

J. Webb of Westgate-hoys Bath



SERMONS

PREACH'D

Upon several Occasions.

By His Grace JOHN Lord
Arch-Bishop of Canterbury.

The First Volume.

The Eighth Edition Corrected.

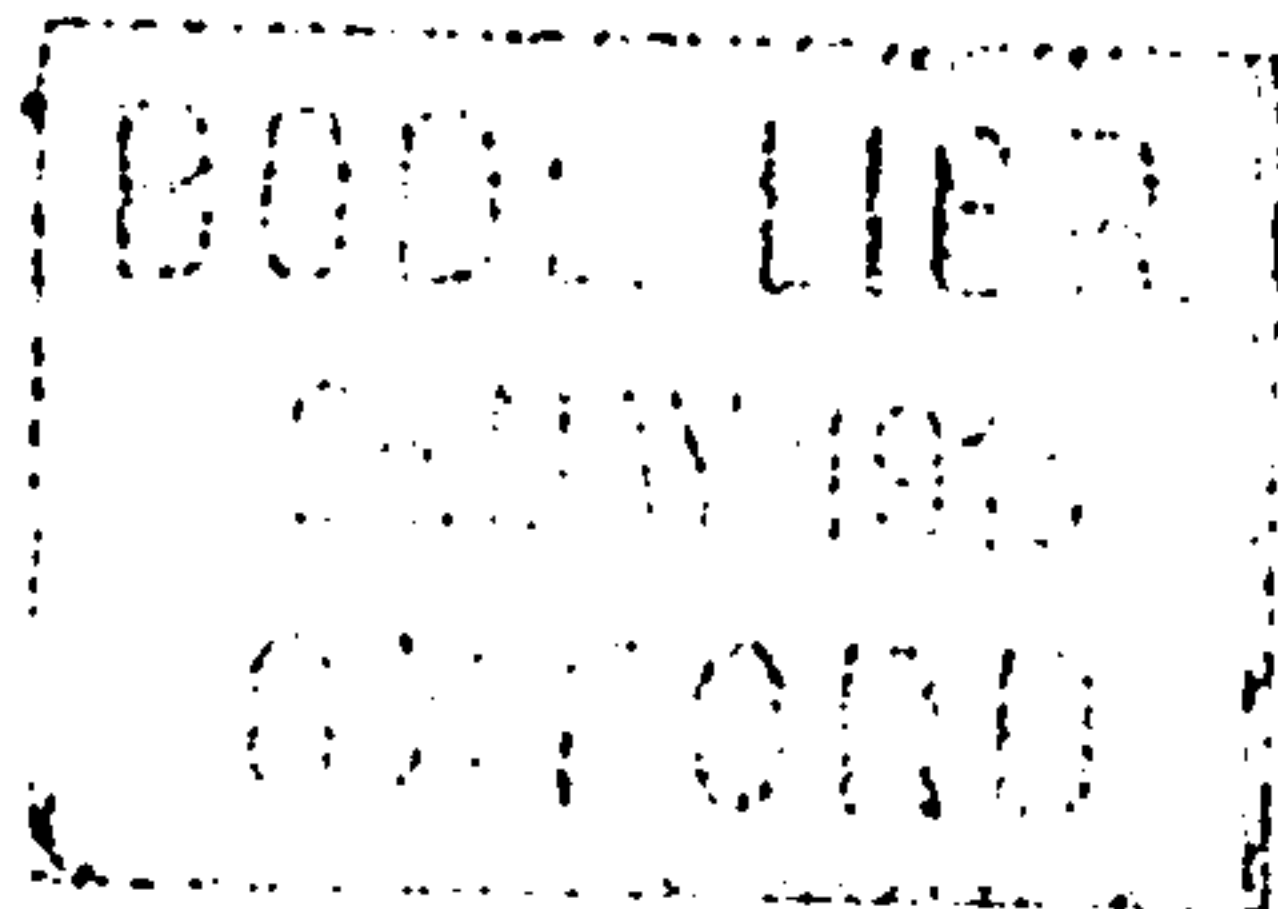
LONDON,

Printed for Brabazon Aylmer, at the Three Pigeons
against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill; and William
Rogers, at the Sun against St. Dunstons Church in
Fleet-street. 1694.

To the Worshipfull the Ma-
sters of the Bench, and
the rest of the Members of
the Honourable Society of
Lincolns-Inn.

Gentlemen.

When I resolv'd to publish
these Sermons, there
could be no dispute to whom I
should dedicate them. They do
of right belong to you, being most
of them first preach'd among you ;
besides my great obligation to
you for your constant respects to
me, both in the favourable ac-
ceptance and in the generous en-



The Epistle Dedicatory.

couragement of my labours, ever since I had the honour and happiness to be related to you. In a thankfull acknowledgment whereof I humbly present this small part of them to you, hoping that by the blessing of God they may be of some use for the promoting of true piety and vertue, which is the sincere wish and aim of

Your most obliged

and faithfull Servant,

John Cant.

The Preface.

I Shall neither trouble the Reader, nor my self, with any apology for the publishing of these Sermons. For if they be in any measure truly serviceable to the end for which they are design'd, to establish men in the Principles of Religion and to recommend to them the practice of it with any considerable advantage, I do not see what Apology is necessary, and if they be not so, I am sure none can be sufficient. However if there need any, the common heads of excuse in these cases are very well known; and I hope I have an equal right to them with other men.

I shall chuse rather in this Preface, to give a short account of the following Discourses; and as briefly as I can to vindicate a single passage in the first of them from the Exceptions of a Gentleman who hath been pleas'd to honour it so far as to write a whole Book against it.

The Design of these Discourses is four-fold.

The Preface.

First, To shew the unreasonableness of Atheism, and of scoffing at Religion; which I am sorry is so necessary to be done in this Age. This I have endeavour'd in the two first of these Discourses.

Secondly, To recommend Religion to men from the great and manifold advantages which it brings both to publick Society and to particular persons. And this is the argument of the third and fourth.

Thirdly, To represent the excellency, more particularly, of the Christian Religion; and to vindicate the practise of it from the suspicion of those grievous troubles and difficulties which many imagine it to be attended withall. And this is the subject of the fifth and sixth.

Fourthly, To perswade men to the practise of this holy Religion, from the great obligation which the profession of Christianity lays upon men to that purpose; and more particularly, from the glorious rewards of another life; which is the design of the two last Discourses.

Having given this short account of the following Discourses, I crave leave of the Reader to detain him a little longer, whilst I vindicate a passage in the first of these Sermons, from the assaults of a whole Book purposely writ against it. The Title of the
Book

The Preface.

Book is Faith, vindicated from the possibility of Falshood. The Author Mr. J. S. the famous Author of Sure footing. He hath indeed in this last Book of his, to my great amazement, quitted that glorious Title. Not that I dare assume to my self to have put him out of conceit with it, by having convinc'd him of the phantasticalness of it. No, I despair to convince that man of any thing, who after so fair an admonition does still persist to maintain, * that first and self-evident Principles not onely may, but are fit to be demonstrated; and † that those ridiculous identical Propositions, that Faith is Faith, and a Rule is a Rule, are first Principles in this Controversie of the Rule of Faith, without which nothing can be solidly concluded either about Rule or Faith. But there was another reason for his quitting of that Title, and a prudent one indeed: He had forsaken the defence of Sure footing, and then it became convenient to lay aside that Title, for fear of putting people any more in mind of that Book.

I expected indeed after his Letter of Thanks, in which he * tells us, he intended to throw aside the rubbish of my Book, that in his Answer he might the better lay open the Fabrick of my Discourse, and have no-
thing

The Preface.

thing there to doe, but to speak to solid Points; I say, after this, I expected a full Answer to the solid Points (as he is pleased to call them) of my Book; and that, (according to his excellent method of removing the rubbish, in order to the pulling down of a building) the Fabrick of my Book would long since have been demolish'd and laid even with the ground. But especially, when in the conclusion of that most civil and obliging Letter, he threatn'd never to leave following on his blow, till he had either brought Dr. Still. and me to lay Principles that would bear the test, or it was made evident to all the world that we had none: I began (as I had reason) to be in a terrible fear of him, and to look upon my self as a dead man. And indeed who can think himself so considerable as not to dread this mighty man of Demonstration, this Prince of Controvertists, this great Lord and Possessor of First Principles? But I perceive that great minds are mercifull, and do sometimes content themselves to threaten when they could destroy.

For instead of returning a full Answer to my Book, he (according to their new mode of confuting Books) manfully falls a nibbling at one single passage in it, pag. 118. wherein he makes me to say (for I say no such thing)

The Preface.

thing) that the Rule of Christian Faith, and consequently Faith it self, is possible to be false, Nay in his Letter of Thanks, * he says it is an avow'd Position, in that^{* P. 13.} place, that Faith is possible to be false. And to give the more countenance to this calumny, he chargeth the same Position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of Faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental Point, the Tenet of a Deity, upon the forementioned Sermon. But because he knew in his conscience, that I had avow'd no such Position, he durst not cite the words either of my Book or Sermon lest the Reader should have discover'd the notorious falshood and groundlesness of this Calumny: Nay he durst not so much as refer to any particular place in my Sermon, where such a passage might be found. And yet this is the Man that has the face to charge others with false citations, to which charge, before I have done, I shall say something, which (what effect soever it may have upon him) would make any other man sufficiently asham'd.

But yet I must acknowledge, that in this Position which he fastens upon me, he honours me with excellent company, my Lord Faulkland, Mr. Chillingworth, and Dr. Stillingfleet; Persons of that admirable strength

The Preface.

strength and clearness in their Writings, that Mr. S. when he reflects upon his own style and way of reasoning, may blush to acknowledge that ever he has read them. And as to this Position which he charges them with, I do not know (nor have the least reason upon Mr. S's word to believe), any such thing is maintained by them.

As for my self, whom I am now onely concern'd, to vindicate, I shall set down the two Passages to which I suppose he refers.

*In my Sermon, I endeavour (among other things) to shew the unreasonableness of Atheism upon this account: Because it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. To make this good, I discourse thus: Aristotle hath long since observed, how unreasonable it is to expect the same kind of Proof for every thing, which we have for some things. Mathematical things being of an abstracted nature, are onely capable of clear Demonstration. But Conclusions in Natural Philosophy, are to be prov'd by a sufficient Induction of experiments; things of a Moral nature, by Moral Arguments, and Matters of Fact by credible Testimony. And though none of these be strict Demonstration, yet have we an undoubted
assu-*

The Preface.

assurance of them, when they are prov'd by the best Arguments that the nature and quality of the thing will bear. None can demonstrate to me, that there is such an Island in America as Jamaica; yet upon the Testimony of credible persons, and Authours who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as from doubting of the clearest Mathematical Demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm Principle, by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, that when any thing is prov'd by as good Arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great assurance that it is, as we could possibly have supposing it were, we ought not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing. Now to apply this to the present case. The being of God is not Mathematically demonstrable, nor can it be expected it should; because onely Mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be prov'd immediately by sense, because God being suppos'd to be a pure Spirit, cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a God, as the nature of the thing to be prov'd is capable of, and as we could in reason expect

The Preface.

expect to have, supposing that he were.

Upon this passage it must be (if any thing in the Sermon) that Mr. S. chargeth this Position (in equivalent terms) of the possible falshood of Faith, and that as to the chiefest and most fundamental Point, the Tenet of a Deity. And now I appeal to the Reader's Eyes and Judgment, whether the sum of what I have said, be not this, That though the existence of God be not capable of that strict kind of Demonstration which Mathematical matters are, yet, that we have an undoubted assurance of it. One would think that no man could be so ridiculous as from hence to infer, that I believe it possible, notwithstanding this assurance; that there should be no God. For however in many other cases an undoubted assurance that a thing is, may not exclude all suspicion of a possibility of its being otherwise; yet in this Tenet of a Deity it most certainly does. Because whoever is assur'd that there is a God, is assur'd there is a Being whose existence is and always was necessary, and consequently is assured that it is impossible he should not be, and involves in it a contradiction. So that my Discourse is so far from being equivalent to the Position he mentions, that it is a perfect contradiction to it. And he might with as much truth have

The Preface.

have affirm'd, that I had expressly, and in so many words said that there is no God.

*The other passage is in pag. 118. of my Book, concerning the Rule of Faith. I was discoursing that no man can shew by any necessary argument, that it is naturally impossible that all the Relations concerning America should be false. But yet (say I) I suppose that notwithstanding this, no man in his wits is now possess'd with so incredible a folly, as to doubt whether there be such a place. The case is the very same as to the certainty of an ancient Book, and of the sense of plain expressions: We have no demonstration for these things, and we expect none; because we know the things are not capable of it. We are not infallibly certain, that any Book is so ancient as it pretends to be; or that it was written by him whose Name it bears; or that this is the sense of such and such passages in it; it is possible all this may be otherwise: But we are very well assur'd that it is not, nor hath any prudent man any just cause to make the least doubt of it; For a bare possibility that a thing may be, or not be, is no just cause of doubting whether a thing be or not. It is possible all the people in France may dye this night, but I hope the possibility of this doth not
incline*

The Preface.

incline any man in the least to think it will be so. It is possible that the Sun may not rise to morrow morning; yet for all this I suppose that no man hath the least doubt but that it will.

To avoid the cavils of this impertinent Man, I have transcrib'd the whole Page to which he refers. And now where is this avow'd Position of the possible falshood of Faith? All that I say is this, That we are not infallible either in judging of the antiquity of a Book, or of the sense of it; by which I mean (as any man of sense and ingenuity would easily perceive I do) that we cannot demonstrate these things of, as to shew that the contrary necessarily involves a contradiction; but yet that we may have a firm assurance concerning these matters, so as not to make the least doubt of them.

And is this to avow the possible falshood of Faith? And yet this Position Mr. S. charges upon these words; how justly I shall now examine.

Either by Faith Mr. S. means the Doctrine reveal'd by God, and then the meaning of the Position must be, that what God says, is possible to be false; which is so absurd a Position as can hardly enter into any man's mind; and yet Mr. S. hath the modesty all along in his Book to insinuate
that

The Preface.

that in the forecited Passage I say as much as this comes to.

Or else Mr. S. means by Faith, the assent which we give to Doctrines as reveal'd by God; and then his sense of infallibility must be either that whoever assents to any thing as reveal'd by God, cannot be deceiv'd, upon supposition that it is so reveal'd; or else absolutely, that whoever assents to any thing as reveal'd by God, cannot be deceiv'd. Now although I do not, in the Passage forecited, speak one syllable concerning Doctrines reveal'd by God, yet I affirm (and so will any man else) that an assent to any Doctrine as revealed by God, if it be reveal'd by him, is impossible to be false. But this is onely an infallibility upon supposition, which amounts to no more than this, That if a thing be true, it is impossible to be false. And yet the principal design of Mr. S's Book is to prove this, which I believe no man in the world was ever so senseless as to deny. But if he mean absolutely, that whoever assents to any Doctrine as reveal'd by God, cannot be deceiv'd, that is, that no man can be mistaken about matters of Faith (as he must mean, if he pretend to have any adversary, and do not fight onely with his own shadow,) this I confess is a very comfortable assertion, but I am much afraid it is not true.

Or

The Preface.

Or else lastly, By Faith he understands the Means and Motives of Faith. And then the plain state of the controversie between us is this, Whether it be necessary to a Christian belief to be infallibly secur'd of the means whereby the Christian Doctrine is convey'd to us, and of the firmness of the Motives upon which our belief of it is grounded. This indeed is something to the purpose; for though in the passage before-cited, I say not one word concerning the Motives of our Belief of the Christian Doctrine, yet my discourse there was intended to be apply'd to the means whereby the knowledge of this Doctrine is convey'd to us. However, I am contented to joyn issue with Mr. S. upon both these Points.

