Can we doubt, if we endeavour to have the same Frame of Mind, and govern our Actions by the same Law of Benevolence; whether we shall obtain his Favour?
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Since to imitate him, is to pay him the highest Adoration; and to keep his Commandments shows the highest Veneration. 'Tis for such Reasons as these, that Dr Scot entirely differs from this learned Author, and says, "If we truly understand what God is, we can't but apprehend, what Worship is suitable to him, from the eternal Congruity and Propor-

"tion, that there is between Things and Things, as ob-

"vious to the Mind, as Sounds, and Colours are, to the

"Ears and Eyes.

B. Dr Clark owns, that "Obedience to the Obliga-

"tions of Nature, and Imitation of the moral Attri-

"butes of God; the wisest Philosophers easily knew, "was, undoubtedly, the most acceptable Service to God;" and what he insists upon as necessary, is only some ex-

ternal Adoration.

A. But since external Adoration can't be perform'd, but by external Signs, these must be different in different Places; because what are Marks of Respect in one Coun-

try, are Marks of Disrespect in another; or, at least, look ridiculous.

B. The Reason that the Dr gives, why the wisest Men were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God wou'd be acceptably worshipp'd with external Adoration, is, be-

cause they fell lamentably into the Practice of the most foolish Idolatry.

A. Never any before, call'd the Worshipping of Idols, the Worshipping of the true God, tho' unacceptably. But however, since You lay such Stresss on this Discourse, I shall consider what the Dr says, to prove his Paradox.

"Plato, says he, after having deliver'd almost divine Truths, concerning the Nature, and Attributes of the supreme God, weakly advises Men to worship likewise."
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"in inferior Gods; nor dar'd to condemn the worshipping "even of Statues. — And so he spoil'd the best Philo-
"phy in the World, by adding Idolatry to that Worship, "which he had wisely, and bravely before prov'd to be due "to the Creator of all Things." But cou'd he be intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of, what he had bravely, and wisely prov'd?

Fig. 179. "Socrates, he says, superstitiously offer'd a Cock to Esca-
"lapius, unless it was done in Mockery to him, looking "on Death to be his greatest Deliverance: " But since he doubted what Socrates intended, why does he instance in him, as One intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God was to be acceptably worshipp'd?

Fig. 180. "Cicero, he says, allow'd Men to continue the Idolatry "of their Ancestors, advis'd them to conform themselves "to the superstitious Religion of their Country. — In "which he fondly contradicts himself; by inexecutably com-
"plying with the Practices of those Men, whom, in many "of his Writings, he largely, and excellently proves to be "extremely foolish, upon the Account of those very Practi-
"ces." But does this prove any unavoidable Ignorance in Cicero, in relation to the Worship of the true God? But only that he, as a Philosopher, not only knew, but spoke the Truth; tho', as a Priest, he thought fit to dissemble; perhaps, he suppos'd it not prudent, without some such softning Ex-
pressions, so plainly to attack the reigning Superstition. But,

Since the Reasoning of the ancient Philosophers fully shew'd their Sense, these Reflections might have been spar'd; were it but for the sake of some modern Philosophers; whose philosophical Faith is as little reconcileable with the Creeds and Litanies, they, as Priests, solemnly repeat; and the Ar-
ticles they as solemnly subscribe; as any Thing Cicero, the

Priest,
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Priest, cou'd say in Opposition to Cicero, the Philosopher: Who describes our moral Obligations after so beautiful a Manner; and by such plain, and irresistible Arguments, shews the necessary Connexion between Virtue and Happiness, Vice and Misery; as can't but make us highly delighted with the One; and create in us a just Aversion to the Other.

The Dr had here a fair Opportunity, of shewing the Absurdity of arguing from what even the best of Men say, when 'tis not safe to talk otherwise. This had been more agreeable to his Candor, than taking an Handle from hence to expose the Light, and Law of Nature, as well as those great Men; to whom we are infinitely oblig'd, for writing under these Disadvantages so freely as they have done; especially Cicero; from whom the Fathers have borrow'd their best Arguments against Paganism. Arnobius says, Arnob. contra Gen. i. 3. that if his Works had been read, as they ought, by the Heathens, there had been no Need of Christian Writers. And in Answer to those Gentiles, who seeing the Use the Christians made of them, were for soliciting the Senate to burn, or otherwise suppress them: He says, That were not to defend the Gods, but to fear the Testimony of Truth. Which Pagan Method has not only been us'd ever since, by all who fear'd the Testimony of Truth, to the Loss of an immense Treasure of Learning; but they have improv'd it too; and been for burning of Men, as well as Books: And thereby introduc'd a Superstition more abominable than Paganism. And give me Leave to add, that

In Old Rome, as long as there was Civil Liberty, there was an entire Liberty of Conscience; and even the Priests of the National Church, provided they comply'd with its Ceremonies, had no speculative Creeds, or Articles, to subscribe,
scribe; but were entirely free to maintain what Opinions they pleas'd: Of this, Cicero is a remarkable Instance; who, in his Book de Divinatione, exposes the Superstition of his own Country-men, and ridicules those Miracles, with which the Annals of the Church-Priests were fill'd: And he, tho' a Priest himself, everywhere treats his Brethren with great Freedom; and in his Address to them, speaking of an ambitious, intriguing Priest, who would hide his Malice under the Cover of Religion, (for some such there have been in all Religions); says, "If Publius Clau-
dius is to defend his pestilent, and deadly Ministry by the sacred Name of divine Religion, when 'tis impossible for him to do it by human Equity; 'tis high Time to look for other Ceremonies, other Ministers of the immortal Gods, and other Interpreters of Religion." But to return,

The Dr having thus expos'd the Light of Nature, and, as he thinks, shewn its undeniable Defects in the Persons of these Philosophers; demands what Grounds our modern Deists have to imagine, that if they themselves had liv'd without the Light of the Gospel, they shou'd have been wiser than Plato, Socrates, and Cicero; but sure no great Wisdom is requir'd to know the Law of Nature, was it but half as plain, as the Dr, from Bishop Cumberland, has represented it; and which no well-meaning Gentile, who did by Nature the Things contain'd in the Law, cou'd be ignorant of. And,

I am surpris'd to find the Dr arguing as if that Law, "which is a most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being; is not perfect enough for his imperfect Creatures," tho' their whole Perfection consists in imitating him, and governing their Actions by the same Rule: A Rule, which, it
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It can't be deny'd, had Mankind govern'd their Actions by it, you'd have render'd them as perfect as their Nature was capable of: I shou'd be glad to know, why this Rule has lost its Virtue, and will not now render Men as acceptable to God as ever? But cou'd we suppose a God of infinite Perfection, might ordain an imperfect, or insufficient Rule, for the Actions of his Creatures; Or, which comes to the same, afford them no other Light for the Discovery of it, but what had such undeniable Defects, as made them incapable of knowing their Duty; nor was sufficient to hinder them from falling into, and continuing from Age to Age, in a deplorable State of Corruption; I wou'd ask, whether God did this knowingly, or ignorantly, not foreseeing the Consequences; to suppose the first, is to make God act out of Spite, and Hatred to his Creatures, in bringing them into Being, and making that Being a Curse to them: Or if the last, why were not these Defects supply'd as soon as discover'd? Or, were they not discover'd by infinite Wisdom till these latter Times; and then reveal'd only to a small Number, tho' all Mankind had equal Need of them? And then too, for imperfectly, that Men have ever since been in continual Quarrels, about the Meaning of most of those Things, which are suppos'd to have been added, to supply the Defects of the Law of Nature?