1. That it is not necessary to the true nature of Faith, that the Motives upon which any man believes the Christian Doctrine should be absolutely conclusive, and impossible to be false. That it is necessary, Mr. S. several times affirms in his Book; but how unreasonably, appears from certain and daily experience. Very many Christians (such as St. Austin speaks of, as sav'd not by the quickness of their understandings, but the simplicity of their belief) do believe the Christian Doctrine upon incompetent grounds, and their belief is true, though the argument
upon

The Preface.

upon which they ground it be not (as Mr. S. says) absolutely conclusive of the thing: And he that thus believes the Christian Doctrine, if he adhere to it, and live accordingly, shall undoubtedly be sav'd; and yet I hope Mr. S. will not say that any man shall be saved without true Faith. I might add, that in this Assertion Mr. S. is plainly contradicted by those of his own Church.

For they generally grant, that General Councils, though they be infallible in their Definitions and Conclusions, yet are not always so in their Arguments and reasonings about them. And the Guide of Controversies * expressly says, that it is not necessary * P. 35. that a Divine Faith should always have an external rationally infallible ground or motive thereto (whether Church Authority, or any other) on his part, that so believes. Here is a man of their own Church avowing this Position, that Faith is possible to be false. I desire Mr. S. who is the very Rule of Controversie, to do justice upon this false Guide.

I must acknowledge that Mr. S. attempts to prove this Assertion, and that by a very pleasant and surprizing Argument, which is this. The profound Mysteries of Faith (he tells us †) must needs seem to some, † Faith. (viz. those who have no light but their
pure 93.

The Preface.

† P. 89. pure natural Reason, † as he said before) impossible to be true; which therefore nothing but a Motive of its own nature seemingly impossible to be false can conquer so as to make them conceit them really true. *What Mr. S. here means by a Motive of its own nature seeming impossible to be false I cannot divine, unless he means a real seeming impossibility. But be that as it will; does Mr. S. in good earnest believe that a Motive of its own nature seeming impossible to be false, is sufficient to convince any man, that has and uses the light of natural Reason, of the truth of a thing which must needs seem to him impossible to be true? In my opinion these two seeming impossibilities are so equally matched, that it must needs be a drawn Battle between them. Suppose the thing to be believed be Transubstantiation; this indeed is a very profound Mystery, and is (to speak in Mr. S's phrase) of its own nature so seemingly impossible, that I know no argument in the world strong enough to cope with it. And I challenge Mr. S. to instance in any Motive of Faith which is, both to our understanding and our senses, more plainly impossible to be false than their Doctrine of Transubstantiation is evidently impossible to be true. And if he cannot, how can he reasonably*

The Preface.

sonably expect that any man in the World should believe it?

2. *That it is not necessary to the true nature of Faith, that we should be infallibly secur'd of the means whereby the Christian Doctrine is convey'd to us; particularly of the Antiquity and Authority of the Books of Scripture, and that the expressions in it cannot possibly bear any other sense. And these are the very things I instance in, in the passage so often mention'd. And to these Mr. S. ought to have spoken, if he intended to have confuted that passage. But he was resolv'd not to speak distinctly, knowing his best play to be in the dark, and that all his safety lay in the confusion and obscurity of his talk.*

Now that to have an infallible security in these particulars is not necessary to the true nature of Faith is evident upon these two accounts; because Faith may be without this infallible security, and because in the particulars mention'd it is impossible to be had.

1. *Because Faith may be without this infallible security. He that is so assur'd of the Antiquity and Authority of the Books of Scripture, and of the sense of those Texts wherein the Doctrines of Christianity are plainly delivered, as to see no just cause to doubt thereof, may really assent to those Doc-*

The Preface.

*trines though he have no infallible security. And an assent so grounded I affirm to have the true nature of Faith. For what degree of assent, and what security of the Means, which convey to us the knowledge of Christianity are necessary to the true nature of Faith is to be estimated from the end of Faith, which is the salvation of mens souls. And whoever is so assur'd of the authority and sense of Scripture, as to believe the Doctrine of it, and to live accordingly, shall be saved. And surely such a belief as will save a man hath the true nature of Faith, though it be not infallible. And if God have sufficiently provided for the salvation of men of all capacities, it is no such reflection upon the goodness and wisdom of providence, as Mr. S. imagines, that he hath not taken care that every man's Faith should arrive to the degree of infallibility; nor does our blessed Saviour, for not having made this provision, deserve to be esteem'd by all the world not a wise Lawgiver, but a mere Ignoramus and Impostor, as * one of his fellow Con-*

trovertists speaks with reverence. Besides, this assertion that infallibility is necessary to the true nature of that assent which we call Faith, is plainly false upon another account also; because Faith admits of degrees. But Infallibility has none. The
Scripture

* Laby-
rinthus
Cantuari-
ensis P.
77.

The Preface.

Scripture speaks of a weak and a strong Faith and of the increase of Faith; but I never heard of a weak and strong Infallibility. Infallibility is the highest perfection of the knowing faculty, and consequently the firmest degree of assent upon the firmest grounds, and which are known to be so. But will Mr. S. say, that the highest degree of assent admits of degrees, and is capable of increase? Infallibility is an absolute impossibility of being deceived; now I desire Mr. S. to shew me the degrees of absolute impossibility; and if he could doe that, and consequently there might be degrees of Infallibility, yet I cannot believe that Mr. S. would think fit to call any degree of Infallibility a weak Faith or assent.

2. *Because an infallible security in the particulars mention'd is impossible to be had; I mean in an ordinary way, and without miracle and particular revelation; because the nature of the thing is incapable of it. The utmost security we have of the antiquity of any Book is humane Testimony, and all humane Testimony is fallible for this plain reason because all men are fallible. And though Mr. S. in defence of his beloved Tradition is pleas'd to say that humane Testimony in some cases is infallible, yet I think no man before him was ever so hardy as to maintain that the Testi-*
mony

The Preface.

*mony of fallible men is infallible. I grant it to be in many cases certain; that is, such as a considerate man may prudently rely and proceed upon, and hath no just cause to doubt of; and such as none but an obstinate man or a fool can deny. And that thus the learned men of his own Church define certainty Mr. S. (if he would but vouchsafe to read such Books) might have learnt from * Melchior Canus, who speaking of the firmness of humane Testimony in some cases (which yet he did not believe to be infallible) defines it thus, those things are certain among men, which cannot be deny'd without obstinacy and folly. I know Mr. S. is pleas'd to say, that certainty and infallibility are all one. And he is the first man that I know of that ever said it. And yet perhaps some body may have been before him in it, for I remember Tully says, that there is nothing so foolish but some Philosopher or other has said it. I am sure Mr. S's own Philosopher Mr. Wh. contradicts him in this most clearly, in his Preface to Rushworth's Dialogues; where explicating the term Moral certainty he tells us, that some understood by it such a certainty as makes the cause always work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working other ways; and this presently after he tells us, ought absolutely to be reckon'd*

* De lo.
Theol.
lib. 11.
c. 4.
Certa a-
pud ho-
mines
ca sunt,
quæ ne-
gari sine
pervica-
cia, &
stultitia
non pos-
sunt.

The Preface.

reckon'd in the degree of true certainty, and the Authors consider'd as mistaken in undervaluing it. So that accordi·g to Mr. Wh. true certainty may consist with a possibility of the contrary, and consequently Mr. S. is mistaken in thinking certainty and infallibility to be all one. Nay, I do not find any two of them agreeing among themselves, about the notions of infallibility and certainty. Mr. Wh. says, that what some call moral certainty, is true certainty, though it do not take away a possibility, of the contrary. Mr. S. asserts the direct contrary, that Moral certainty is only probability because it does not take away the possibility of the contrary. The Guide in Controversies * differs from them both, and makes moral, certain and infallible all one. I desire that they would agree these matters among themselves before they quarrel with us about them.

In brief then, though moral certainty be sometimes taken for a high degree of probability which can onely produce a doubtful assent; yet it is also frequently us'd for a firm and undoubted assent to a thing upon such grounds as are fit fully to satisfy a prudent man; and in this sense I have always us'd this Term. But now infallibility is an absolute security of the understanding from all possibility of mistake in what it believes. And there are but two ways for the under-
standing

* P. 135.

The Preface.

standing to be thus secur'd; either by the perfection of its own nature, or by supernatural assistance. But no humane understanding being absolutely secur'd from possibility of mistake by the perfection of its own nature (which I think all mankind except Mr. S. have hitherto granted) it follows, that no man can be infallible in any thing, but by supernatural assistance. Nor did ever the Church of Rome pretend to infallibility upon any other account, as every one knows that hath been conversant in the Writings of their Learned men. And Mr. Cressy in his * Answer to Dr. Pierce hath not the face to contend for any other infallibility but this, that the immutable God can actually preserve a mutable creature from actual mutation: But I can by no means agree with him in what immediately follows, concerning the Omniscience of a creature; that God, who is absolutely omniscient, can teach a rational Creature all truths necessary or expedient to be known; so that though a man may have much ignorance, yet he may be in a sort omniscient within a determinate sphere. Omniscient within a determinate sphere, is an infinite within a finite sphere; and is not that a very pretty sort of knowing all things, which

The Preface.

which may consist with a ignorance of many things? Of all the Controvertists I have met with (except Mr. S.) Mr. Cressy is the happiest at these smart and ingenious kind of reasonings.

As to the other Particular of the sense of Books, it is likewise plainly impossible, that any thing should be deliver'd in such clear and certain words as are absolutely incapable of any other sense; and yet notwithstanding this, the meaning of them may be so plain as that any unprejudic'd and reasonable man may certainly understand them. How many Definitions and Axioms, &c. are there in Euclid, in the sense of which men are universally agreed, and think themselves undoubtedly certain of it? and yet the words in which they are express'd, may possibly bear another sense. The same may be said concerning the Doctrines and Precepts of the H. Scriptures; and one great reason why men do not so generally agree in the sense of these as of the other is because the interests, and lusts, and passions of men are more concern'd in the one than the other. But whatever uncertainty there may be in the sense of any Texts of Scripture, Oral Tradition is so far from affording us any help in this case that it is a thousand times more uncertain and less to be trusted to; especially if we
may

The Preface.

may take that to be the *Traditional sense* of *Texts of Scripture*, which we meet with in the *Decretals of their Popes*, and the *Acts of some of their Councils*; than which never was anything in the whole world more absurd and ridiculous: And whence may we expect to have the *infallible Traditional sense* of *Scripture*, if not from the *Heads and Representatives of their Church*?

This may abundantly suffice for the vindication of that Passage which Mr. S. makes such a rude clamor about, as if I had therein deny'd the truth and certainty of all Religion; but durst never trust the Reader with a view of those words of mine upon which he pretended to ground this Calumny. But the world understands well enough, that all this was but a shift of Mr. S's for the satisfaction of his own Party, and a pitifull Art to avoid the vindication of *Sure-footing*, a Task he had no mind to undertake.

And yet the main design of this Book which he calls *Faith vindicated*, &c. is to prove that which I do not believe any man living ever denyed, viz. That what is true is not possible to be false: Which, though it be one of the plainest Truths in the world, yet he proves it so foolishly, as would make any man (if it were not evident of it self) to doubt of it. He proves it from
Logick,

The Preface.

Logick, and Nature, and Metaphysicks, and Ethicks, &c. I wonder he did not do it likewise from *Arithmetick and Geometry*, the Principles whereof, he * tells us are * *Sure-footing*, concerned in demonstrating the certainty of *Oral Tradition*. He might also have ^{p. 93.} proceeded to *Astrology, and Palmistry, and Chymistry*, and have shewn how each of these lend their assistance to the evidencing of this Truth. For that could not have ^{† Faith.} been more ridiculous, than his ^{vindic. p. 6. 7, &c.} Argument from the nature of *Subject, and Prædicate, and Copula* in *Faith-Propositions*; because forsooth whoever affirms any Proposition of *Faith* to be true, affirms it impossible to be false. Very true. But would any man argue, that what is true is impossible to be false, from the nature of *Subject, Prædicate and Copula*? for be the Proposition true or false, these are of the same nature in both, that is, they are *Subject, Prædicate and Copula*.

But that the Reader may have a taste of his clear style and way of reasoning, I shall for his satisfaction transcribe Mr. S's whole Argument from the nature of the *Prædicate*. His words are these. Our Argument from the *Copula* is particularly strengthened from the nature of the *Prædicate* in the Propositions we speak of; I mean in such speeches as affirm such and such points of
Faith

The Preface.

P. 9, 10, 11, 12. Faith to be true. For *True* means *Existent* in Propositions which express onely the *Anest* of a thing, as most points of Faith do; which speak abstractedly, and tell not wherein the nature of the subject it speaks of consists, or the *Quid est*. So that most of the Propositions Christians are bound to profess are fully expressed thus, *A Trinity is existent, &c.* and the like may be said of those Points which belong to a Thing or Action past; as, *Creation was, &c.* For, *Existent* is the Prædicate in these two, onely affixt to another difference of time; and 'tis equally impossible such Subjects should *neither have been nor not have been*, or *have been and have not been* at once, as it is that a thing should *neither be nor not be* at present, or both *be and not be* at present. Regarding then stedfastly the nature of our Prædicate [*Existent*] we shall find that it expresses the utmost Actuality of a Thing; and as taken in the posture it bears in those Propositions, that *Actually exercis'd*, that is, the utmost Actuality in its most actual state; that is, as absolutely excluding all manner or least degree of Potentiality, and consequently all possibility of being otherwise; which is radically destroyed when all Potentiality is taken away. This

The Preface.

This Discourse holding, which in right to truth I shall not fear to affirm (unconcern'd in the drollery of any Opposer) to be more than Mathematically *demonstrative*, it follows inevitably that whoso is bound to profess a *Trinity, Incarnation, &c. is or was existent*, is also bound to profess that 'tis *impossible they should be not Existent*; or which is all one, that 'tis impossible these points of Faith should be false.

The same appears out of the nature of *distinction* or *division* applyed to our Prædicate *Existent*, as found in these Propositions: For could that Prædicate bear a pertinent distinction expressing this and the other respect, or *thus and thus*, it might possibly *be* according to one of these respects, or *thus considered*, and *not be* according to another, that is *another way considered*: But this evasion is here impossible; for either those distinguishing Notions must be more Potential or Antecedent to the Notion of *Existent*, and then they neither reach *Existent*, nor supervene to it as its Determinations or Actuations, which differences ought to doe; nor can any Notion be more *Actual* or *Determinative* in the line of *Substance* or *Being*, than *Existent* is; and, so fit to distinguish it in that line; nor, lastly, can any de-
termi-

The Preface.

termination in the line of Accidents serve the turn; for, those suppose Existence already present, and so the whole Truth of the Proposition entire and complete antecedently to them: 'Tis impossible therefore that what is thus affirmed to be True, should in any regard be affirmed possible to be false: the impossibility of distinguishing the Prædicate pertinently, excluding here all possibility of divers respects.

The same is demonstrated from the impossibility of distinguishing the Subjects of those Faith-propositions; for those Subjects being Propositions themselves; and accepted for Truths, as is supposed, they are incapable of Distinction, as shall be particularly shewn hereafter. Besides, those Subjects being points of Faith, and so standing in the Abstract, that is, not descending to subsuming respects, even in that regard too they are freed from all pertinent distinguishableness.

The same is demonstrated from the nature of Truth, which consists in an Indivisible; whence there is nothing of Truth had, how great soever the conceived approaches towards it may be, till all *may-not-bees*, or Potentiality to be otherwise, be utterly excluded by the Actuality of Is

The Preface.

Is or Existence; which put or discover'd, the light of Truth breaks forth, and the dim twilights of *may-not-bees* vanish and disappear.

I have here (Reader) presented thee with a Discourse which (if we may believe Mr. S.) is more than Mathematically demonstrative. A rare Sight indeed! And is not this a pleasant Man, and of good assurance? I now find it true, which he * says * Letter of Thanks P. 1. elsewhere, that Principles are of an inflexible genius, and self-confident too, and that they love naturally to express themselves with an assuredness. But certainly the sacred names of Principles and Demonstration were never so profan'd by any Man before. Might not any one write a Book of such Jargon, and call it Demonstration? And would it not equally serve to prove or confute? If he intended this stuff for the satisfaction of the People, he might as well have writ in the Coptick or Slavonian Language: yet I cannot deny, but that it is very suitable to the Principles of the Roman Church; for why should not their Science as well as their Service be in an unknown Tongue? that the one may be as fit to improve their knowledge, as the other is to raise their devotion. But if he designed this for the Learned, nothing could be more impro-

The Preface.

improper ; for they are far less apt to admire non-sense than the common People : And I desire that no man (how learned soever he may think himself) would be over-confident, that this is sense. I do verily believe, that neither Harpius, nor Ruffrochius, nor the profound Mother Juliana, have any thing in their writings more senseless and obscure than this Discourse of his, which he affirms to be more than Mathematically Demonstrative. So that if I were worthy to advise Mr. S. he should give over this pretence to Science ; for whatever he may think, his Talent certainly does not lie that way ; but he seems to be as well made for a Mystical Divine, as any man I know ; and methinks his Superiours should be sensible of this, and employ him to write about the Deiform fund of the Soul, the super-essential life, the method of self-annihilation, and the passive unions of nothing with nothing : These are profound Subjects, and he hath a Style peculiarly fitted for them. For even in this parcel of stuff which I have now cited, there are five or six words, such as may-not-bees, potentiality, actuality, actuation, determinative, supervene and subsume, which if they were but well mingled and discreetly ordered, and brought in now and then with a that is, to explain one

The Preface.

one another) would half set up a man in that way, and enable him to write as Mystical a Discourse as a man would wish. But enough of this. And I have trespass'd not a little upon mine own disposition in saying thus much, though out of a just indignation at confident Non-sense.

It is time now to draw toward a conclusion of this debate. I shall onely leave with the Reader a few observations concerning this Book of Mr. S's and his Doctrine of Infallibility.

First, That the main drift of his Book being to prove that what is true is impossible to be false, he opposes no body that I know of in this matter.

Secondly, That in asserting Infallibility to be necessary to the true nature of Faith he hath the generality of his own Church his professed Adversaries. The Church of Rome never arrogated to her self any other Infallibility but what she pretends to be founded upon Chrilt's promise to secure his Church always from Error by a supernatural assistance, which is widely different from Mr. S's rational infallibility of Oral Tradition. Mr. S. surely cannot be ignorant, that the Divines of their Church (till Mr. Rushworth and Mr. White found out this new way) did generally resolve

c

Faith

The Preface.

Faith into the infallible Testimony of the Church, and the infallibility of their Church, into our Saviour's Promise; and the evidence of the true Church into the Markes of the Church, or the Motives of credibility; which Motives are acknowledg'd to be only prudential, and not demonstrative. * Bel-
* I. 4. de Ecclef. *larmine says, that the Marks of the Church do not make it evidently true, which is the true Church, but onely evidently credible; and that (says he) is said to be evidently credible which is neither seen in it self, nor in its principles; but yet hath so many and so weighty Testimonies, that every wise man hath reason to believe it.*
* Sum. Tom. 2. partic. de tide c. 1. *Becanus * to the same purpose, that the Motives of credibility are onely the foundation of a prudent, but not of an infallible assent, I know very well that Mr. Knott and some others would fain perswade us, that an assent in some sort infallible may be built upon prudential Motives, which is as absurd as it's possible; but if it were true, yet Mr. S. would not accept of this sort of infallibility; nothing less will serve him than demonstrative Motives, and such as are absolutely conclusive of the thing. Stapleton (as Mr. Cressy tells us) expressly says, that such an infallible certitude of Means is not now necessary to the Pastors of*

The Preface.

of the Church, as was necessary to the Apostles, who were the first founders of the Church. So that, according to these Authors, there may be true Faith where neither the means nor the Motives of it are such as to raise our assent to the degree of infallibility. And this is as much to the full as any Protestant (that I know of) ever said. Nay, even his Friends of the Tradition, Mr. Rushworth, Mr. White and Mr. Cressy, are guilty of the same damnable and fundamental Errour, as Mr. S. calls it †. For they grant less assurance than that which is infallible to be sufficient to Christian Faith, and that we are justly condemn'd if we refuse to believe upon such evidence as does ordinarily satisfy prudent men in humane affairs. And particularly, Mr. Wh. makes a question whether humane nature be capable of infallibility; as I have shewn at large by clear and full Testimonies out of each of these Authors, in the Answer to Sure-footing †. Of which Testimonies though Mr. S. hath not thought fit to take the least notice throughout his Book; yet I cannot but think it a reasonable request, to desire him to vindicate the Divines of his own Church (especially those of his own way) from these things, before he charge us any farther with them.

The Preface.

Thirdly, *That Mr. S. by this Principle, that infallibility is necessary to the true nature of Faith, makes every true believer infallible in matters of Faith; which is such a Paradox, as I doubt whether ever it enter'd into any other man's mind. But if it be true, what need then of any infallibility in Pope or Council? And if this infallibility be grounded upon the nature of Oral Tradition, what need of supernatural assistance? I doubt Mr. S. would be loth to preach this Doctrine at Rome; I have often heard, that there is an old teasty Gentleman lives there, who would take it very ill that any one besides himself should pretend to be infallible.*

Fourthly, *That Mr. S. by his Principles does plainly exclude from salvation the generality of his own Church, that is, all that do not believe upon his Grounds. And this is the necessary consequence of his reasoning in a late Treatise, intituled, The method to arrive at satisfaction in Religion: The principles whereof are these; That the Church is a Congregation of Faithfull; The Faithfull are those who have true Faith; That, till it be known which is the true Faith, it cannot be known which is the true Church; That*

The Preface.

*That which is the true Faith, can onely be known by the true Rule of Faith, which is Oral Tradition; And that the infallibility of this Rule is evident to common sense. And from these principles he concludes * that those who follow not this Rule, and so are out of this Church, can have no true Faith; And that though many of the Points to which they assent are true, yet their assent is not Faith; for Faith (speaking of Christian Faith) is an assent which cannot possibly be false. So that the Foundation of this Method is the self-evident infallibility of Oral Tradition, which hath been sufficiently consider'd in the Answer to Sure footing, which yet remains unanswered. That which I am now concern'd to take notice of, is the consequence of this Method, which does at one blow excommunicate and un-Christian the far greatest part of his own Church. For if all who do not follow Oral Tradition as their onely Rule of Faith are out of the Church, and can have no true Faith, then all who follow the Council of Trent are ipso facto no Christians. For nothing is plainer, than that that Council did not make Oral Tradition the sole Rule of their Faith, nor rely upon it as such; which hath been prov'd at large in the Answer to Sure footing,*

* Sec. 21.

The Preface.

But why is Mr. S. so zealous in this matter of infallibility? There is a plain reason for it. He finds that confidence, how weakly soever it be grounded, hath some effect upon the common and ignorant People; who are apt to think there is something more than ordinary in a swaggering man, that talks of nothing but Principles and Demonstration. And so we see it in some other Professions. There are a sort of People very well known, who find that the most effectual way to cheat the People is always to pretend to infallible Cures.

I have now done with his Infallibility. But I must not forget this Letter of Thanks. I shall wholly pass by the passion and ill language of it, which a man may plainly see to have proceeded from a gall'd and uneasy mind. He would fain put on some pleasantness, but was not able to conceal his vexation. Nor shall I insist upon his palpable shuffling about the explication of the Terms, Rule and Faith. He was convinc'd that he had explain'd them very untowardly, and therefore would gladly come off by saying that he did not intend explication, but onely to prædicate or affirm something of them. And yet the whole design of the first page of Sure-footing is to shew the necessity of beginning with the meaning of those words

p. 7.

The Preface.

words which express the thing under debate: And this method he tells us he will apply to his present purpose, and will examine well what is meant by those words which express the thing he was to discuss, namely, The RULE of FAITH. Now if to examine well what is meant by words, be not to go about to explain them, I must confess my self to be in a great error. Of the same kind in his Apology for his Testimonies, as if they were * not intended against * P. 105. the Protestants; whereas his Book was writ against the Protestants, and when he comes to his Testimonies, he † declares the design of them to be, to second by Authority † Sure-footing. P. 126. what he had before establish'd by Reason. So that if the Rational part of his Book was intended against the Protestants, and the Testimonies were design'd to second it, I cannot understand why he should say one was less intended against them than the other. But it seems he is so conscious of the weakness of those Testimonies, that he does not think them fit to satisfy any but those who believe him already.

As to his charge of false citations, it is but the common artifice of the Roman Controversists when they have nothing else to say. However that the world may see how little he is to be trusted, I shall instance in two or

c 4

three

The Preface.

three about which he makes the loudest clamour, and leave it to the Reader to judge by these of his sincerity in the rest.

p. 62.

He says, I notoriously abuse the Preface to Rushworths Dialogues in citing the Author of it to say that such certainty as makes the cause always to work the same effect though it take not away the absolute possibility of working otherwise, ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty; whereas (says Mr. S.) he onely tells us there, p. 7. that by moral certainty [some understood] such a certainty as makes the cause, &c. To vindicate my self in this, I shall onely set the Author's words before the Reader's eyes. They are these. This term Moral certainty, every one explicated not like; but some understood by it such a certainty as makes the cause always work the same effect, though it take not away the absolute possibility of working other ways. Others call'd that a moral certainty which proceeds from, &c. A third explication of this word is, &c. Of these three the first ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty, and the Authors consider'd as mistaken in undervaluing it. Is this onely to tell us that by moral certainty some understood, &c. Does not the Prefacer also expressly

The Preface.

pressly affirm, that what these some understood by moral certainty, ought absolutely to be reckon'd in the degree of true certainty? which is the very thing I cited him for.

Another heavy charge is, that according^{p. 65.} to my usual sincerity, I quote Rushworth's Nephew to say, that a few good words are to be cast in concerning Scripture, [for the satisfaction of indifferent men who have been brought up in this verbal and apparent respect of the Scripture,] whereas (says Mr. S.) in the place you cite, he onely expresses, it would be a satisfaction to indifferent men to see the positions one would induce them to embrace maintainable by Scripture. Does he onely say so? let the Reader judge. The words in Mr. Rushworth are these: Yet this I must tell ye, that it were a great satisfaction for indifferent men, that have been brought up in this verbal and apparent respect of the Scripture, to see that the Positions you would induce them unto, can be and are maintain'd by Scripture, and that they are grounded therein. Certainly one would think that either this man has no eyes or no forehead.

But the greatest out-cry of all, is, that I^{p. 57, 77.} abuse his first Demonstration by virtue of a direct

The Preface.

direct falsification both of his words and sense, by cogging in the word [all,] making his principle run thus, that the greatest hopes and fears are applied to the minds of [all] Christians. This indeed I make to be his Principle grounded upon his words which I had cited a little before; and they are these, First; That Christian Doctrine was at first unanimously settled by the Apostles in the hearts of the faithfull dispers'd in great multitudes over several parts of the world. 2ly, That this Doctrine was firmly believed by [all] those faithfull to be the way to Heaven, and the contradicting or deserting of it to be the way to damnation; so that the greatest hopes and fears imaginable were, by engaging the divine Authority, strongly apply'd to the minds of the first Believers, &c. Now if these first believers, to whom he says, these hopes and fears were strongly apply'd, be all those faithfull he spoke of before which were dispers'd over several parts of the world, (as the tenor of his words plainly shews) what are these less than all the Christians of that Age? and he himself a little after tells us, there is the same reason of the following Ages. So that I made his Principle run no otherwise than he himself had laid it. And if it contra-
dict

The Preface.

dict what he says elsewhere, it is no new or strange thing. I wonder more at his confidence in charging such falsifications upon me as every man's eyes will presently confute him in. Methinks though a man had all Science, and all Principles, yet it might not be amiss to have some Conscience.

I shall only speak a few words to the two solid Points, (as I may call them) of his Letter, and I have done.

I had charg'd him that he makes Traditions certainty a first and self-evident Principle, and yet that he goes about to demonstrate it; which I said was impossible to be done, and if it could be done was needless. To avoid this inconvenience which he found himself sorely press'd with all, he distinguishes between Speculative and Practical self-evidence, and says that things which are practically self-evident may be demonstrated, but those that are speculatively so, cannot. But he must not think to shelter himself from so palpable an absurdity by this impertinent distinction. For let things be evident how they will, speculatively or practically, 'tis plain that if they be Principles evident of themselves they need nothing to evidence them; and if they be first Principles there can be nothing to make them more evident, because there is nothing before them to demonstrate
monstrate

The Preface.

monstrate them by. Now if Mr. S. had in truth believed that the certainty of Tradition was a first and self-evident Principle, he should by all means have let it alone, for it was in a very good condition to shift for it self; but his blind way of Demonstration is enough to cast a mist about the clearest Truth in the world. But perhaps by the self-evident certainty of Tradition, Mr. S. only means that it is evident to himself, for I dare say it is so to no body else. And if that be his meaning he did well enough to endeavour to demonstrate it; it was no more than needed.

The other Point is about his First Principles, such as these, a Rule is a Rule, Faith is Faith, &c. which he says † must principle all that can be solidly concluded either about Rule or Faith. Of these he hath mighty store, and blesteth himself in it, as the Rich man in the Gospel did in his full Barns, Soul take thine ease, thou hast Principles laid up for many years; and out of an excess of good nature pities my case, who did undertake to write a Discourse about the Ground of Faith, without so much as one Principle to bless my self with. But the mischief is, that after all this stir about them they are good for nothing, and of the very same stamp with that frivolous one

† P. 11.
P. 74.

Aristo.

The Preface.

Aristotle speaks of [if a thing be, it is,] ^{Analyt. Poster. l. 1.} which he rejects as a vain and ridiculous Proposition. Such are Mr. S's first Principles, surfeited of too much truth (as an ingenious Writer of his own Church says of them) and ready to burst with self-evidence, and yet by ten thousand of them a man shall not be able to advance one step in knowledge, because they produce no conclusion but themselves; whereas it is of the nature of Principles to yeild a Conclusion different from themselves. And to convince Mr. S. fully of the foolery of these Principles, I will try what can be done with them, either in a Categorical or Hypothetical Syllogism, e.g. A Rule is a Rule, Tradition is a Rule, Ergo Tradition is a Rule. Again, If a Rule be a Rule, then a Rule is a Rule; But a Rule is a Rule, Ergo. How is any man the wiser for all this? But it may be Mr. S. can make better work with them, and manage them more dextrously, so as to principle any thing that can be solidly concluded in any Controversie.

And now I hope at last to have given Mr. S. full satisfaction; since he has brought me to the very point he desir'd, to acknowledge that I have no Principles. And indeed if there be no other to be had but such as these, I do declare to all the world, that I neither have any Principles, nor will have any.

The

The Texts of each Sermon.

JOB 28. 28. *And unto man he said; Behold! the fear of the Lord that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

page 1

2 Pet. 3. 3. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days Scoffers walking after their own lusts.*

p. 101

Prov. 14. 34. *Righteousness exalteth a Nation; but sin is the reproach of any people.*

p. 129

Psalms 19. 11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

p. 151

Phil. 3. 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

p. 179

1 Joh. 5. 3. *And his Commandments are not grievous.*

p. 213

2 Tim. 2. 19. *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

p. 243

Phil. 3. 20. *For our conversation is in Heaven.*

p. 273

JOB

J O B XXVIII. 28.