What human Legislator, if he found a Defect in his Laws, and thought it for the Good of his Subjects to add new Laws, wou'd not promulgate them to all his People? Or, what Parent wou'd act after so partial a Manner, as the Dr, in a self-confounding Scheme, suppos'd the common Parent of Mankind has done? And not let all his Children know as soon as possible, what was for their com-
mon Good? especially, if they were in such a forlorn, and miserable Condition, as he represents all Mankind to have been in, almost as soon as created.

The Dr very rightly observes, that "Even among Men, there's no earthly Father, but, in those Things he esteems his own Excellencies, desires, and expects to be imitated by his Children; how much more, says be, is it necessary, that God, who is infinitely far from being subject to Passions, and Variableness, as frail Men are; and has an infinitely tenderer, and heartier Concern for the Happiness of his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the Welfare of their Posterity, must desire to be imitated by his Creatures in those Perfections, which are the Foundation of his own unchangeable Happiness." How far this Invariableness in God, and his great Love for his Creatures, is consistent with that Scheme of Things, which the Dr has hitherto advanc'd, has, I think, been made appear. We will now examine what he adds, to shew that God has an infinitely more tender, and hearty Concern for the Happiness of his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the Welfare of their Posterity: What he says, is, that "both the Necessities of Men, and their natural Notions of God gave them reasonable Ground to expect, and hope for a divine Revelation, to recover Mankind out of their universally degenerate Estate, into one suitable to the original Excellence of their Nature. And that it was agreeable to the Dictates of Nature, and right Reason, to hope for such a divine Revelation; That it is agreeable to the natural Hopes and Expectations of Men, that is, of right Reason duly improv'd, to suppose God making some particular Revelation of his Will"
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"Will to Mankind. —— And that this was most suitable to the divine Attributes;" yet notwithstanding these, and a great many other fine Sayings to the same Purpose, he denies that God was oblig'd to make such a Revelation: But, with Submission, what other Reason have we to say, God is oblig'd to do any one Thing whatever; but that 'tis agreeable to the natural Notions we have of his Wisdom and Goodness, and to the Dictates of Nature and Reason, for him so to do; and if the Necessities of Mankind have always been as great, and the Goodness of God always the same; wou'd not these oblige him to have prescrib'd an immediate Remedy to the Disease; and not deferr'd it for four thousand Years together, and then apply'd it but to a few, tho', all had equal Need of it: And a Need occasion'd (as the Dr. supposes) by God himself, in not affording them any other Light, but what was insufficient to answer the End for which it was giv'n.

B. The Dr supposes, that this Revelation was not the Effect of God's Justice; for then it must needs have been giv'n in all Ages, and to all Nations; but of Mercy, and condescending Goodness.

A. Can a Being be denominated merciful, and good, who is so only to a few; but cruel, and unmerciful to the rest? And certainly, all the Arguments the Dr can urge from the Necessities of Mankind, and the abundant Goodness of God, will equally prove, that this Revelation, did it teach a New Religion, shou'd be universal; as that it shou'd be at all. But,

If Revelation was absolutely necessary to recover Man-kind, out of their universally degenerate, and corrupted State, and replace them in a State suitable to the origi-
nal Dignity, and Excellency of their Nature; and more
effectually to do this, there was instituted an Order of
Men, who were to be, as the Dr. calls them, the Instru-
ments of conveying extraordinary Assistances for this Pur-
pose; must not Revelation have had its intended Effect;
and made Christians, especially where these Instruments
of conveying extraordinary Assistances are in great Num-
bers, and in great Authority; much more perfect, and ex-
cellent, than Men cou’d possibly be in, when under Times
of unavoidable Corruption? And yet

The Dr. having taken a large Passage from Cicero,
where the Orator very rhetorically describes the great Cor-
ruptions of his Time, and assigns the Causes thereof;
makes this Remark, "That a livelier Description of the
present corrupt State of human Nature is not easily to be
met with;" which, I think, is sufficiently owning, that
human Nature at present is far from being exalted to so
high a State of Perfection, or in the least mended. And
tho’ the Dr. frequently quotes Cicero for the Support of his
Opinion, yet Cicero is far from supposing any such Defect
in Nature: For a Proof of which, I need only mention
these two short Passages. "’Tis impossible to err, as long
as we follow the Guidance of Nature. — There’s
no Man, who following the Conduct of Nature, but
may arrive at Perfection." And the Dr. himself quotes
a Passage from him, to shew that Nature has not been
wanting to declare her Mind; Multis signis natura de-
clarat quid velit. And it might be as easily shewn, he as
much mistakes the Meaning of those other Philosophers he
quotes. And indeed, how cou’d any Men, except they had
a very absurd Hypothetis to serve, assert, that any Thing cou’d
be Mens Dury, they were unavoidably ignorant of? Yet,
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The Dr. to prove this invincible Ignorance in the Gentile World, has frequent Recourse to the Authority of Laærantius, a primitive Father, without shewing that he had a greater Regard for Truth than other Fathers: And I am afraid the Dr. himself seems here not much to regard it, in maiming a Sentence of Laærantius; Maximum itaq; argumentum est, philosophiam neq; ad sapientiam tendere, neq; ipsam esse sapientiam; quod mysterium ejus, barbatantum celebratur, & pallio. Whereas the whole Sentence runs thus, Non est ergo sapientia, si ab hominum caetu abborret; quoniam, si sapientia homini data est, sine ullo discernimen omnibus data est; ut nemo sit prorsus, qui eam capere non possit. At illi [Philosophi] virtutem humano generi datam sic amplexantur, ut joli omnium publico bono frui velle videantur; tam invidi, quam si velint deligare oculos, aut effodere caeteris, ne solem videant.—Quod si natura hominis sapientiae capax est; oportuit opifices, & rusticos & mulieres, & omnes denique qui humanam formam gerunt, doceri, ut sapient; populumque ex omni lingua, & conditione, & sexu, & ætate confari. Then follows what the Dr. quoted.