And unto man he said; Behold! the fear of the Lord that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

IN this Chapter Job discourseth of the secrets of nature, and the unsearchable perfections of the works of God. And the result of his discourse is this. That a perfect knowledge of Nature is no where to be found but in the Author of it; no less wisdom and understanding than that which made the world and contrived this vast and regular frame of Nature can thoroughly understand the Philosophy of it and comprehend so vast a design: But yet there is a *knowledge* which is very proper to man and lies level to humane understanding; and that is the *knowledge* of our Creator and of the duty we owe to him; the *wisdom* of pleasing God, by doing what he commands and avoiding what he forbids: This *Knowledge* and *Wisdom* may be attained by man, and is sufficient to make him happy. *And unto man he said: Behold!*

Behold! the fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

These words consist of two Propositions, which are not distinct in sense, but one and the same thing variously express'd; For *wisdom* and *understanding* are *synonymous* words here; and though sometimes they have different notions, yet in the *Poetical Books of Scripture* they are most frequently used as words equivalent, and do both of them indifferently signify either a *speculative knowledge* of things, or a *practical skill* about them, according to the exigency of the matter or thing spoken of. And so likewise *the fear of the Lord*, and *departure from evil*, are *phrases* of a very near sense, and like importance; and therefore we find them several times put together in Scripture: *Fear the Lord*, and *depart from evil*: *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil*. So that they differ onely as *cause* and *effect*, which by a *Metonymie* usual in all sorts of Authors, are frequently put one for another.

Pro. 3.7.
Pr. 16.6.

Now, *to fear the Lord*, and *to depart from evil*, are phrases which the Scripture useth in a very great latitude, to express to us *the sum of Religion*, and *the whole of our duty*. And because the large usage of these phrases is to be the foundation of my following

lowing discourse, I shall for the farther clearing of this matter endeavour to shew these two things:

1. That 'tis very usual in the Language of Scripture to express the *whole of Religion* by these and such like phrases.

2. The particular fitness of these two phrases to describe Religion.

I. It is very usual in the Language of Scripture to express the *whole of Religion* by some eminent principle or part of Religion.

The great Principles of Religion are *knowledge, faith, remembrance, love, and fear*; by all which the Scripture useth to express the *whole duty of man*.

In the *Old Testament*, by the *knowledge, remembrance* and *fear* of God. Religion is called *The knowledge of the holy*. And wicked men are described to be such as *know not God*. So likewise, by the *fear of the Lord*, frequently in this Book of *Job*, and in the *Psalms* and *Proverbs*. And *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another*. And the *fear of God* is expressly said to be the sum of Religion, *Fear God and keep his Commandments, for this is the whole of man*: And on the contrary, the wicked are described to be such as *have not the fear of God before their eyes*. And

Prov. 30.
3. Jer.
10. 25.

Ecl. 12.

Ps. 35. 1.

so likewise by the remembrance of God Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth; that is, enter upon a religious course betimes: And on the contrary, the character of the wicked is, that they forget God; The wicked shall be turned into Hell; and all the Nations that forget God. In the New Testament, Religion is usually expressed by faith in God and Christ, and the love of them. Hence it is, that true Christians are so frequently called *believers*, and wicked and ungodly men *unbelievers*, And that good men are described to be such as love God, all things shall work together for good to them that love God; and such as love the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the reason why these are put for the whole of Religion, is, because the belief, and knowledge, and remembrance, and love, and fear of God, are such powerfull principles, and have so great an influence upon men to make them Religious, that where any one of these really is, all the rest, together with the true and genuine effects of them, are supposed to be.

And so likewise the sum of all Religion is often expressed by some *eminent part* of it; which will explain the second phrase here in the Text, *departing from evil*. The worship of God is an eminent part of Reli-

Ecc. 12.
1.

Pf. 9. 17.

Ro. 8. 28.
Eph. 6.
24.

Religion; and Prayer, which is often in Scripture expressed by *seeking God*, and *calling upon his Name*, is a chief part of Religious worship. Hence Religion is described by *seeking God*, He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek, him: and by *calling upon his name*, Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. And so by *coming to God*, and by *departing from evil*. In this fallen state of man Religion begins with *repentance* and *conversion*, the two opposite terms of which, are God and Sin: Hence it is that Religion is described sometimes by *coming to God*, He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, that is, no man can be religious, unless he believe there is a God; sometimes by *departing from sin*, And he that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey: that is, such was the bad state of those times of which the Prophet there complains that no man could be religious but he was in danger of being persecuted.

II. For the fitness of these two phrases to describe Religion.

1. For the first, [*the fear of the Lord*] The fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider how great an influence the fear of God hath upon men to make them

religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that Principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man. Every one desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore hath a natural dread and horreur of every thing that can destroy his Being, or endanger his happiness. And the greatest *danger* is from the greatest *power*, and that is *omnipotency*. So that *the fear of God* is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and just Being, which is armed with an almighty and irresistible power; God having hid in every Man's Conscience a secret awe and dread of his infinite power, and eternal justice. Now *fear* being so intimate to our natures, it is the strongest bond of Laws, and the great security of our duty.

There are two bridles or restraints which God hath put upon humane nature, *shame* and *fear*. *Shame* is the weaker, and hath place onely in those in whom there are some remainders of virtue. *Fear* is the stronger, and works upon all who love themselves and desire their own preservation. Therefore in this degenerate state of mankind, *fear* is that passion which hath the greatest power
over

over us, and by which God and his Laws take the surest hold of us: Our *desire* and *love*, and *hope*, are not so apt to be wrought upon by the representation of vertue, and the promises of reward and happiness, as our *fear* is from the apprehensions of Divine displeasure. For though we have lost in a great measure the gust and relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that fear relies upon a natural love of our selves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation. And therefore Religion usually makes its first entrance into us by this passion; hence perhaps it is that *Solomon* more than once calls *the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom*.

2. As for the Second phrase [*departing from evil*] the fitness of it to express the *whole duty of man*, will appear, if we consider the necessary connexion that is between the negative and positive part of our duty. He that is carefull to avoid all sin will sincerely endeavour to perform his duty. For the soul of man is an active principle, and will be employed one way or other, it will be doing something; if a man abstain from evil, he will do good. Now there being such a strait connexion

between these, *the whole of our duty* may be expressed by either of them ; but most fitly by *departing from evil*, because that is the first part of our duty. Religion begins in the forsaking of sin :

Virtus est vitium fugere, & sapientia prima Stultitia caruisse——

Virtue begins in the forsaking of vice ; and the first part of wisdom is not to be a fool.

And therefore the Scripture, which mentions these parts of our duty, doth constantly put *departing from evil* first ; De-

Ps. 24. 14. *part from evil and do good. Cease to do*
 & 37. 27. *evil, learn to do well. Let the wicked forsake*

If. 1. 16, *his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,*

17. & 55. *and let him return unto the Lord. We are first*

7. Eph. 4. *to put off the old man which is corrupt accor-*
 23. 24. *ding to deceitful lusts, and then to be renewed*
in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new

1 Pet. 3. *man, &c. Let him eschew evil and do good.*

To all which I may add this farther consideration, that the Law of God contained in the ten Commandments, consisting mostly of prohibitions, (*Thou shalt not doe such or such a thing*) our observance of it is most fitly expressed by *departing from evil*, which yet includes obedience likewise to the positive Precepts implied in those Prohibitions.

Having thus explain'd the *Words*, I come
 now

now to consider the *Proposition* contain'd in them, which is this :

That Religion is the best knowledge and wisdom.

This I shall endeavour to make good these three ways.

1. *By a direct proof of it.*

2. *By shewing on the contrary the folly and ignorance of irreligion and wickedness.*

2. *By vindicating Religion from those common imputations which seem to charge it with ignorance or imprudence.*

I begin with the direct proof of this : And because Religion comprehends two things, the *knowledge of the Principles of it*, and a *suitable life and practice* ; (the first of which being *speculative*, may more properly be called *knowledge* ; and the latter, because 'tis *practical*, may be called *wisdom or prudence*) therefore I shall endeavour distinctly to prove these two things.

1. *That Religion is the best knowledge.*

2. *That 'tis the truest wisdom.*

1. First, *That it is the best knowledge.*

The knowledge of Religion commends its self to us upon these two accounts.

1. 'Tis the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most excellent.

Of those things which are most usefull and necessary for us to know.

First, It is the best knowledge, because it is the knowledge of those things which are in themselves most *excellent* and *desirable to be known*; and those are *God*, and our *duty*. *God* is the sum and comprehension of all perfection. It is delightfull to know the *Creatures*, because there are particular excellencies scatter'd and dispers'd among them which are some shadows of the Divine perfections: But in *God* all perfections in their highest degree and exaltation meet together and are united. How much more delightfull then must it needs be to fix our minds upon such an object in which there is nothing but *beauty* and *brightness*, what is *amiable*, and what is *excellent*; what will *ravish our affections* and *raise our wonder*, *please us* and *astonish us* at once; And that the finite measure and capacity of our understandings is not able to take in and comprehend the infinite perfections of *God*, this indeed shews the excellency of the object, but doth not altogether take away the delightfulness of the knowledge. For as it is pleasant to the Eye to have an endless prospect, so is it some pleasure to a finite understanding to view unlimited excellencies which have no shore or bounds, though it cannot comprehend them. There is a pleasure

sure in admiration; and this is that which properly causeth admiration, when we discover a great deal in an object which we understand to be excellent, and yet we see we know not how much more beyond that, which our understandings cannot fully reach and comprehend.

And as the *knowledge of God* in his *nature* and *perfections* is excellent and desirable, so likewise to know him in those glorious manifestations of himself *in the works of Creation and Providence*; and above all, in that stupendious work of the *Redemption* of the world by *Jesus Christ*, which was such a mystery, and so excellent a piece of knowledge that *the Angels* are said to *desire to pry into it*. 1 Pet. x.
12.

And as the *knowledge of God* is excellent, so likewise of *our Duty* which is nothing else but *virtue* and *goodness* and *holiness*, which are the image of *God*, a conformity to the nature and will of *God*, and an imitation of the Divine Excellencies and Perfections, so far as we are capable: For to know our duty is to know what it is to be like *God* in *goodness*, and *pity*, and *patience*, and *clemency*, in *pardonning injuries*, and *passing by provocations*; in *justice* and *righteousness*, in *truth* and *faithfulness*, and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary

trary of these : In a word, it is to know what is the good and acceptable will of God, what it is that he loves and delights in and is pleased withall, and would have us to do in order to our perfection and our happiness. It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledge to know the *laws of the Land*, and the *customs of the Countrey* we live in, and the *will of the Prince* we live under : How much more, to know the *Statutes of Heaven*, and the *Laws of eternity*, those immutable and eternal rules of justice and righteousness ; to know the will and pleasure of the great Monarch and universal King of the World, and the *Customs* of that *Countrey* where we must live for ever ? This made *David* to admire the Law of God at that strange rate, and to advance the knowledge of it above all other knowledge, *I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

Psal. 119.
96.

Secondly, 'Tis the *knowledge* of those things which are most *usefull* and *necessary* for us to know. The *goodness* of every thing is measured by its *end* and *use*, and that's the best thing which serves the best end and purpose ; and the more necessary any thing is to such an end, the better it is : So that the best knowledge is that
which

which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our *great end*, which is *eternal happiness*, and the *salvation of our Souls*. Curious speculations, and the contemplation of things that are impertinent to us, and do not concern us, nor serve to promote our happiness, are but a more specious and ingenious sort of idleness, a more pardonable and creditable kind of Ignorance. That Man that doth not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know is but an ignorant man, whatever he may know besides. Now the knowledge of *God*, and of *Christ*, and of our *duty*, is of the greatest usefulness and necessity to us in order to our happiness. It's of absolute necessity that we should know *God* and *Christ*, in order to our being happy ; *This is life eternal* (that is, Joh. 17. 3 the onely way to it) *to know thee the onely true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ*. It is necessary also in order to our happiness to know our *duty* : because 'tis necessary for us to do it, and it is impossible to do it except we know it.

So that whatsoever other knowledge a man may be endued withall, he is but an ignorant person who doth not know *God*, the Author of his being, the preserver and protector of his life, his Sovereign,
and

and his Judge, the giver of every good and perfect gift, his surest refuge in trouble, his best friend or worst enemy, the present support of his life, his hopes in death, his future happiness, and his portion for ever: who does not know his relation to God, the duty that he owes him, and the way to please *him* who can make him happy or miserable for ever: who doth not know the Lord Jesus Christ who is *the way, the truth, and the life.*

If a man by a vast and imperious mind, and a heart large as the sand upon the Sea-shore, (as it is said of Solomon) could command all the knowledge of *Nature* and *Art*, of *words* and *things*; could attain to a mastery in all Languages, and sound the depths of all Arts and Sciences, measure the earth and the heavens, and tell the stars, and declare their order and motions; could discourse of the interests of all States, the intrigues of all Courts, the reason of all Civil laws and constitutions, and give an account of the History of all ages; could speak of trees, *from the Cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the Hysop that springs out of the wall; and of beasts also and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes:* and yet should in the mean time, be destitute of the knowledge of *God* and *Christ*,
and

and his *duty*; all this would be but an impertinent vanity, and a more glittering kind of Ignorance; and such a man (like the Philosopher, who whilst he was gazing upon the stars, fell into the ditch) would but *sapienter descendere in infernum* be undone with all this knowledge, and with a great deal of wisdom go down to Hell.

2. Secondly, *That to be religious is the truest wisdom*, and that likewise upon two accounts.

1. Because it is to be wise for our selves.

2. It is to be wise as to our main interest and concernment.

1. 'Tis to be wise for our selves. There's an expression, *Job 22. 21. He that is wise is profitable to himself;* and *Prov. 9. 12. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy self:* intimating that wisdom regards a man's own interest and advantage, and that he is not a wise man that doth not take care of himself and his own concernments, according to that of Old *Ennius, nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret,* That man hath but an empty title of Wisdom and is not really vwise vwho is not wise for himself. As *self-preservation* is the first principle of *Nature*, so care of our selves and our ovvn interest is
the

the first part of *wisdom*. He that is wise in the affairs and concernments of other men, but careless and negligent of his own, that man may be said to be busie, but he is not wise : he is employed indeed, but not so as a wise man should be : Now this is the *Wisdom of Religion*, that it directs a man to a care of his own proper interest and concernment.

2. *It is to be wise as to our main interest.* Our chief end and highest interest is happiness : And this is *happiness* to be freed from all (if it may) however from the greatest evils ; and to enjoy (if it may be) all good, however the chiefest. *To be happy* is not onely to be freed from the *pains and diseases* of the *body*, but from *anxiety and vexation* of *spirit* : not onely to enjoy the *pleasures* of *sense*, but *peace of Conscience* and tranquillity of *mind*. *To be happy*, is not onely to be so for a little while, but as long as may be ; and if it be possible, for ever. Now *Religion* designs our *greatest and longest happiness* ; it aims at a freedom from the greatest evils, and to bring us to the possession and enjoyment of the greatest good. For *Religion* wisely considers that men have *immortal spirits*, which as they are *spirits* are capable of a pleasure and happiness distinct from

from that of our *bodies* and our *senses* ; and because they are *immortal*, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now our *souls* being the best part of our selves, and *eternity* being infinitely the most considerable duration, the greatest *wisdom* is to secure the interest of our *souls* and of *eternity* though it be with loss and to the prejudice of our *temporal* and *inferior* Interests. Therefore *Religion* directs us rather to secure *inward peace* than *outward ease*, to be more carefull to avoid *everlasting* and *intolerable torment* than *short* and *light afflictions* which are but for a *moment* ; to court the *favour* of *God* more than the *friendship* of the *world*, and not so much to *fear* them that can kill the *body*, and after that have no more that they can do, as him who after he hath kill'd, can destroy both *body* and *soul* in *hell* : In a word, our *main interest* is to be as happy as we can, and as long as is possible ; and if we be cast into such circumstances, that we must be either in part and for a time or else wholly and always miserable, the *best wisdom* is to chuse the *greatest and most lasting happiness*, but the *least and shortest misery*. Upon this account *Religion* prefers those *pleasures* which flow from the presence of *God* for evermore, infinitely before the *transitory*

itory pleasures of this world, and is much more carefull to avoid *eternal misery* than *present sufferings*. This is the *wisdom of Religion*, that upon consideration of the whole and casting up all things together it does advise and lead us to our best interest.