This had been a full Answer to all the Dr. had taken from him; if not to all the Dr. has said on this Head; and it plainly shews, this Father here thought, that Wisdom, as it was design'd for all, was within the Reach of all; and that which the lowest of Mankind cou'd not attain, was neither Wisdom, nor Virtue; and that those Philosophers, who wou'd confine this universal Light to themselves, were as envious, as if they wou'd exclude others from the Light of the Sun. And that this alone was a sufficient Proof, that their Philosophy consisted only in the Beard, and the Cloak.

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This Father affirms nothing here, but what the wisest of Men had long before own'd, in saying, that Wisdom is easily seen of them that love her; and found of such as seek her. — She goes about seeking such as are worthy of her; she shows herself favourable to them in the Ways; and meeteth them in every Thought. And,

What impartial Man, who has compar'd the former, and present Condition of Mankind, can think the World much mended since the Times of Tiberius; or tho' ever fo well vers'd in Church-History, can, from the Conduct of Christians, find, that they are arriv'd to any higher State of Perfection, than the rest of Mankind; who are supposed to continue in their Degeneracy, and Corruption. What was the Opinion of a late eminent Philosopher, as well as Divine, is plain, by his saying, Si resurgerent Philosophi & Gentilium sapientes, & perluxrare orbe à nobis quaererent, quid profuerit humano generi religio Christiana, quoad mores & vitae probitatem? quoad pacem & bonum publicum? nos utique appellatis Barbaros per opprobrium: sed nobis barbaris quid præstatis vos Christiani?

Monseur Libnitz, a great Statesman as well as Philosopher, in comparing the Christians at present, with the Infidels of China, does not scruple to give the Preference to the latter, in relation to all moral Virtues; — and after having said of them, Dici enim non potest, quam pulchra omnia ad tranquillitatem publicam, ordinemque hominum inter se, ut quam minimum sibi ipsi incommodent, supra aliarum gentium leges apud Sinensés sint ordinata. He adds, Certa talis nostrarum rerum mibi videtur esse conditio, glifi centibus in immensus corruptelis, ut propemodum necessarum videatur missionarios Sinensium ad nos mitti, qui Theologiae naturalis usum praxinque nos doccant, quemadmodum nos illis mittimus qui Theologiam eos doccant revelatam. And

the
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the learned Huetius tells us, that "There's such a constant Agreement between the Chinese themselves, and their neighbours, as they seem to be all but one Family." And, Navarette, a Chinese Missionary, agrees with Leibnitz, and says, that "It is God's special Providence, that the Chinese did not know what is done in Christendom for if they did, there would be never a Man among them, but would spit in our Faces." And he adds, with respect to the Manners of those European Christians, who come into the East Indies, and of the Converts made by the Missionaries; "That there are few converted in those Parts, where they converse with the Europeans; and when it happens that any are converted, they prove so bad, it were better they had never been baptiz'd."

And I am afraid, 'tis much the same in relation to the West Indies.

And, Bishop Kidder says of Christians in general, "That were a wise Man to choose his Religion by the Lives of those who profess it; perhaps, Christianity would be the last Religion he would choose." And who, that has been abroad, and compar'd the Lives of Believers and Unbelievers, does not say the same Things?

And Dr. Clark himself, in the Discourse we are now considering, has sufficiently prov'd, that Man is naturally a social Creature, full of Benevolence, Pity, and Tenderness; and he says, that "Reason, which is the proper Nature of Man, can never lead Men to any Thing else than universal Love, and Benevolence; and that "Wars, Hatred, and Violence can never arise, but from extreme Corruptions." Tho' there's no Part of Natural Religion, but highly tends to improve this social, and benign Temper.
Temper; yet alas! we find, that what, in most Places, passeth for the Christian Religion, if not the chiefest Part of it, has transform'd this social, and benign Creature into One fierce, and cruel; and made him act with such Rage and Fury against those, who never did, or design'd him the least Injury; as cou'd not have enter'd into the Hearts of Men to conceive, even tho' they were in the Dr's unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption.

If People are once persuaded, that what their Priests call Schism, Herefy, Infidelity, &c. tho' held with the utmost Sincerity, are damnable Sins; it wants not much Skill to persuade them to hate those mortally, whom God, they are already persuaded, will hate to all Eternity; and that, as they regard the Preservation of the Orthodox Faith, and the saving their own Souls, and the Souls of all that are dear to them, they ought to take the most effectual Methods to root out all such damnable Opinions. 'Tis upon this common Principle, that the Inquisition is establish'd; and the Papists, to do them Justice, act up to it; tho' perhaps, even among them, there are some Lay-men, where Nature is too hard for Principles.

If once pernicious Opinions are believ'd to be contain'd in any Revelation, they will have the same Effect, as if really there. Has not the Belief of the judicial Power of the Clergy, as to the next World; and their independent Power in this World, done the same Mischief, as if they had really been contain'd in Scripture? And if they, who maintain these, and other as vile Maxims, have got Possession of Mens Minds, by ingrassing (not to mention other Arts) the Teaching the Young, as well as Instructing the Old; what less than a new Revelation can expose their Expositions, or explain away their Explanations of the present Reve-
Revelation, which have prov’d more fatal to the Happiness of Mankind, than all the Superstitions of the Pagan World. Had the Bees Speech and Reason, wou’d they, think You, from Age to Age, have continu’d to give the best Part of their Honey to such haranguing Drones, who, for the most part, employ’d their Talents, to set not only Hive against Hive; but the Bees of the same Hive against one another, for such Things as had no other Tendency, than to make the idle Drones lord it over the industrious Bees? But not to deviate,

We have no great Reason to hope, it will ever be so well with Mankind; but that there will always be too much Room for such Arguments, as the Dr. urges from the Corruptions of Mankind, for new Revelations. Have not Impostors always made ufe of this Plea? Was it not on the Carnality of the primitive Orthodox Christians, that the spiritual Montanus founded his new Gospel; which divided the Christian World for no small Time, and made the celebrated Tertullian say; That “the Law and Prophets were to be look’d on as the Infancy; and the Gospel, as it were, the Youth; but that there was no compleat Perfection to be found, but in the Instruction of the Holy Ghost, who spoke by Montanus.