II. The *Second way of confirmation* shall be by endeavouring to shew the ignorance and folly of irreligion. Now all that are irreligious are so upon one of these two accounts: Either, *First*, because they do not believe the foundations and principles of Religion, as *the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and future rewards*: or else, *Secondly*, because though they do in some sort believe these things, yet they live contrary to this their belief; and of this kind are the far greatest part of wicked men. The *first* sort are guilty of that which we call *speculative*, the *other* of *practicall Atheism*. I shall endeavour to shew the Ignorance and Folly of both these.

First, *Speculative Atheism* is unreasonable, and that upon these *Five* accounts. 1. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. 2. Nor does it give any reasonable account of the universal consent of mankind in this apprehension, That there

there is a God. 3. It requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. 4. The Atheist pretends to know that which no man can know. 5. Atheism contradicts it self.

I. Because it gives no tolerable account of the existence of the world. One of the greatest difficulties that lies in the Atheist's way is, upon his own supposition that there is no God, to give a likely account of the existence of the world. We see this vast frame of the World, and an innumerable multitude of creatures in it, all which we who believe a God attribute to him as the Author of them. For a being suppos'd of infinite goodness and wisdom and power is a very likely cause of these things. What more likely to make this vast world, to stretch forth the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and to form these and all things in them of nothing, than infinite power? What more likely to communicate Being and so many degrees of happiness to so many several sorts of creatures, than infinite goodness? What more likely to contrive this admirable frame of the Universe and all the creatures in it, each of them so perfect in their kind and all of them so fitted to each other and to the whole, than infinite

C

counsel

counsel and wisdom? This seems to be no unreasonable account.

But let us see now what account the *Atheist* gives of these things. If there be no God there are but these *two* ways imaginable for the world to be. Either it must be said, That not onely the Matter but also the *Frame* of this world is eternal; and that as to the main things always were as they are without any first cause of their being; which is the way of the *Aristotelian* Atheist; (those I mean, who proceed upon *Aristotle's* supposition of the eternity of the world, but yet deny it to be from God, which he expressly asserts:). Or else the *matter* of the world being supposed to be eternal and of it self, the original of this vast and beautifull *frame* must be ascribed merely to *chance*, and the casual concourse of the parts of matter; which is the way of the *Epicurean* Atheist. But neither of these ways gives a tolerable account of the existence of the world.

1. I shall first consider, the *Hypothesis* of those whom for distinction sake I call the *Aristotelian* Atheists, which is this; That not onely the matter but also the *frame* of the world is eternal, and that as to the main it was always as it is, of it self

self; and that there hath been from all eternity a succession of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being.

It seems to be very hard, and if that would do any good might be just matter of complaint, that we are fallen into so prophane and sceptical an age which takes a pleasure and a pride in unravilling almost all the received principles both of Religion and Reason: So that we are put many times to prove those things which can hardly be made plainer than they are of themselves. And such almost are these Principles, *That God is*, and *That all things were made by him*; which by reason of the bold cavils of perverse and unreasonable men we are now a-days put to defend.

That something is of it self is evident, because we see things are. And the things that we see must either have had some first cause of their being, or have been always and of themselves. One of these two is unavoidable.

So that the controversie between us and this sort of Atheist comes to this; Which is the more credible opinion, that the world was never made nor had a beginning but always was as it is, and that there hath been from all eternity a succession

of men and other creatures without any first cause of their being: or, that there was from all eternity such a *being* as we conceive *God* to be, infinite in power, goodness and wisdom, which made us and all other things; The *first* of these opinions I shall shew to be altogether incredible, and the *latter* to have all the credibility and evidence of which a thing of that nature is capable, and such evidence as is sufficient to convince any impartial and considerate man.

Now in comparing the probabilities of things, that we may know on which side the advantage lies, these two considerations are of great moment, What the arguments are on each side, and what the difficulties. For if there be fair proofs on the one side, and none at all on the other, and if the most pressing difficulties be on that side on which there are no proofs: this is sufficient to render *one* opinion very credible and the *other* altogether incredible.

These *two things* therefore I shall endeavour to make good, in the matter that is now under our consideration. *First*, That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the things is capable of; but that there is no pretence of

of proof on the other. And *Secondly*, That the side on which there is no proof is incumbered with the greatest difficulties.

First, That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence of proof on the other.

This Question, *Whether the world was created and had a beginning, or not?* is a question concerning an ancient matter of fact, which can onely be decided these two ways; by *testimony*, and by *probabilities of reason*. *Testimony*, is the principal argument in a matter of this nature, and if fair *probabilities of reason* concur with it this argument hath all the strength it can have: Now both these are clearly on the affirmative side of the question, *viz.* That the world was created, and had a beginning.

1. *Testimony*; of which there be two kinds, *Divine* and *Humane*.

Divine testimony, as such, is not proper to be us'd in this cause considering the occasion of the present debate: For that would be to beg the first and main question now in controversy, which is, *Whether there be a God or not?* which a testimony from God does suppose, and therefore ought not to be brought for the proof

of it. 'Tis true indeed that those effects of Divine Power, I mean miracles which will prove a divine testimony to an infidel, will as well prove the being of a God to an Atheist; But when we dispute against those who deny a God no testimony ought to be presum'd to be from God, but must be prov'd to be so. And whatever argument proves that will also prove that there is a God.

Humane testimonies are of two sorts; *universal tradition*, and *written History*. Both these are plainly and beyond dispute on our side.

First, There is an *universal tradition* concerning the beginning of the world, and that it was made by God. And for the evidence of this we have the concurring Tradition of the most ancient Nations, the *Egyptians* and *Phœnicians**; and of the most barbarous the *Indians*; who as *Strabo* † tells us, did in many things agree with the *Grecians*, particularly in this, that the world did begin, and should have an end; and that God the maker and governor of it, is present in all parts of it. And *Acosta* tells us, that at the first discovery of *America*, the inhabitants of *Peru* did worship one chief God, under the name or title of *The Maker of the*
Uni-

* Vide
Grot. de
verit. Chr
Relig.
L. 1.
† Geo-
graph.
L. 15.

Universe: And yet these people had not had any commerce with the other known parts of the world, for God knows how many ages.

To which may be added, that the most ancient of the Philosophers, and those that were the heads of the chief Sects of Philosophy, as *Thales*, *Anaxagoras* and *Pythagoras* did likewise consent to this Tradition. Particularly concerning *Thales*, *Tully** tells us that he was the first of all the Philosophers that enquired into these things, and he said, that water was the beginning of all things, and that God was that mind (or intelligent Principle) which fashion'd all things out of water. So likewise *Strabo** informs us that the *Brachmans*, the chief Sect of Philosophers among the *Indians*, agreed with the *Grecians* in this, That the world was made of water. Which agrees exactly with *Moses's* account of the Creation, viz. That the Spirit of God moved upon the face of waters; which *St. Peter** expresses thus, That by the word of God the heavens and the earth (for so the Hebrews call the world) were of old constituted or made of water; not standing out of the water, as our Translation renders it.

* De Nat.
Deorum
L. 1.

* Geogr.
L. 15.

* 2 Pet.
3. 5.

* Metaph. L. 1. c. 3. Nay *Aristotle* * himself, who was the great asserter of the eternity of the world, gives this account why the Gods were anciently represented by the Heathens as swearing by the lake *Styx*, because water was supposed to be the *principle of all things*. And this, he tells us, was the *most ancient opinion* concerning the original of the world; and that the *very oldest Writers of Theology*, and those who liv'd at the *greatest distance from his time*, were of this mind. And in the Book *de Mundo* * it is freely acknowledg'd to have been an ancient saying, and a general Tradition among all men, *That all things are of God, and were made by him*. I will conclude this with that full Testimony of *Maximus Tyrimen* * to this purpose: *However (says he) men may differ in other things, yet they all agree in this Law or Principle, that there is one God, King, and Father of all things, &c. This the Greeks say, this the Barbarians; this those that live upon the Continent, and those that dwell by the Sea; the wise and the unwise.*

* Differ-
tat. 1.

Secondly, We have likewise a most *ancient and credible History* of the beginning of the world; I mean the *History of Moses*, with which no Book in the world in point of antiquity can contend. I shall not

not now go about to strengthen my argument, by pleading the *Divine authority* of this Book; for which yet I could offer good evidence, if that were proper to the matter^m hand. It is sufficient to my present purpose that *Moses* have the ordinary credit of an *Historian* given him, which none in reason can deny him, he being cited by the most ancient of the *Heathen Historians*, and the antiquity of his writings never questioned by any of them, as *Josephus* * assures us.

* L. 1.
contra
Appion.

Now this *History of Moses* gives us a particular account of the beginning of the world, and of the creation of it by God. Which assertion of his is agreeable to the most ancient *Writers* among the *Heathen*, whether *Poets* or *Historians*. And several of the main parts of *Moses's* History, as concerning the *Floud* and the *first Fathers* of the *several Nations* of the World (of which he gives a particular account, *Gen. 10.*) do very well accord with the most ancient accounts of *Prophane History*. And I do not know, whether any thing ought more to recommend the *Writings of Moses* to a humane belief, than the easie and credible account which he gives of the original of the World, and of the first peopling of it.

As

As to the account of ancient times, both the *Aegyptian* and *Chaldean* accounts, which are pretended by some to be so vastly different from that of the *Scriptures*, may for all that be, near the matter, easily reconcil'd with it *; if we do but admit what *Diodorus Siculus* and *Plutarch*, very credible persons and diligent searchers into ancient Books, do most expressly assure us, *viz.* that both those *Nations* did anciently reckon months for years. And the account of the *Chineses* is not hard to be reconcil'd with that of the *Septuagint*. Now in so nice and obscure a matter, as the account of ancient times is, it ought to satisfy any fair and reasonable enquirer if they can be brought any whit near one another.

So that *universal Tradition* and the most *ancient History* in the world are clearly on our side. And if they be, one can hardly wish a more convincing argument. For if the world and consequently mankind had a beginning, there is all the reason in the world to expect these two things: *First*, that there should be an *universal Tradition*, concerning this matter; because it was the most memorable thing that could be transmitted to posterity. And this was easy to be done, if mankind sprang from one common

* Vide Dr. Stillingfleet's Orig. Sac. where this is fully made out.

common root and original, from whence this *Tradition* would naturally be universally diffus'd. *Secondly*, it may with the same reason be expected, that so remarkable a thing should be recorded in the most ancient *History*. Now both these have accordingly happened. But then on the other hand, if the world was eternal and had no beginning there could be no real ground for such a *Tradition* or *History*. And if such a *Tradition* were at any time endeavoured to be set on foot, it is not easy to imagine how it should at first gain entertainment, but much more difficult to conceive how ever it should come to be *universally* propagated. For upon the *supposition* of those who hold the eternity of the world; the world was always peopled; and if so, there could be no common head or spring from whence such a *Tradition* would naturally derive it self into all parts of the world. So that unless all the world was sometime of one *language*, and under one *Government* (which it never was that we know of since it was peopled) no endeavour and industry could make such a *Tradition* common.

If it be said, that this *Tradition* began after some universal deluge, out of which possibly but one family might escape, and

that

that possibly too of barbarous people; from whom any fond and groundless conceit might spring and afterwards spread it self as mankind encreas'd. This I shall have occasion to consider in a more proper place. In the mean time I have shewn, even from the acknowledgment of *Aristotle* himself, that there was anciently such a Tradition concerning the beginning of the world. Nay, if we may believe him, he himself was the very first asserter of the eternity of the world. For he * says expressly, *That all the Philosophers that were before him, did hold that the world was made.* Thus much for the first kind of proof this matter is capable of, namely, *testimony.*

*De Cœlo. l. 1. c. 10.

2dly. The probabilities of reason do all likewise favour the beginning of the world: As,

1. The want of any *History* or *Tradition* ancients than what is consistent with the received opinion of the time of the worlds beginning; nay, the most ancient Histories were written long after that time. This *Lucretius*, the famous *Epicurean*, urgeth as a strong presumption that the world had a beginning

— *Si nulla fuit genitalis origo
Terrarum & Cæli, semperque aeterna fuerit:
Cur*

*Cur supra bellum Thebanum, & funera Troje,
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere Poetae?*
i. e. *If the world had no beginning, how is it that the Greek Poets (the most ancient of their Writers) mention nothing higher than the Theban war, and the destruction of Troy? Were there from all eternity no memorable actions done till about that time? Or had mankind no way till of late to record them and propagate the memory of them to posterity? It is much if men were from eternity, that they should not find out the way of writing all that long duration, which had past before that Time. Sure he was a fortunate man indeed, who after men had been eternally so dull as not to find it out, had the luck at last to hit upon it.*

But it may be, the famous actions of former times were always recorded, but that the memorials of them have been several times lost by universal deluges, which have now and then happen'd and swept all away, except (it may be) two or three persons, that have escap'd and begun the world again upon a new score. This is the onely refuge that the *Atheist* hath to fly to, when he is prest with this and the like arguments. But he cannot possibly escape this way. For these universal inundations must

must either be *natural* or *supernatural*. If they be *supernatural*, (as any man that considers well the frame of the world, and how hard it is, to give a natural reason of them, would be inclin'd to think) then indeed it is easie to conceive how a few of mankind, and no more, should escape: Because this will depend upon the pleasure of that superiour Being which is supposed supernaturally to order these things. But this is to yield what we have all this while contended for, *viz.* That there is a God. But if they be *natural*, which the *Atheist* must say, then there is nothing to restrain them from a total destruction, not onely of mankind, but of all the beasts of the earth. This the *Atheist* cannot deny, not onely to be very possible, but exceeding probable; because he grants it to have come so near the matter, that but very few escap'd, and no doubt with great difficulty. Now it is the greatest wonder in the world, that a thing (according to their own supposition) so likely to happen, should never have fallen out in an infinite duration. Will any man have the face to say that a thing is likely which did never yet happen from all eternity? One would think that not onely whatever is probable, but whatever can possibly happen

pen should be brought about in that space: So that if mankind had been from eternity it had in all probability, I had almost said, been destroyed from all eternity, but I may confidently say, long since ruin'd.

2. Another *probability* of the worlds beginning is, the account which we have of the *original of Learning and the most useful Arts* in several parts of the world. Now if the world had been eternal, these in all likelihood would have been found out, and generally spread long ago and beyond the memory of all ages. There are some *Arts* indeed that are peculiarly convenient to some particular Nations; and others that are onely serviceable to the humour and fashion of one or more ages. These are not likely to spread, and they may come in, and go out, and return again as often as there is occasion. But those which are generally usefull to mankind in all times and places, if they were once found out (and who would not think they should in an eternal duration?) it is not imaginable but that they should have been spread innumerable ages since: Nor can any man give a good reason how they should ever be lost, but by some such accident as an universal deluge, which has been spoken to already. But now on the contrary, the beginnings of

of *Learning* and of the most useful *Arts* in several Nations, is very well known. And I add farther, that where-ever Learning and Civil Arts have come this *Tradition* concerning the beginning of the world hath been most vigorous, and asserted with the greatest clearness and confidence.

3. The several parts of which the world consists, being (so far as by those parts of it which we know, we can possibly judge of the rest) in their nature corruptible; it is more than probable, that in an infinite duration this frame of things would long since have been dissolv'd; especially, if (as the *Atheist* affirms) there be no superior being, no wise and intelligent principle to repair and regulate it, and to prevent those innumerable disorders and calamitous accidents, which must in so long a space in all probability have happen'd to it.