And it was the ill Lives of the Professors of Christianity, as ‘tis own’d by Christian as well as Arabick Writers, which prepar’d the Way, for that Success which Mahomet met with; whose Religion, as it gain’d in a short Time, more Proselsites than any other, so it is still gaining Ground: For which Father Marracci, who has so well translated, and makes such just Reflections on the Alcoran, gives this odd Reason: Habit nimium bae Superstitio (Mahumcdana) quicquid plausible, ac probable in Christiana Religione repetitur,
ritur, quæ Naturæ legi ac lumini consentanea videntur. Mysteria illa Fidei nostræ, quæ primo aspectu, incredibilia, & impossibilia apparent; & præcipue, quæ nimis ardua humanae naturæ confertur, penitus excludit. Hinc moderni Idolorum Cultores, facilius ac promptius Saracenicam, quam Evangelicam Legem amplectuntur. But,

The Dr. is so far from solving the Difficulties attending this Scheme, that he quits it, and artfully introduces a new Scene; and tho’ he had before laid it down as a most evident Truth, that God does nothing by meer Will and Arbitrariness; yet this new Hypothesis is wholly built on it, in supposing, that in these latter Times, God intended to give some Men, without regard to their Merits, an higher Degree of Happiness than he did the rest; and to shew how consistent this is with Reason, he says,

As God was not oblig’d to make all his Creatures equal, or to make Men Angels, or to endow all Men with the same Capacities and Faculties; so he was not bound to make all Men capable of the same Degree, or the same Kind of Happiness; or to afford all Men the very same Means and Opportunities of obtaining it.

B. But how comes this to be shifting the Scene, and introducing a new Hypothesis?

A. Because his former supposes Men living and dying in a deprav’d, corrupted, degenerate, and impious State, incapable of Reformation; whereas in this all Men are allow’d to have, in general, the Means of attaining to a certain Degree of Happiness hereafter; whilst Christians alone have in particular the Means and Opportunities of gaining his higher Degree, and Kind of Happiness.

Tho’ infinite Variety of Creatures, and consequently Inequality, is necessary to shew the great Extent of the divine
vine Goodness, which plainly appears from the beautiful, and well form'd System of the World, and the due Subordination of Things, all contriv'd for the Happiness of the whole; yet sure, it does not from thence follow, that God will not either here, or hereafter, bestow on the rational Creation, all the Happiness their Nature is capable of; since that was the End why God gave it them.

Can God, who equally beholds all the Dwellers on Earth, free from Partiality and Prejudice; make some People his Favourites, without any Consideration of their Merits; and merely because they believe certain Opinions taught in that Country where they happen to be born; while Others, far the greater Number, shall, from Age to Age, want this Favour; not upon the Account of their Demerits, but because destin'd to live in Places, where God, who always acts from Motives of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, thought it best to conceal from them all such Opinions. What can more represent God as an arbitrary, and partial Being, than thus to suppose, that he vouchsafes not to afford, the greatest Part of Mankind, the Happiness, of which himself had made them capable?

Must not every One perceive, that this narrow Notion is inconsistent with the Character of a Being of unlimited Benevolence? Is not infinite Goodness always the same? How then can it, in these last Days, make such Inequality among Men? Is not this supposing Inconstancy in the divine Conduct? Is not this Notion repugnant to the natural Idea we have of the divine Goodness? As likewise to those express Texts of Scripture, which declare God is no Respec'ter of Persons; that Every One, of what Nation soever, shall be rewarded according to his Works? And that Men are accepted according
to what they have, and not according to what they have not?

If God, as the Dr. contends, will judge Men as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; must not the Judgment of the most righteous Judge, hold an exact Proportion to the Use they have made of their Reason? And if Mens State in this Life be a State of Probation, and for that Cause they are made moral Agents, capable of knowing Good from Evil, and consequently, of doing every Thing that's fit to be done; must they not be dealt with hereafter, according to the Use they have made of their moral Agency?

How can Men be sure, if God acts thus partially; that this Partiality may not even now be in Favour of other Countries, than those they live in; and of other Notions; which not flowing from the Nature and Reason of Things, we may be wholly unacquainted with? If Men may lose any Part of God's Favour for Impossibilities, or not observing such Rules as he never gave them; where shall we stop? Cou'd I think God so partial and prejudic'd, as most Sects, for their own Sakes, represent him; how cou'd I admire, love, and adore him, as I ought? Nay, how can any, who have such unworthy Notions of God, be certain, God's Prejudice and Partiality will be in their Favour? If You admit any one Imperfection in God; how can You be sure of his Veracity, Immutability, or any other Perfection whatever.

Tho' Dr. Clark contends for what terminates in this gross Partiality, as if the whole of Christianity was founded on it; yet some of our Divines, of the first Rank too, are of a different Opinion; from two of which, I'll give You the following Quotations.

"God's
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"God's Goodness and Mercy (says Mr. Wharton) were, from all Ages, equal and uniform; his Justice always impartial and universal, in excluding none from his Favour, but for Reasons common to them with all Mankind. — The Universality, and Impartiality of the divine Justice and Favour, is founded on the Excellency of the divine Nature; which can't be supposed to want That, which above all is necessary for the Government of the World; impartial Justice in the dispensing of Rewards and Punishments. — All Men were equally created by God; and if we respect That alone, all have an equal Title to his Favour. — Otherwise we could not but conceive Injustice in God; nor were it possible to reconcile such a Partiality with his infinite Excellency. The Reason why God is no Respec-tor of Persons, is said to be, because There is no Iniquity with the Lord. All reasonable Preference of one Person to another, must be founded on some just Cause; otherwise it would be trifling, and fond; nay, even unjust, and foolish. — Far be it from us, to imagine any such Imperfections in God; in him there is no Variableness, or Shadow of Change. — He ever proceeds upon fixed, and immovable Principles; which equally serve for all Actions and Causes. — God has fix'd most impartial Laws of Government; which universally affect all the Members of Mankind. — It is so pleasing a Delusion, to fancy themselves dear to God in an extraordinary Manner, and for unaccountable Reasons; that 'tis no Wonder many have been tempted to entertain such a charming Error. — This seduced the Jews. — This Prejudice has corrupted great Numbers of Christians. — Is God the God of the Jews?
and Christians only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Are not his Attributes always unalterable; and the Influence of these equally deriv'd down to all his Creatures?

That celebrated Preacher, Dr. Ibbott, affirms, that 'Tis not our being of any Nation, or any Sect, Members of any particular Church, or Society; that will intitle us to God's Favour; but our working the Work of God, living up to that Light and Knowledge which He has afforded us; and being most punctual, and exact in the Discharge of those moral Duties, which all Mankind, who have any true Notions of God and Religion, have ever thought themselves oblig'd to. — Again, Wherever Men fear God, and love one another, they will be accepted without any Regard to their Country, or Nation; their Tribe, or Family; for This is what God would bring all People to, from the Rising of the Sun unto the going down thereof. This is that inward Temper of Mind, and that outward Practice of Life, which he requires; and which, wherever he meets it, will find Acceptance with Him.

The contrary is a Notion, which lays a Foundation for everlasting Persecution; for if Men flatter themselves, that they, upon the Account of their particular Systems, are the Favourites of Heaven; and that Others shall want, even to Eternity, many Degrees of their Happiness; will not That oblige them, as they love their Children, Families, Friends, Neighbours, and Relations; to use any Means, come into any persecuting Measures, to prevent such Opinions from spreading, as they imagine, would deprive them of that Degree of Happiness, which otherwise they might ever enjoy: And is it not chiefly owing to this Absurdity, that even the most
most moderate of the different Sects, are far from treating one another with that Benevolence, which the common Ties of Humanity require?

Did Men believe, that all, who were equally sincere, were equally acceptable to God; there could be no Pretence for the least Partiality, much less for Persecution, either Positive, or Negative: Nor could any Man love another the less, for the widest Difference in Opinions: And then of Course, Mens Indignation would be wholly bent against Immorality, discoverable by the Light of Nature; which, now alas! is but too often protected by Zeal for mere Speculations.

This Principle, and this alone, would cause universal Love, and Benevolence, among the whole Race of Mankind; and did it prevail, must soon produce a new, and glorious Face of Things; or, in the Scripture Phrase, a new Heaven, and a new Earth; and would free Men from that miserable Perplexity, in which the Fear of mistaking in speculative Matters involves them.

What Assurance, upon any other Ground, can even the Generality of Christians have, that they do not err most dangerously; when they consider what Divisions there have been, from the Beginning, among Christians about such Points? And that the Guides of their own Churches, even the most able, tho' they agree in saying, Their Fundamentals are plain; have not always the same Set of Fundamentals; and when they have, widely differ in explaining them: Can they, I say, who consider This, be certain, that it is not the Fear of Loss of Preferment, or some other political Reasons, that keep up any Sort of verbal Agreement among them, even in Things own'd to be of the highest Consequence; and which,
which, as such, are plac’d in their Creeds and Articles? Consider with yourself, what Comfort, what Satisfaction, it must give a Man, especially, on his Death-bed; to be certain, he is not accountable for any Errors in Opinion; if he has, according as his Circumstances permit, done his best to discover the Will of God.

Dr. Prideaux says, "The main Arguments Mahomet made use of, to delude Men into the Imposture, were his Promises, and his Threats; being Those which easily work on the Affections of the Vulgar." If the Bulk of Mankind are so easily deluded by Threats and Promises, when join’d to Opinions as absurd as Those of Mahomet; can there be any other Way to avoid their being deluded in Proportion to the Greatness of those Promises and Threats; but by annexing them, not to any Set of Opinions, but to Sincerity and Insincerity? For here, the only Effect they can have, is to make Men judge without Prejudice, and Partiality.

Prelav, p. 78. The present Bishop of Sarum says, "God is just, equal, and good; and as sure as he is, so he can’t put the Salvation and Happiness of any Man, upon what he has not put it in the Power of any Man on Earth to be entirely satisfy’d of." And much less, say. I, can a just, equal, and good God put the Salvation, or any Part of the Happiness of the greatest Part of Mankind, upon that, of which, instead of being entirely satisfy’d, they are entirely ignorant. Is it possible, a mistaken Christian can have a Title to God’s Favour, and a Man of another Religion not have the same Title; when that Sincerity, on which the Title depends, is common to them both?

"If the Favour of God, as the Bishop says, follows Sincerity, as such; and equally follows every Degree of Sin-
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"Sincerity;" must not Men of all Religions whatever, if equally sincere, have the same Title to be equally favour'd by God? Who is the only infallible Judge of their Sincerity; in the Use of those Talents, whether great, or small; he has endow'd them with. And,

Mr. Chillingworth was so far from thinking involuntaryErrors Crimes, that he thought it criminal to ask Pardon for them; and says, "That would be to impute to "God the strange Tyranny of requiring Bricks, where "he has giv'n no Straw; of expecting to gather, where "he has not sowed; to reap, where he sowed not; of "being offended with us for not doing, what he knew "we could not do." And,

The Romanists themselves, tho' they own the common People can have but an imperfect Knowledge, of what their infallible Church requires; yet say, that "a Dispo- "sition to receive, and an Endeavour to understand what "it teaches, is sufficient." And shall not the Protestants allow as much to such a Disposition, in relation to the Will of God; as the Papists do, to the Will of Man? But since there are some, to whom these Notions about Sincerity, will appear shocking; for their sakes, I will quote a Divine, whom they have in a Manner idoliz'd: I mean the famous Mr. Lefley, who says, "In the Be- "ginnings God created Man, and left him in Hands "of his own Counsel. (Eccles. 15. 14.) He set Life and "Death, Blessing and Cursing for him to choose; and "God will bless, or curse him, according to what he has "set before him; whether by Revelation, or his own Na- "tural Reason only: And who is Judge of this but God, "who always knows the Sincerity of any Man's Intentions, "and
“and what Endeavours he has us'd towards the right In-
“forming his Judgment?

In a Word, this is so evident a Truth, that there are
none, but who, with the Bishop of London, say, “Chri-
“stianity requires no further Favour, than a fair, and
“impartial Inquiry into the Grounds, and Doctrines of
“it’; even while they are designing the further Favours
of Fines, Pillories, and Imprisonment, &c. But to return

to the Dr,

I wou’d be glad to know, whether the greater Degree of
Happiness, from which Dr. Clark wou’d exclude the rest of
Mankind; belongs to all those innumerable Sects, that go
under the Name of Christians; or to one Sect, by Virtue of
its peculiar Fundamentals; or else to all Christians, who,
tho’ ever so much mistaken, sincerely endeavour to find out
the Will of God? If the Dr. says the latter, he can’t think
this Favour depends on any Set of Notions, but on Sincere-
ity; and consequently, must equally belong to all that are
equally sincere: But allowing that Christians are to be re-
warded above others, equally sincere; yet if they are like-
wise subject to be punish’d above others for their Mistakes,
even about such abstruse Notions, as divide the most emi-
nent Men of the same most eminent Church; such as Dr.
Waterland, and Dr. Clark; nay, Dr. Clark, in some Editions
of his Book, and himself in other Editions; where then, is
the great Advantage of the Dr’s Hypothecis? But,

If Christians are to be punish’d hereafter, for not ob-
serving such Things, as the Happiness of Mankind in
general does not depend on; God, certainly, is far from
being partial in their Favour; if not, where is the Dis-
ference?
B. But does not the Dr. raise an Argument, from Mens different Capacities and Abilities in this Life, for their having different Degrees of Happiness hereafter?