* L. 5.

This *Lucretius* * also urges as a convincing proof that the world was not eternal,

*Quare etiam nativa necesse est confiteare
Hæc eadem; neq; enim mortali corpore quæ sunt
Ex infinito jam tempore adhuc potuissent
Immensi validas ævi contemnere vires.*

It must necessarily (says he) be acknowledged that the world had a beginning; otherwise

wise

wise those things which are in their own nature corruptible had never been able, from all eternity to have held out against those forcible and violent assaults which in an infinite duration must have happen'd. Nay, thus much *Aristotle* himself every where grants, that if the frame of the world be liable to dissolution, it must of necessity be acknowledg'd to have had a beginning.

These are some of the chief Probabilities on our side; which being taken together, and in their united force, have a great deal of conviction in them. Especially if this be added, that there is no kind of positive proof so much as pretended on the other side. The utmost that *Aristotle* pretends to prove, is, That the world proceeded from God by the way of a natural and necessary effect, as light does from the Sun. Which if it be true (as there is no tolerable ground for it) the World indeed would be without beginning, but not of it self. And thus I have done with the first consideration I propounded to speak to, viz. That there are fair proofs on our side, and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of; but that there is no pretence or proof on the other. I proceed therefore to the

D

Second

Second Consideration, That the most pressing difficulties are on that side on which there is no proof.

Those who deny a God, and hold the world to have been eternal and of it self, have onely two things to object against us: The difficulties that there are in the *notion of a God, and in making the world of nothing.* To the *first* I answer: That we attribute nothing to God that hath any repugnancy or contradiction in it. *Power, wisdom, goodness, justice and truth,* have no repugnancy in them to our reason; because we own these Perfections to be in some degree in our selves; and therefore they may be in the highest degree that is possible in another. The *eternity* of God and his *immensity*, and his *being of himself*, how difficult soever they may be to be conceived, yet these perfections must be granted to be somewhere; and therefore they may as well, nay much better, be ascrib'd to God, in whom we suppose all other perfections to meet, than to any thing else. And as for God's being a *spirit*, whatever difficulty there may be in conceiving the notion of a *spirit*, yet the *Atheist* must grant the thing, that there is a being or principle really distinct from matter; or else shew how meer
matter

matter, which is confessed by themselves to be void of sense and understanding, and to move necessarily, can produce any thing that has sense, understanding and liberty. As to the *other* difficulty, of *making the world of nothing*, I shall onely say this: that though it signifie an inconceivable excess of power, yet there can no contradiction be shewn in it. And it is every whit as easie to conceive that something should be caus'd to be that was not before, as that any thing should be of it self; which yet must be granted on both sides; and therefore this difficulty ought not to be objected by either.

But then on the other side there are these *two* great and real difficulties. *First*, That men generally have always believed the contrary, *viz.* That the World had a beginning, and was made by God. Which is a strong evidence that this account of the existence of the world is more natural, and of a more easie conception to humane understanding. And indeed it is very natural to conceive that every thing which is imperfect (as the world and all the creatures in it must be acknowledged in many respects to be) had some cause which produc'd it, such as it is, and determin'd the bounds and
D 2 limits

limitss of its perfection : but that which is of it self and without a cause , may be any thing, and have any perfection which does not imply a contradiction. *Secondly*, To assert mankind to have been of it self, and without a cause, hath this invincible objection against it ; that we plainly see every man to be from another. So that mankind is asserted to have no cause of its being, and yet every particular man must be acknowledged to have a father ; which is every whit as absurd in an infinite succession of men , as in any finite number of generations. It is more easie indeed to conceive how a constant and permanent being, suppose *matter*, should always have been of it self ; and then that *that* should be the foundation of infinite successive changes and alterations : But an infinite succession of the generations of men without any permanent foundation, is utterly unimaginable. If it be said that the *earth* was always, and in time did produce *men*, and that they ever since have produc'd one another ; this is to run into one great absurdity of the *Epicurean* way, which shall be consider'd in its proper place.

And thus I have endeavour'd as plainly and briefly as the nature of the Argument

ment would admit, to prove that the account which the *Scripture* gives of the existence of the world, is most credible, and agreeable to the reason of mankind ; and that this *First* account which the *Atheist* gives of it, is altogether incredible. And now I expect after all this the *Atheist* will complain, that all that hath been said does not amount to a *strict demonstration* of the thing. It may be so. And if the *Atheist* would undertake to *demonstrate* the contrary, there might be some reason for this complaint. In the mean time I desire to know whether when both sides are agreed that the world is, and that it must either have its original from God, or have been always of it self ; and if it have been made evident, that on *one side* there are fair *proofs* both from *testimony* and *reason* and as convincing as the nature of the thing is capable of, and no pretence of proof on the *other* ; and that the *difficulties* are most pressing on that *side* which is destitute of proof ; I say, if this have been made evident, I desire to know whether this be not upon the matter as satisfactory to a wise man as a *demonstration*? For in this case there can be no doubt on which side the clear advantage of evidence lies, and consequently

requently which way a prudent man ought to determine assent.

I come now in the *Second* place, to consider the *other account* which another sort of *Atheists*, those whom I call the *Epicurean*, do give of the existence of the world. And 'tis this. They suppose the matter of which the world is constituted to be eternal and of it self, and then an infinite empty space for the infinite little parts of this matter (which they call *Atomes*) to move and play in; and that these being always in motion did after infinite trials and encounters, without any counsel or design and without the disposal and contrivance of any wise and intelligent being, at last by a lucky casualty entangle and settle themselves in this beautiful and regular frame of the world which we now see. And that the Earth, being at first in its full vigour and fruitfulness, did then bring forth men and all other sorts of living creatures as it does plants now.

This is in short the *Epicurean* account of the original of the world, which as absurd as it is *Lucretius** hath very elegantly expressed in these verses.

Sed

*Sed quibus ille modis coniectus materiai,
Fundarit cælum ac terram, pontique profunda,
Solisque & lunæ cursus, ex ordine ponam.
Nam certe neque consilio primordia rerum
Ordine se quæque, atque sagaci mente locarunt,
Nec quos quæq; darent motus pepigere profecto:
Sed quia multa modis multis primordia rerum
Ex infinito iam tempore percita plagis
Ponderibusque suis consuerunt concita ferri,
Omnimodisque coire, atque omnia pertentare,
Quæcunque inter se possent congressa creare:
Propterea fit, uti magnum vulgata per ævum
Omnigenos cætus, & motus experiundo,
Tandem ea conveniant, quæ ut convenere, re-
Magnarum rerum fiunt exordia sæpe, [pente
Terrai, maris & cæli, generisque animantum.*

Thus he like a good *Poet*, but a very bad maker and contriver of the world. For I appeal to any man of reason whether any thing can be more unreasonable, than obstinately to impute an effect to chance which carries in the very face of it all the arguments and characters of a wise design, and contrivance? Was ever any considerable work, in which there was required a great variety of parts and a regular and orderly disposition of those parts, done by chance? Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and

D 4

not

not fail in any one? How often might a man after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact Poem, yea or so much as make a good discourse in Prose? And may not a little *Book* be as easily made by chance, as this great *Volume* of the world? How long might a man be in sprinkling colours upon Canvas with a careless hand, before they would happen to make the exact Picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance than his Picture? How long might twenty thousand *blind men*, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of *England*, wander up and down before they would all meet upon *Salisbury plains* and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an Army? And yet this is much more easie to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man that sees *Henry the Seventh's Chappel* at *Westminster* might with as good reason maintain (yea with much better, considering the vast difference betwixt that little structure and the huge fabrick of the world) that it was never contrived or built by any man, but that the stones did by chance grow into those curious figures

figures into which they seem to have been cut and graven; and that *upon a time* (as tales usually begin) the materials of that building, the stone, mortar, timber, iron, lead, and glass, happily met together and very fortunately rang'd themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now so close compacted that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an opinion as this, and write a *Book* for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad: but yet with a little more reason than any man can have to say that the world was made by chance; or that the first men grew up out of the earth as plants do now. For can any thing be more ridiculous and against all reason, than to ascribe the production of men to the first fruitfulness of the earth, without so much as one instance and experiment in any Age or History to countenance so monstrous a supposition? The thing is at first-sight so gross and palpable, that no discourse about it can make it more apparent. And yet these shameful beggars of Principles, who give this precarious account of the original of things, assume to themselves to be the men of reason, the great

great wits of the world the onely *cautious* and wary persons that hate to be imposed upon, that must have convincing evidence for every thing, and can admit of nothing without a clear demonstration for it.

II. *Speculative atheism* is unreasonable, because it gives no reasonable account of the *universal consent* of mankind in this apprehension, *that there is a God*. That men do generally believe a God, and have done in all Ages, the present experience of the world and the records of former times do abundantly testify. Now how comes this persuasion to have gained so universal a possession of the mind of man, and to have found such general entertainment in all Nations, even those that are most barbarous? If there be no such thing as God in the world, how comes it to pass that this object doth continually encounter our understandings? Whence is it that we are so perpetually haunted with the apparition of a Deity, and followed with it wherever we go? If it be not natural to the mind of man, but proceeds from some accidental distemper of our understandings, how comes it to be so universal that no differences of age, or temper, or education can wear it out, and set any considerable
number

number of men free from it; Into what can we resolve this strong inclination of mankind to this error and mistake? How come all Nations to be thus seduced? It is altogether unimaginal but that the reason of so universal a consent in all places and ages of the world, and among all differences of persons, should be one and constant. But no one and constant reason of this can be given, but from the nature of man's mind and understanding which hath this notion of a Deity born with it and stamped upon it; or which is all one, is of such a frame that in the free use and exercise of it self it will find out God: And what more reasonable than to think, that if we be God's workmanship, he should set this mark of himself upon all reasonable creatures, that they may know to whom they belong, and may acknowledge the *Author* of their beings? This seems to be a credible and satisfactory account of so *universal a consent* in this matter. But now what doth the *Atheist* resolve this into? He is not at one with himself what account to give of it, nor can it be expected he should. For he that will over-look the true reason of a thing which usually is but one, may easily find many false ones, error being infinite, But there are *three*
which

which he principally relies upon, *fear*, *tradition*, and *policy of State*. I shall briefly consider these.

First, He would make us believe that this apprehension of a God doth spring from an infinite *jealousie* in the mind of man, and an endless fear of the worst that may happen; according to that *divine saying* of the Poet, which he can never sufficiently admire,

Primum in orbe Deos fecit timor,—

Fear first made Gods. So that it is granted on both sides that the *fear of a Deity* doth universally possess the minds of men. Now the question is, whether it be more likely that the existence of a God should be the cause of this fear, or that this fear should be the cause why men imagine there is a God? if there be a God, who hath impressed this image of himself upon the mind of Man, there's great reason why all men should stand in awe of him: But if there be no God, it is not easie to conceive how fear should create an universal confidence and assurance in men that there is one. For, whence should this fear come? It must be either from without, from the suggestion of others who first tell us there is such a *being* and then our fear believes it, or else it must arise from within, from the nature of man which is apt to fancy
dreadfull

dreadfull and terrible things. If from the suggestion of others who tell us so, the question returns, who told *them* so? and will never be satisfied till the first Author of this report be found out. So that this account of *fear* resolves it self into *tradition*, which shall be spoken to in its proper place. But if it be said that this fear ariseth from within, from the nature of man which is apt to imagine dreadfull things, this likewise is liable to inexplicable difficulties. For, *First*, The proper object of fear, is something that is dreadfull, that is, something that threatens men with harm or danger; and that in God must either be power or justice; and such an object as this fear indeed may create: But Goodness and Mercy are essential to the notion of a God as well as power and justice: now how should fear put men upon fancying a being that is infinitely good and merciful? No man hath reason to be afraid of such a being, as such. So that the *Atheist* must joyn another cause to fear, *viz.* hope, to enable men to create this imagination of a God. And what would the product of these two contrary passions be? the imagination of a being which we should fear would do us as much harm as we could hope it would do us
good;

good ; which would be *quid pro quo*, and which our reason would oblige us to lay aside so soon as we have fancied it, because it would signifie just nothing. But, *Secondly*, suppose fear alone could do it; how comes the mind of man to be subject to such groundless and unreasonable fears? The *Aristotelian* Atheist will say, it always was so; But this is to affirm, and not to give any account of a thing. The *Epicurean* Atheist, if he will speak consonantly to himself, must say that there happened in the original constitution of the first men such a contexture of *Atomes* as doth naturally dispose men to these panick fears; unless he will say that the first men when they grew out of the earth and afterwards broke loose from their root, finding themselves weak and naked and unarmed and meeting with several fierce Creatures stronger than themselves, they were put into such a fright as did a little dis-temper their understandings and let loose their imaginations to endless suspicions and unbounded jealousies, which did at last settle in the conceit of an invisible *being* infinitely powerful, and able to do them harm; and being fully possess'd with this apprehension (nothing being more ordinary than for crazed persons to believe their

own

own fancies) they became religious; and afterwards when mankind began to be propagated in the way of generation, then Religion obliged them to instill these *Principles* into their Children in their tender years that so they might make the greater impression upon them; and this course having been continued ever since the notion of a God hath been kept up in the world. This is very suitable to *Epicurus* his *Hypothesis* of the original of men; But if any man think fit to say thus I cannot think it fit to confute him. *Thirdly*, whether men were from all eternity such timorous and fancifull Creatures, or hapned to be made so in the first constitution of things, it seems however that this *fear* of a Deity hath a foundation in nature. And if it be natural, ought we not rather to conclude that there is some ground and reason for these *fears*, and that nature hath not planted them in us to no purpose, than that they are vain and groundless? There is no principle that *Aristotle* (the great assertor of the eternity of the world) doth more frequently inculcate than this, *That nature doeth nothing in vain*; and the *Atheist* himself is forc'd to acknowledge (and so every man must who attentively considers the frame of the world) That al-

though

though things were made by chance, yet they have happen'd as well as if the greatest wisdom had the ordering and contriving of them. And surely wisdom would never have planted such a vain principle as the fear of a Deity in the nature of man, if there had not been a God in the world.

Secondly, If *fear* be not a sufficient account of this universal consent, the *Atheist* thinks it may very probably be resolved into *universal Tradition*. But this likewise is liable to great exception. For, whence came this Tradition? It must begin some time, it must have its original from some body; and it were very well worth our knowing who that man was that first raised this spirit which all the reason of mankind could never conjure down since. *Where* did he live, and *when*? In what *Countrey*, and in what *Age* of the world? *What was his name, or his sons name, that we may know him?* This the *Atheist* can give no punctual account of: only he imagines it not improbable that some body long ago (no body knows when) beyond the memory of all Ages did start such a notion in the world and that it hath past for current ever since. But if this *Tradition* be granted so very ancient as to have been before all Books
and

and to be elder than any History, it may for any thing any body can tell have been from the beginning; and then it is much more likely to be a notion which was bred in the mind of man and born with him, than a *Tradition* transmitted from hand to hand through all Generations; especially if we consider how many rude and barbarous Nations there are in the world which consent in the opinion of a God, and yet have scarce any certain *Tradition* of any thing that was done among them but two or three Ages before.

Thirdly, But if neither of these be satisfactory, he hath one way more; which although it signifie little to men of sober and severe Reason, yet it very unhappily hits the jealous and suspicious humour of the generality of men, who from the experience they have had of themselves and others are very apt to suspect that every body, but especially their Superiours and Governours, have a design to impose upon them for their own ends. In short, it is this: that this noise about a God is a mere State-Engine and a Politick device, invented at first by some great Prince or Minister of State, to keep People in awe and order. And if so, from hence (saith the *Atheist*) we may easily apprehend how
E from

from such an original it might be generally propagated and become universally current, having the stamp of publick authority upon it. Besides, that people have always been found easie to comply with the inclinations of their Prince. And from hence likewise we may see the reason why this notion had continued so long. For being found by experience to be so excellent an instrument of government we may be sure it would always be cherished and kept up.