A. Tho' Men here have different Capacities, yet if That depends on bodily Organs; all Souls may in Heaven have equal Capacities: But even this Supposition will not serve his Purpose, except the wisest of the Philosophers had not Abilities equal to the meanest Christian; and so (allowing a Proportion between Happiness and Abilities) were naturally incapable of the same Degree, or Kind of Happiness.

But,

The Dr. himself seems conscious of the Weakness, even of this new Hypothecis; since he, after he had us'd it, to get rid of a troublesome Objection; strait quits it in saying, 'That as no Man ever deny'd, but that the Benefit of Christ's Death extended backward, to those who liv'd before his Appearance in the World; so no One can prove, "but the same Benefit may extend itself forward to those, "who never heard of his Appearance; tho' they liv'd after "it." If both these, tho' knowing nothing of Christ, or his Death, reap the Benefit of his Death; what more can the most perfect Believer expect? So that even on this Supposition, the Dr. must have own'd, that all Men, living up to that Light God has giv'n them, are upon a Level, in relation to their future Happiness.

And indeed, if Sinners, since the Coming of Christ are not to be fav'd without Repentance and Amendment; and Sinners, at all Times, were to be fav'd on these Terms, or else cou'd not be fav'd at all; must not Repentance and Amendment, which suppose a Knowledge of what was to be repented of, and amended; put all Mankind, at all Times, upon a Level, with relation to their future Happiness? Can any Thing be more evident, than that, if doing Evil is the only
only Foundation of God's Displeasure; ceasing to do Evil, and doing the contrary, must take away that Displeasure: As long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue the proper Objects of God's Resentment; but when they, forsaking their Sins, act a Part suitable to their rational Nature, they of Course become the proper Objects of his Approbation: And This, sure, can't be deny'd, except You suppose, Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but Sinners to Repentance; propos'd some other Way of reconciling them to God, than by persuading them to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance; or, in other Words, by obliging them to live up to the eternal, and universal Law of Righteousness.

Tho' the Dr. says no more than our Articles affirm, viz. that "the Oblation of Christ once made, is that perfect Redemption, Propitiation, and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World, both Original, and Actual;" yet I wish the Dr. had been more explicit, and told us, what Benefit those who never heard of Christ's Appearance, cou'd gain by his Death.

B. The Dr. says, that "Christ dy'd, to shew God's irreconcileable Hatred to Sin; and to vindicate the Honour of his Laws.

A. These Reasons, sure, cou'd never influence those, who never heard of Christ; or, if they had, perhaps, would have been so perversé, as not to imagine, that pardoning the guilty, and punishing the innocent; cou'd either shew irreconcileable Enmity to Guilt, or Love for Innocence; and perhaps, govern'd by Prejudices, might think very odly of a King, who, tho' he freely pardon'd his repenting Rebels; yet shou'd cause his most loyal, and only Son to be put to Death, to shew his Hatred to Rebellion; and
and to vindicate the Honour of those Laws, which forbid putting an innocent Person to Death; or any Person to be any Way instrumental to his own Death; much more to sacrifice himself. Could these Philosophers, who did not imagine any Virtue in sacrificing of Beasts, to wash away the Sins of Men; easily conceive, a human Sacrifice, which they believed human Nature abhor'd, to be an Expiation for Sins? Or, that Sins freely pardon'd, could want any Expiation? Or, that all was mere Mercy, and pure Forgiveness, after a full Equivalent paid, and adequate Satisfaction given?

B. This, indeed, seems to me as great a Mystery, as that the same God should receive Satisfaction from, and give Satisfaction to the same God; and that the same God, who thus receives, and gives Satisfaction, should neither give, or receive any Satisfaction; since the Holy Ghost, the same God with God the Father, and God the Son, neither gives, or receives any Satisfaction.

A. Tho' I have omitted several Things, which well deserve to be criticized; yet, I think, I have said enough to shew the Inconsistency of the Dr's Scheme; and the Weakness of all those Arguments, by which he attempts to destroy the All-sufficiency, absolute Perfection, Plainness, and Perspicuity of the Law of Nature; which he had before so fully demonstrated: Who could expect, after we had been told, that as God governs all his own Actions by the eternal Rule of Reason; so all his rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in all theirs, by the same eternal Rule: A Rule too, own'd to be so plain, that the Reason of all Men everywhere naturally, and necessarily assents to it: Who, I say, after these, and a Number of other such Expressions, could imagine, that all this
Hypothesis of their Adversaries, may, by equally receding from those arbitrary Things they have brought into Religion, come to an happy Agreement.

For my part, I think, there's none who wish well to Mankind, but must likewise wish this Hypothesis to be true; and can there be a greater Proof of its Truth, than that it is, in all its Parts, so exactly calculated for the Good of Mankind, that either to add to, or take from it, will be to their manifest Prejudice. And,

If, as Bishop Chandler remarks, "They are Deceivers, and true Enemies to Mankind, who do not teach a Religion most worthy of God, most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual;" what need we run to his Jewish Rabbies, or any other Rabbies, to discover this true Religion? If 'tis by this Test, that our Reason must judge of the Truth of all Religion; are not they the best Friends to Mankind, who teach such a Religion, without the least Mixture of those arbitrary Things, that have caus'd such fatal Contentions among Christians? And which, at the best, serve only to divert them from attending to a Religion most worthy of God, most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual; and withal, is a Religion, as I hope, is here fully prov'd, founded upon such demonstrable Principles, as are obvious to the meanest Capacity; and most effectually prevents the Growth, both of Scepticism and Enthusiasm.

I entirely agree with this Right Reverend Father, that "Christianity in itself, stripp'd of the Additions that Policy, Mistake, and the Circumstances of Time, have made to it, is a most holy Religion;" but I may add,
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that by Reason of these Additions, it is become, in most Places, a most unholy Religion. And can we hope to get rid of these Additions, but by bringing them to the Bishop's own Text? I might here ask him, Who are they, that have brought in, and still defend these Additions to Christianity; which, as all fair, and candid Writers own, have giv'n great Advantages to its Adversaries?

**What** good Christian is not ready to join with the excellent Dr. Sykes, in wishing, "That Christians wouldn't not vend under the Name of Evangelical Truths, the absurd, and contradictory Schemes of ignorant, or wicked Men? That they would part with the Load of Rubbish, which makes thinking Men sink under the Weight, and gives too great a Handle to Infidelity?" "The Hands of Friends to Christianity, says he, have been much embarrassed, thro' Fear of speaking against local Truths; and its Adversaries have so successfully attack'd those Weaknesses, that Christianity itself has been deem'd indefensible; when, in Reality, the Follies of Christians alone have been so." If this be true, have I not shown some Resolution, in daring to attack the darling Weaknesses, and Follies of false Christians; in proving that true Christianity is so far from being indefensible, that it carries its own Evidences with it; or in other Words, all its Doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise, and good God; as being most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government; and most beneficial to every Individual; or, in one Word, free from all Priest-craft.

B. There's one Objection which will always stick, You will be represented as an Affecter of Novelty; and that
that 'tis Pride and Vain-glory, which makes You go out of the common Road.

A. That is a Reflection All must expect, who endeavour to reform any prevailing Abuses: They little understand human Nature, who do not see, that Novelty, in this Case, can only serve to make a Man despis'd by the Majority, for his Ignorance; in not being able to discover that Truth, which they, at first Sight, clearly perceive; as well as hated by them, for propagating false Doctrine; and inhumanly treated for it, if it clashes (and where does not Reformation clash) with the Interest of a certain Set of Men, who have two Thirds of Mankind, 

viz. the Bigots and Immoral, entirely at their Devotion. But,

I am so far from being a Novelist, that All, except where they disagree with themselves, must agree with me: Are not All of my Sentiments, who own, that their Revelation contains all Things worthy of having God for its Author? For that supposes, that Reason, antecedently to Revelation, can tell them what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author: And do not all recede from Revelation, or, which is the same, recede from the plain, obvious, grammatical Construction of its Words, whenever That, in the least Point, recedes from the Religion of Nature and Reason? Which being, as Dr. Prideaux owns, wrote in the Hearts of every One of us from the Creation; is "the Touchstone of all Religion; and that, "if the Gospel varies from it in any Particular, or "in the minutest Circumstance is contrary to its Right- "eousness; that is strong enough to destroy the whole "Caufe; and make all Things else that can be said for "its Support, totally ineffectual." Which supposes, we can't
can't judge of the Truth of any Revelation, till we apply to it the Touchstone of all Religion; and see whether it agrees with that in all Particulars: And do not all, without regard to the plain Meaning of the Words, in interpreting the Precepts of the Gospel (which are, for the most Part, deliver'd in general, undetermin'd, and very often, hyperbolical Terms;) so explain, limit, and restrain these Precepts, as to make them agreeable to the Touchstone of all Religion, the Nature, and Reason of Things; for Fear, that otherwise they might depreciate Morality: And in this Case, they, as 'tis allow'd, are the best Interpreters, who most recede from the killing Letter: And is not this, in Effect, saying with the present Bishop of Bangor, "That the Gos-
pel is a Republication of the Law of Nature; and its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which is as old as the Creation. And, "'Tis as reasonable to sup-
pose, that three Angles of a Triangle should be equal to two right Ones in one Age, and unequal in another; as to suppose, that the Duties of Religion should differ in one Age, from what they were in another; the Hab-
tudes, and Relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

The Principles I maintain are so evident, that they who are introducing Things in Opposition to them, yet must own their Force. Dare any say, that God is an arbitrary Being, and his Laws not founded on the eternal Reason of Things; even while they are contending for his acting arbitrarily, and giving us such Laws as are founded on mere Will and Pleasure? Will any maintain, that our reasoning Faculties were not giv'n us, to distinguish between Good and Evil, Religion and Superstition? Or that they will not answer the End for which they were giv'n?
WILL any affirm, that the Nature of God is not eternally the same? Or that the Nature of Man is chang'd? Or that the Relations God and Man stand in to one another, are not always the same; nay, even while they are making Alterations in these Relations, by supposing new Laws, and new Duties?

If All own, that God, at no Time, cou'd have any Motive to give Laws to Mankind, but for their Good; and that he is, at all Times, equally good, and, at all Times, acts upon the same Motives; must they not own with me, except they are inconsistent with themselves, that his Laws, at all Times, must be the same? And that the Good of Mankind is the Test, the Criterion, or the internal Evidence, by which we are to judge of all his Laws? But,

If, after all, I am still criminal, it must be in not owning, that God created the greatest Part of Mankind to be damn'd; or, which is the same, made such Things necessary to their Salvation, as they were incapable of knowing?

And in my Asserting, that God is a Rewarder of those, who diligently seek him; tho' they do not seek him under the Direction of this, or that Set of Men; who, provided they can make themselves necessary here, care not who they damn hereafter. And thus,

In believing with St. Peter, that God is no Respecker of Persons; but in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him. And with St. Paul, that the Gentiles do by Nature the Things contained in the Law;

And that God will render to every Man (whether Believer, or Unbeliever;) according to his Deeds; And that the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, — Teaching us, — we shou'd live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World, (which takes in the whole of our Duty) has appear'd to all Men, and at all Times.
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In believing with our Saviour, that the Whole need Mat. 12, not a Physician; and that the Doctrine he taught John 7, 17; itself to be the Will of God; and that he did not speak of himself; and in believing the Description, that God himself gives of the New Covenant, I will put my Laws into their Minds, and write them in their Hearts: — They shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, —— They shall all know me from the least to the greatest.

In a Word, All are forc'd to own these Sentiments I contend for, except the Anthropomorphites; they, indeed, said, that Fallible Reason must give Place to infallible Revelation; or in Dr. Waterland's Words, "That to advance "Natural Light, that is, Pagan Darkness, in Opposition to "Scripture Evidence, is setting up human Conjectures "above divine Truths." And that, since the Scripture so frequently imputes human Parts, and Passions to God, we ought not to doubt of it; only because we can't reconcile it with that Philosophy, with which the Bulk of Mankind, for whom the Scripture was chiefly wrote, are entirely ignorant of.

In our next Conference (it being high Time to put an End to this) I shall shew You, that all Mankind, Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, &c. agree, in Owning the Sufficiency of the Law of Nature, to make Men acceptable to God; and that the Primitive Christians believ'd, there was an exact Agreement between Natural and Reveall'd Religion; and that the Excellency of the Latter, did consist in being a Republication of the Former.

For the present, take these few Authorities: "If, says the renowned Origen, "we admit the Judgment of God to be just, we must acknowledge, that there can be no Ground for the Punishment of Sinners, unless the com-

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Mon Conceptions of all Men, are sufficient to give them a sound Understanding in the Duties of Morality. And, therefore, it is not to be thought strange, that those Things which God has taught us by the Prophets, and by our Saviour, were implanted by him in the Minds of all Men, that so every Man, having had the Intention, and Meaning of the Law written in his own Heart, should be left without Excuse before the Divine Tribunal.