And now he triumphs, and thinks the business is very clear: Thus it was, some time or other, (most probably towards the beginning of the world, if it had a beginning, when all mankind was under one universal Monarch) some great *Nebuchadnezzar* set up this *Image* of a *Deity*, and commanded *all people and Nations to fall down and worship it*: And this being found a successful device to awe people into obedience to government it hath been continued to this day, and is like to last to the end of the world. To this fine Conjecture I have these four things to say:

1. That all this is mere conjecture and supposition; *he* cannot bring the least shadow of proof or evidence for any one tittle of it.

2. This

2. This supposition grants the opinion of a God to conduce very much to the support of government and order in the world; and consequently to be very beneficial to mankind. So that the Atheist cannot but acknowledge that it is great pity that it should not be true, and that it is the common interest of mankind, if there were but probable Arguments for it, not to admit of any slight reasons against it; and to punish all those who would seduce men to Atheism, as the great disturbers of the world and pests of humane Society.

3. This supposition can have nothing of certainty in it unless this be true, *that whoever makes a politick advantage of other mens principles ought to be presumed to contrive those principles into them*, Whereas it is much more common (because more easie) for men to serve their own ends of those principles or opinions which they do not put into men but find there. So that if the question of a God were to be decided by the probability of this conjecture, (which the Atheist applauds himself most in) it would be concluded in the affirmative; It being much more likely, since Politicians reap the advantages of obedience and a more ready submission to government from mens believing that there

E 2

is

is a God, that they found the minds of men prepossessed to their hands with the notion of a God, than that they planted it there.

4. We have as much evidence of the contrary to this supposition as such a thing is capable of, *viz.* that it was not an *arcanum imperii*, a *secret of government* to propagate the belief of a God among the people when the Governours themselves knew it to be a cheat. For we find in the Histories of all Ages of which we have any records, (and of other Ages we cannot possibly judge) that Princes have not been more secure from troubles of conscience and the fears of Religion and the terrors of another world, (nay many of them more subject to these) than other men, as I could give many instances, and those no mean ones: What made *Caligula* creep under the bed when it thunder'd? What made *Tiberius*, that great Master of the crafts of government complain so much of the grievous *stings* and *lashes* he felt in his Conscience? What made *Cardinal Woolsey* (that great Minister of State in our own Nation) to pour forth his soul in those sad words, *Had I been as diligent to please my God as I have been to please my King, he would not have forsaken me now in my gray hairs?* What reason for such actions and speeches, if these

these great men had known that Religion was but a cheat? But if they knew nothing of this secret, I think we may safely conclude that the notion of a God did not come from the Court, that it was not the invention of Politicians and a juggle of State to cozen the people into obedience.

And now from all this that hath been said it seems to be very evident, that the general consent of mankind in this apprehension *that there is a God* must in all reason be ascribed to some more certain and universal cause than *fear* or *tradition* or *State-policy*, *viz.* to *this* that God himself hath wrought this image of himself upon the mind of man, and so woven it into the very frame of his being that (like *Phidias* his Picture in *Minerva's* Shield) it can never totally be defaced without the ruine of humane nature.

I know but one *Objection* that this discourse is liable to, which is this; That the universal consent of mankind in the apprehension of a God is no more an Argument that *He* really is, than the general agreement of so many Nations for so many Ages in the worship of many Gods is an Argument that there are many.

To this I answer, 1. That the generality of the *Philosophers* and wise men of

all Nations and Ages, did dissent from the multitude in these things. They believed but one Supreme Deity, which with respect to the various benefits men received from him had several titles bestowed upon him. And although they did fervently comply with the people in worshipping God, by sensible images and representations, yet it appears by their writings that they despised this way of worship as superstitious and unsuitable to the nature of God. So that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* are far from being able to pretend to universal consent from their having had the vote of the multitude in most Nations for several Ages together. Because the opinion of the vulgar separated from the consent and approbation of the wise, signifies no more than a great many Cyphers would do without figures.

2. The gross ignorance and mistakes of the *Heathen* about God and his worship are a good argument that there is a God; because they shew that men sunk into the most degenerate condition, into the greatest blindness and darkness imaginable, do yet retain some sense and awe of a Deity; that Religion is a property of our natures and that the notion of a Deity is intimate to our understandings and sticks close to them,

them, seeing men will rather have any God than none; and rather than want a Deity they will worship any thing.

3. That there have been so many false Gods devis'd, is rather an argument that there is a true one than that there is none. There would be no counterfeits but for the sake of something that is real. For though all pretenders seem to be what they really are not, yet they pretend to be something that really is. For to counterfeit is to put on the likeness and appearance of some real excellency. There would be no Brass-money if there were not good and lawful money. *Bristol-Stones* would not pretend to be Diamonds, if there never had been any Diamonds. Those *Idols* in *Henry* the seventh's time (as *Sir Francis Bacon* calls them) *Lambert Simnell* and *Perkin Warbeck*, had never been set up if there had not once been a real *Plantagenet* and *Duke of York*. So the *Idols* of the *Heathen* though they be set up in affront to the true God, yet they rather prove that there is *one* than the contrary.

III. *Speculative Atheism* is absurd, because it requires more evidence for things than they are capable of. *Aristotle* hath long since well observed, how unreasonable it is to expect the same kind of proof

and evidence for every thing, which we have for some things. *Mathematical* things, being of an abstracted nature are capable of the clearest and strictest *Demonstration*: But *Conclusions* in *Natural Philosophy* are capable of proof by an *Induction* of experiments; things of a *moral* nature by *moral* arguments; and *matters of fact* by *credible testimony*. And though none of these be capable of that strict kind of *demonstration*, which *Mathematical* matters are; yet have we an undoubted assurance of them, when they are proved by the best arguments that things of that kind will bear. No man can demonstrate to me (unless we will call every argument that is fit to convince a wise man a demonstration) that there is such an *Island* in *America* as *Jamaica*. Yet upon the testimony of credible persons who have seen it, and Authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as I am from doubting of the clearest *Mathematical* demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm *Principle* by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all: *That when any thing in any of these kinds, is proved by as good Arguments as a thing of that kind is capable of, and we have as great assurance that it is as we could possibly have*
supposing

supposing it were, we ought not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing.

Now to apply this to the present case. The being of a God is not *Mathematically* demonstrable, nor can it be expected it should, because only *Mathematical* matters admit of this kind of evidence. Nor can it be proved *immediately* by *sense*, because *God* being supposed to be a pure spirit cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a God as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of; and as we could in reason expect to have supposing that he were. For let us suppose there were such a *Being* as an *Infinite Spirit*, clothed with all possible perfection, *that is*, as *good* and *wise* and *powerfull*, &c. as can be imagined: what conceivable ways are there whereby we should come to be assured that there is such a *Being*? but either by an internal impression of the notion of a God upon our minds; or else by such external and visible effects as our Reason tells us must be attributed to some cause, and which we cannot without great violence to our understandings attribute to any other cause but such a *Being* as we conceive God to be, *that is*, one that is infinitely good, and *wise*, and *powerfull*? Now we
 have

have this double assurance that there is a God; and greater, or other than this the thing is not capable of: If God should assume a body and present himself before our eyes, this might amaze us but could not give us any rational assurance that there is an *Infinite Spirit*. If he should work a Miracle; this could not in reason convince an Atheist more than the arguments he already hath for it. If the Atheist then were to *ask a sign in the heaven above, or in the earth beneath*, what could he desire God to do for his conviction more than he hath already done? Could he desire him to work a greater Miracle than to make a world? Why, if God should carry this *perverse man* out of the limits of this world, and shew him a *new heaven* and a *new earth*, springing out of nothing, he might say that innumerable parts of matter chanc'd just then to rally together and to form themselves into this new world, and that God did not make it. Thus you see that we have all the rational assurance of a God that the thing is capable of, and that *atheism* is absurd and unreasonable in requiring more.

IV. The *Atheist* is unreasonable, because he pretends to know that which no man can know, and to be certain of that which

no

no body can be certain of; that is, *that there is no God*, and which is consequent upon this (as I shall shew afterwards) *that it is not possible there should be one*. And the Atheist must pretend to know this certainly. For it were the greatest folly in the world for a man to deny and despise God, if he be not certain that *He* is not. Now whoever pretends to be certain that there is no God hath this great disadvantage, he pretends to be certain of a pure *Negative*. But of *negatives* we have far the least certainty, and they are usually hardest, and many times impossible to be proved. Indeed such *negatives* as onely deny some particular mode or manner of a things existence, a man may have a certainty of *them*; because when we see things to be, we may see what they are, and in what manner they do or do not exist. *For instance*, we may be certain that man is not a creature that hath wings, because this only concerns the manner of his existence; and we seeing what he is, may certainly know that he is not so, or so. But *pure negatives*, that is, such as absolutely deny the existence of things, or the possibility of their existence, can never be proved. For after all that can be said against a thing this will still be true, that

many

many things possibly are which we know not of, and that many more things may be than are; and if so, after all our arguments against a thing it will be uncertain whether it be or not. And this is universally true, unless the thing denied to be do plainly imply a contradiction; from which I have already shewn the notion of a God to be free. Now the Atheist pretends to be certain of a *pure negative*, that there is no such being as God, and that it is not possible there should be: But no man can reasonably pretend to know thus much, but he must pretend to know all things that are or can be; which if any man should be so vain as to pretend to, yet it is to be hoped that no body would be so weak as to believe him.

V. *Speculative atheism* is unreasonable, because it contradicts it self. There is this great contradiction in the denial of a God. He that denies a God, says that *that is impossible* which yet he must grant to be *possible*. He says it is *impossible* that there should be such a *Being* as God, in saying that *de facto* there is no such *being*. For *eternity* being essential to the notion of a God, if there be not a God already it is impossible now that there should be one; because such a being as is supposed to be essentially eter-
nal

nal and without beginning cannot *now begin to be*. And yet he must grant it possible that there should be such a *being*, because it is possible there should be such a *being* as hath all possible perfection; and such a *being* as this is that which we call *God*, and is that very thing which the Atheist denies and others affirm to be. For he that denies a God, must deny such a being as all the world describe God to be; and this is the general notion which all men have of God, *that he is a being as perfect as is possible*; that is, endued with all such perfections as do not imply a contradiction, which none of those perfections which we attribute to God do, as I have already prov'd.

II. *Speculative atheism* as it is *unreasonable*, so is it a most *imprudent* and uncomfortable opinion: And that upon these *two* accounts. *First*, because it is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. *Secondly*, because it is infinitely hazardous and unsafe in the issue.

I. It is against the present interest and happiness of mankind. If *Atheism* were the general Opinion of the World, it would be infinitely prejudicial to the peace and happiness of *humane Society*, and would open a wide door to all manner of confusion and disorder. But this I shall not now in-
fist

sist upon, because I design a particular Discourse of *that* by it self.

I shall at present content my self to shew, how uncomfortable an opinion this would be to particular persons. For nothing can be more evident than that *man* is not sufficient of himself to his own happiness. He is liable to many evils and miseries which he can neither prevent nor redress. He is full of wants which he cannot supply, and compass'd about with infirmities which he cannot remove, and obnoxious to dangers which he can never sufficiently provide against. Consider *man* without the protection and conduct of a *superior Being*, and he is secure of nothing that he enjoys in this world, and uncertain of every thing that he hopes for. He is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and eagerly to desire what he is never likely to obtain. *Man walketh in a vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain.* He courts happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he pursues it the faster it flies from him. His hopes and expectations are bigger than his enjoyments, and his fears and jealousies more troublesome than the evils themselves which he is so much afraid of. He is liable to a great many inconveniences every moment of his life, and is continually in-

secure

secure not onely of the good things of this life, but even of life it self. And besides all this, after all his endeavours to the contrary, he finds himself naturally to dread a *superior Being* that can defeat all his designs, and disappoint all his hopes, and make him miserable beyond all his fears. He has oftentimes secret misgivings concerning another life after this, and fearful apprehensions of an invisible Judge; and thereupon he is full of anxiety concerning his condition in another world, and sometimes plung'd into that anguish and despair that he grows weary of himself. So that the *Atheist* deprives himself of all the comfort that the apprehensions of a God can give a man, and yet is liable to all the trouble and disquiet of those apprehensions.

I do not say that these Inconveniences do happen to all; but every one is in danger of them. For man's nature is evidently so contriv'd as does plainly discover how unable he is to make himself happy. So that he must necessarily look abroad and seek for happiness somewhere else. And if there be no *superiour Being*, in whose care of him he may repose his confidence and quiet his mind; If he have no comfortable expectations of another life to sustain him under the evils and calamities he is liable

to

to in this world, he is certainly *of all creatures the most miserable*. There are none of us but may happen to fall into those circumstances of danger, or want, or pain, or some other sort of calamity, that we can have no hopes of relief or comfort but from *God* alone: none in all the world to flee to, but *Him*. And what would men do in such a case if it were not for *God*? Human nature is most certainly liable to desperate exigencies, and he is not happy that is not provided against the worst that may happen. It is bad to be reduc'd to such a condition as to be destitute of all comfort. And yet men are many times brought to that extremity that if it were not for *God* they would not know what to do with themselves, or how to enjoy themselves for one hour, or to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable considerations under their present anguish and sufferings. All men naturally fly to *God* in extremity, and the most atheistical person in the world when he is forsaken of all hopes of any other relief is forc'd to acknowledge him and would be glad to have such a friend.

Can it then be a wise and reasonable design to endeavour to banish the belief of a *God* out of the world? Not to say how
impious

impious it is in respect of *God*, nothing can be more malicious to men, and more effectually undermine the onely foundation of our happiness. For if there were no *God* in the world man would be in a much more wretched and disconsolate condition, than the creatures below him. For they are onely sensible of present pain, and when it is upon them they bear it as they can. But they are not at all apprehensive of evils at a distance, nor tormented with the fearfull prospect of what may befall them hereafter: nor are they plung'd into despair upon the consideration that the evils they lye under are like to continue, and are incapable of a remedy. And as they have no apprehension of these things, so they need no comfort against them. But Mankind is liable to all the same evils, and many others; which are so much the greater, because they are aggravated and set on by the restless workings of our minds, and exasperated by the smart reflexions and frettings of our own thoughts: And if there be no *God* we are wholly without comfort under all these, and without any other remedy than what time will give. For if the providence of *God* be taken away, what security have we against those innumerable dangers and mischiefs

to which humane nature is continually expos'd? What consolation under them, when we are reduc'd to that condition that no creature can give us any hopes of relief? But if we believe that there is a God that takes care of us, and we be carefull to please him, this cannot but be a mighty comfort to us, both under the present sense of affliction, and the apprehension of evils at a distance. For in that case, we are secure of one of these three things. Either that God by his providence will prevent the evils we fear, if that be best for us: Or that he will support us under them when they are present, and add to our strength as he increaseth our burthen: Or that he will make them the occasion of a greater good to us, by turning them either to our advantage in this world, or the increase of our happiness in the next. Now every one of these considerations has a great deal of comfort in it, for which if there were no God there could be no ground. Nay, on the contrary the most real foundation of our unhappiness would be laid in our Reason; and we should be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much we have a quicker apprehension and a deeper consideration of things.