Laetusnus, the most eloquent of the Fathers, seems ravished with the Description Cicero gives of the Law of Nature; and therefore, chooses to express his own Sense of it, in the Words of that Philosopher. "The Law of God, says he, is necessary to be observ’d, That will lead us into the Way of Happiness; that holy and heavenly Law, I mean, which Marcus Tullius has, as it were, divinely describ’d in his third Book de Republica; and whose Words, I will, therefore, subjoin. Right Reason is a Law of Truth, consonant to Nature, implanted in all Men, uniform and eternal.—This Law neither needs to be propos’d, nor can it ever be, either in whole, or part, repeal’d; neither Senate, nor People, can discharge us from the Obligation of it; we need not look abroad for an Expositor, to make us understand it. It is not one Law at Rome, another at Athens; one at this Time, another hereafter; but one, and the same immutable Law continues, and extends itself to all Times and Nations; and one God is the common Lord, and Governor of all Things. He it is, that has fram’d, propounded, and establish’d this Law; and whosoever obeys not him, abandons even himself, renounces his own Nature; and in so doing, suffers actually in himself the greatest Punishment, tho’ he escapes all Things else, which are deem’d so..."
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St. Austin says, "The Reason why God has given us a written Law, is not because his Law was not already written in our Hearts; but because Men letting out their Appetites after Things abroad, became Strangers to themselves; and therefore, we have been summon'd, and call'd upon by him, who is everywhere present, to return into ourselves: For what is that the outward written Law calls for, unto those who have forsaken the Law written in their Hearts; but Return, O ye Transgressors, to your own Hearts?"

I shall, likewise, shew You, that the Law of Liberty, that perfect Law of Liberty, which we are oblig'd to main- tain in all our Words and Actions, as the Law we are to be judged by; does not consist in a Freedom from Things of a moral Nature, for that would be perfect Slavery; but from all those Things as are not of such a Nature: And that 'tis evident from the Reasoning, which runs thro' all the Epistles, that the placing Religion in any indifferent Things, is inconsistent with the Nature of Christianity; 'tis introducing Judaism, or what (as Christians have found to their Cost) is still more prejudicial.

And therefore, instead of transcribing the best Part of the Epistles, I shall only mention a Text, or two: The Apostle of the Gentiles not only says, Stand fast in the Liberty, where- with Christ hath made You free; but declares, Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty; and consequently, that they who impose any indifferent Things, as Part of Religion, sin against our Christian Liberty; and act by another Spirit than that of the Lord: And I am afraid, that in this, as well as in many other Cases, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Church, in most Places, have been very opposite. And lest we should mistake in this important Point, the Apostle like--
likewise tells us, not only in what Things the Kingdom of
God does, but in what Things it does not consist. The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost; for be that in these Things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approvd of Man: Let us, therefore, follow after the Things which make for Peace, and Things wherewith we may edify one another. If these are the only Things, by which we can serve Christ, and which will make us acceptable to God, and approvd of Men; can such Things, as have no Tendency to promote Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost, make us serviceable to Christ, or acceptable either to God, or Man?

These Words of the Apostle, tho' they need no Paraphrase, yet I shall mention what Calvin says on this Place, Nam fieri non potest, ubi quispiam Deo acceptus est ac hominibus probatus, quin perfetis in ipso vigeat ac floreat regnum Dei. Qui tranquilla placidaq; Conscientia per justitiam servit Christo, tam hominibus quam Deo se approbat. Ubi ergo est justitia, & pax, & gaudium spirituale, illic regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est absolutum. And with him Bucer, Musculus, and Others of our first Reformers, agree. And if the Kingdom of God, which has these Things, is absolutely perfect, omnibus suis numeris absolutum; it can only be the Kingdom of Satan, which requires Things of a different Nature: And if 'tis in these Things only we can serve Christ, Others can't be introduc'd, but for the Service of Antichrist.

However, I shall, at present, content myself with saying, There are but two Ways for any Thing to oblige; either from the Reason of the Thing, or else from a positive Command: Now, if there are no such Things, as are commanded to be observ'd at all Times, and by all
all People; and no Commands can oblige those, to whom they were not giv'n; we have no Way left, to know what Things oblige perpetually, but from their Nature, which will sufficiently distinguish them from those, which (in so miscellaneous a Book as the Bible, taking in such a vast Period of Time) might be given upon certain Occasions, and particular Reasons; in which we are no other Ways concern'd, than like them, to act according as the Circumstances we are in require. Without this, Christians would have no certain Rule, to know what Precepts oblige perpetually; all being alike commanded in Scripture, without making any Difference; no Precepts being said to bind all Mankind, or to bind any for ever, except those relating to the Jewish Economy; which, in an hundred Places, we are told, are to last for ever.

To comprise the Matter in few Words, what I have been endeavouring to prove, is,

First, That there are Things, which, by their internal Excellency, shew themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise, and good God.

Secondly, There are Things, which have no Worth in themselves; yet because those that have, can't many Times be perform'd without them, these are to be consider'd as Means to an End; and being of a mutable Nature, are left to human Discretion, to be vary'd as best suits those Ends; for whose sake alone they are instituted.

Thirdly, That there are some Things so indifferent, as not to be consider'd either as Means, or Ends; and to place any Part of Religion in the Observance of These, is highly superstitious. And I may venture to say, He that carries these Distinctions in his Mind, will have a truer Notion of Religion, than if he had read all the Schoolmen, Fathers, and Councils.
B. I own, 'tis Time to give You some Respite, and to thank You for a Favour, which can't be too much acknowledg'd; in thus freely communicating your Thoughts on this important Subject; and doing it after such a Manner, as cannot, were this Conference to be publish'd, offend Persons, tho' of the greatest Gravity, who have the Interest of Truth at Heart.

A. Before we part, I must remind You of the Occasion of this Conference; for tho' You plainly saw, that God never intended Mankind shou'd be without Religion; or cou'd ordain an imperfect Religion; and therefore, did not see how to avoid concluding, there must have been, from the Beginning, a Religion most perfect, which Mankind, at all Times, were capable of knowing; yet You were at a Loss, how to make out Christianity to be this perfect, this original Religion; how far I have gone in removing this Difficulty, You best know: All I can say, is, I am willing, whenever You please, to resume the Conference; and begging Leave to repeat what I mention'd at first, am ready to give up my Hypothesis, if You can name One attended with fewer Difficulties; and likewise, to assure You, that if I have advanc'd any Notion, which does not naturally, and necessarily shew itself to be the Will of God; by tending to promote his Honour, and the Good of Men; I here entirely renounce it: And by not persisting to defend Error, give this uncommon Mark of an ingenuous Disposition. Errare possum, Haereticus esse nolo.

FINIS.