So that if a man had arguments suffici-

ent

ent to perswade him that there is no God (as there is infinite reason to the contrary) yet the belief of a God is so necessary to the comfort and happiness of our lives, that a wise man could not but be heartily troubled to quit so pleasant an error, and to part with a delusion which is apt to yield such unspeakable satisfaction to the mind of man. Did but men consider the true notion of God, he would appear to be so lovely a Being, and so full of goodness and of all desirable perfections, that even those very persons who are of such irregular understandings as not to believe that there is a God, yet could not (if they understood themselves) refrain from wishing with all their hearts that there were one. For is it not really desirable to every man, that there should be such a *Being* in the world as takes care of the frame of it, that it do not run into confusion, and in that disorder ruin mankind? That there should be such a Being, as takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good; as understands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest straits, when nothing else can; to preserve us in our greatest dangers, to assist us against our worst enemies, and to comfort us under our sharpest sufferings,

F 2

when

when all other things set themselves against us? Is it not every man's interest, that there should be such a Governour of the world as really designs our happiness, and hath omitted nothing that is necessary to it; as would govern us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for the doing of that which is best for our selves? that will punish any man that should go about to injure us, or to deal otherwise with us than himself in the like case would be dealt withal by us? In a word, such a one as is ready to be reconcil'd to us when we have offended him, and is so far from taking little advantages against us for every failing that he is willing to pardon our most wilfull miscarriages upon our Repentance and amendment? And we have reason to believe God to be such a Being, if he be at all.

Why then should any man be troubl'd that there is such a Being as this, or think himself concern'd to shut him out of the world? How could such a Governour as this be wanting in the world, that is so great a comfort and security to mankind and *the confidence of all the ends of the earth*? If God be such a being as I have describ'd, woe to the world if it were with-
out

out him. This would be a thousand times greater loss to mankind and of more dismal consequence, and if it were true, ought to affect us with more grief and horreur than the extinguishing of the Sun.

Let but all things be well consider'd, and I am very confident that if a wise and considerate man were left to himself and his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself he could devise; after he had search'd heaven and earth, the *sum* of all his wishes would be this, *that there were just such a being as God is*; Nor would he chuse any other benefactor, or friend, or protector for himself, or governour for the whole world, than infinite power conducted and managed by infinite wisdom and goodness and justice, which is the true *notion* of a God.

Nay, so necessary is God to the happiness of mankind, that though there were no God, yet the Atheist himself upon second thoughts would judge it convenient that the generality of men should believe that there is one. For when the Atheist had attain'd his end, and (if it were a thing possible) had blotted the notion of a God out of the minds of men, mankind would in all probability grow so melancholly and so unruly a thing, that *he himself* would think it fit in policy to contribute

his best endeavours to the restoring of men to their former belief. Thus hath God secur'd the belief of *himself* in the world, against all attempts to the contrary; not onely by rivetting the notion of himself into our natures, but likewise by making the belief of his being necessary to the peace and tranquillity of our minds, and to the quiet and happiness of Humane Society.

So that if we consult our reason, we cannot but believe that there is; if our interest, we cannot but heartily wish that there were such a Being as God in the world. Every thing within us and without us gives notice of him. His name is written upon our hearts; and in every creature there are some prints and footsteps of him. Every moment we feel our dependance upon Him, and do by daily experience find that we can neither be happy without Him, nor think our selves so.

I confess, it is not a wicked man's interest, if he resolve to continue such, that there should be a God; but then it is not mens interest to be wicked. It is for the general good of humane Society, and consequently of particular persons, to be *true* and *just*; it is for mens health to be *temperate*; and so I could instance in all other

other vertues. But this is the mystery of Atheisme, men are wedded to their lusts and resolv'd upon a wicked course; and so it becomes their interest to wish there were no God, and to believe so if they can. Whereas if men were minded to live righteously and soberly and vertuously in the world, to believe a God would be no hindrance or prejudice to any such design; but very much for the advancement and furtherance of it. Men that are good and vertuous do easily believe a God; so that it is vehemently to be suspected, that nothing but the strength of mens lusts, and the power of vicious inclinations do sway their minds and set a *byass* upon their understandings toward Atheism.

2. Atheism is *imprudent*, because *it is unsafe in the issue*. The Atheist contends against the religious man that there is no God; but upon strange inequality and odds, for *he* ventures his eternal interest; whereas the Religious man ventures onely the loss of his Lusts, (which it is much better for him to be without) or at the utmost of some temporal convenience; and all this while is inwardly more contented and happy, and usually more healthfull, and perhaps meets with more respect and faithfuller friends, and lives in a more se-

cure and flourishing condition, and more free from the evils and punishments of this world, than the Atheistical person does; however, it is not much that he ventures: And after this life, if there be no God, is as well as he; but if there be a God, is Infinitely better, even as much as unspeakable and eternal happiness is better than extream and endless misery. So that if the arguments for and against a God were equal, and it were an even question whether there were one or not; yet the hazard and danger is so infinitely unequal, that in point of prudence and interest every man were obliged to incline to the affirmative: and whatever doubts he might have about it, to choose the safest side of the question, and to make that the principle to live by. For, he that acts wisely and is a thoroughly prudent man, will be provided against all events, and will take care to secure the main chance whatever happens; but the Atheist, in case things should fall out contrary to his belief and expectation, he hath made no provision for this case. If contrary to his confidence it should prove in the issue that there is a God, the man is lost and undone for ever. If the Atheist when he dies should find that his soul re-
mains

mains after his body and has onely quitted its lodging, how will this man be amazed and blank'd when contrary to his expectation, he shall find himself in a new and strange place, amidst a world of spirits, entred upon an everlasting and unchangeable state? How sadly will the man be disappointed when he finds all things otherwise than he had stated and determined them in this World? When he comes to appear before that God whom he hath denied and against whom he hath spoken as despightful things as he could, who can imagine the pale and guilty looks of this man and how he will shiver and tremble *for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty?* How will he be surpris'd with terrors on every side, to find himself thus unexpectedly and irrecoverably plunged into a state of ruin and desperation? And thus things may happen for all this man's confidence now. For our belief or dis-belief of a thing does not alter the nature of the thing. We cannot fanfic things into being or make them vanish into nothing by the stubborn confidence of our imaginations. Things are as sullen as we are, and will be what they are whatever we think of them. And if
there

there be a God a man cannot by an obstinate disbelief of him make him cease to be, any more than a man can put out the Sun by winking.

And thus I have as briefly and clearly as I could endeavoured to shew the *ignorance* and *folly* of *speculative Atheisme* in denying the *existence of God*. And now it will be less needful to speak of the other *two Principles of Religion*, the *immortality of the soul*, and *future rewards*. For no man can have any reasonable scruple about *these*, who believes that there is a God. Because no man that owns the existence of an *infinite spirit* can doubt of the possibility of a *finite spirit*, that is, such a thing as is *immaterial* and does not contain any principle of *corruption* in it self. And there is no man that believes the goodness of God, but must be inclin'd to think that he hath made some things for as long a duration as they are capable of. Nor can any man, that acknowledgeth the *holy* and *just* providence of God, and that he loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and that he is a *Magistrate* and *Governour* of the World, and consequently concerned to countenance the obedience, and to punish the violation of his Laws; and that does withall consider the promiscuous dispensations

tions many times of God's Providence in this world? I say, no man that acknowledges all this, can think it unreasonable to conclude, that after this life good men shall be rewarded, and sinners punished. I have done with the *first* sort of irreligious persons, the *speculative Atheist*. I shall speak but briefly of the other.

Secondly, The *practical Atheist*, who is wicked and irreligious, notwithstanding he does in some sort believe that there is a God, and a future state; he is likewise guilty of prodigious folly. The *principle* of the *speculative Atheist* argues more *ignorance*, but the *practice* of the *other* argues greater *folly*. Not to believe a God, and another life, for which there is so much evidence of reason is great ignorance and folly; but 'tis the highest madness when a man does believe these things to live as if he did not believe them: When a Man does not doubt but that there is a God, and that according as he demeans himself towards him he will make him happy or miserable for ever, yet to live so as if he were certain of the contrary, and as no man in reason can live but he that is well assured that there is no God. It was a shrewd saying of the old *Monk* that two kind of Prisons would serve for all offenders in the world,

world, an *Inquisition* and a *Bedlam*: If any man should deny the being of a God and the immortality of the soul, such a one should be put into the first of these the *Inquisition*, as being a desperate *Heretick*; but if any man should profess to believe these things, and yet allow himself in any known wickedness, such a one should be put into *Bedlam*; because there cannot be a greater folly and madness than for a man in matters of greatest moment and concernment to act against his best reason and understanding, and by his life to contradict his belief. Such a man does perish with his eyes open, and knowingly undoes himself; he runs upon the greatest dangers which he clearly sees to be before him, and precipitates himself into those evils which he professes to believe to be real and intolerable; and wilfully neglects the obtaining of that unspeakable good and happiness which he is persuaded is certain and attainable. Thus much for the *second* way of Confirmation.

III. The *third* way of confirmation shall be, by endeavouring to vindicate Religion from those common *imputations* which seem to charge it with *ignorance* or *imprudence*. And they are chiefly these three:

1. *Credulity*.

2. *Singu-*

2. *Singularity*.

3. *Making a Foolish Bargain*.

First, Credulity: Say they, the foundation of Religion is the belief of those things for which we have no sufficient reason, and consequently of which we can have no good assurance; as the belief of a *God*, and of a *future state* after this life; things which we never saw, nor did experience, nor ever spoke with any body that did. Now it seems to argue too great a forwardness and easiness of belief to assent to any thing upon insufficient grounds.

To this I answer,

1. That if there be such a Being as a God, and such a thing as a future state after this life, it cannot (as I said before) in reason be expected that we should have the evidence of sense for such things: For he that believes a God, believes such a Being as hath all perfections, among which this is one, that he is a spirit; and consequently that he is invisible, and cannot be seen. He likewise that believes another life after this, professeth to believe a state of which in this life we have no trial and experience. Besides, if this were a good objection, that no man ever saw these things, it strikes at the Atheist as well as us. For no man ever saw the World to be from eterni-
ty;

ty; nor *Epicurus* his *Atoms*, of which notwithstanding he believes the World was made.

2. We have the best evidence for these things which they are capable of at present, supposing they were,

3. Those who deny these *principles*, must be much more credulous, that is, believe things upon incomparably less evidence of reason. The *Atheist* looks upon all that are religious as a company of credulous fools. But *he*, for his part, pretends to be wiser than to believe any thing for company; he cannot entertain things upon those slight grounds which move other men; if you would win his assent to any thing, you must give him a clear demonstration for it. Now there's no way to deal with this *man of reason*, this rigid exactor of strict demonstration for things which are not capable of it, but by shewing him that he is an hundred times more credulous, that he begs more principles, takes more things for granted without offering to prove them, and assents to more strange conclusions upon weaker grounds than those whom he so much accuseth of credulity.

And to evidence this, I shall briefly give you an account of the *Atheist's Creed*, and present

present you with a Catalogue of the *fundamental Articles* of his Faith. *He believes* that there is no God, nor possibly can be, and consequently that the wise as well as unwise of all ages have been mistaken, except himself and a few more. *He believes* that either all the world have been frighted with an apparition of their own fancy, or that they have most unnaturally conspired together to cozen themselves; or that this notion of a God is a trick of policy, though the greatest Princes and Politicians do not at this day know so much, nor have done time out of a mind. *He believes*, either that the Heavens and the Earth and all things in them had no Original cause of their being, or else that they were made by chance and happened he knows not how to be as they are; and that in this last shuffling of matter all things have by great good fortune fallen out as happily and as regularly as if the greatest wisdom had contriv'd them, but yet he is resolv'd to believe that there was no wisdom in the contrivance of them. *He believes*, that *matter* of it self is utterly void of all *sense*, *understanding* and *liberty*; but for all that he is of opinion that the parts of matter may know and then happen to be so conveniently dispos'd, as to have all these qualities,

lities, and most dextrously to performe all those *fine* and *free operations* which the ignorant attribute to Spirits.

This is the sum of his belief. And it is a wonder, that there should be found any person pretending to reason or wit that can assent to such a heap of absurdities, which are so gross and palpable that they may be felt. So that if every man had his due it will certainly fall to the Atheist's share to be the most credulous person, that is, to believe things upon the slightest reasons. For he does not pretend to prove any thing of all this, only he finds himself, he knows not why, inclin'd to believe so and to laugh at those that do not.

II. The *second imputation* is *singularity*; the affectation whereof is unbecoming a wise man. To this charge I answer,

I. If by *Religion* be meant the *belief* of the *principles* of Religion, that there is a *God*, and a *providence*, that *our souls* are *immortal*, and that there are *rewards* to be expected after this life; these are so far from being *singular* opinions, that they are and always have been the *general* opinion of mankind, even of the most *barbarous* Nations. Infomuch, that the Histories of ancient times do hardly furnish us with the names of above five or six persons who de-
nied

nied a God. And *Lucretius* acknowledgeth that *Epicurus* was the first who did oppose those great *foundations* of Religion, the *providence* of God, and the *immortality* of the soul. *Primum Grajus homo, &c.* meaning *Epicurus*.

2. If by Religion be meant a living up to those principles, that is, to act conformably to our best reason and understanding, and to live as it does become those who do believe a God and a future state; this is acknowledged, even by those who live otherwise, to be the part of every wise man; and the contrary to be the very *madness of folly*, and height of distraction: Nothing being more ordinary than for men who live wickedly to acknowledge that they ought to do otherwise.

3. Though according to the common course and practice of the world it be somewhat *singular* for men truly and throughly to live up to the principles of their *Religion*, yet *singularity* in this matter is so far from being a reflexion upon any man's prudence that it is a *singular* commendation of it. In two cases *singularity* is very commendable.

1. When there is a necessity of it in order to a man's greatest interest and happiness. I think it to be a reasonable account

for any man to give why he does not live as the greatest part of the World do, that he has no mind to die as they do and to perish with them; he is not disposed to be a fool and to be miserable for company, he has no inclination to have his last end like theirs *who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of his Son, and shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

2. It is very commendable to be *singular* in any excellency, and I have shewn that *Religion* is the greatest excellency: to be *singular* in any thing that is wise, and worthy, and excellent, is not a disparagement, but a praise: every man would chuse to be thus *singular*.

III. The *third imputation* is, that *Religion* is a *foolish bargain*; because they who are religious hazard the parting with a present and certain happiness for that which is future and uncertain. To this I answer.

1. Let it be granted, that the assurance which we have of future rewards falls short of the evidence of sense. For I doubt not, but that saying of our Saviour, *blessed is he who hath believed, and not seen*; and those expressions of the Apostle, *we walk by faith and not by sight, and faith is the evidence of things*

things not seen, are intended by way of abatement and diminution to the evidence of Faith, and do signifie that the report and testimony of others is not so great evidence as that of our own senses: And though we have sufficient assurance of another state, yet no man can think we have so great evidence as if we our selves had been in the other world and seen how all things are there.

2. We have sufficient assurance of these things, and such as may beget in us a well grounded confidence and frees us from all doubts of the contrary and perswade a reasonable man to venture his greatest interests in this world upon the security that he hath of another: For,

1. We have as much assurance of these things as things future and at a distance are capable of, and he is a very unreasonable man that would desire more: Future and invisible things are not capable of the evidence of sense; but we have the greatest rational evidence for them, and in this every reasonable man ought to rest satisfi'd.

2. We have as much as is abundantly sufficient to justify every man's discretion, who for the great and eternal things of another world hazards or parts with the poor and transitory things of this life. And

for the clearing of this it will be worth our considering, that the greatest affairs of this world, and the most important concerns of this life are all conducted onely by *moral* demonstrations. Men every day venture their lives and estates onely upon *moral* assurance. For instance, men who never were at the *east* or *West-Indies*, or in *Turky* or *Spain*, yet do venture their whole estate in traffick thither, though they have no *Mathematical demonstration* but onely *moral assurance* that there are such places. Nay which is more, men every day eat and drink, though I think no man can demonstrate out of *Euclide* or *Apollonius*, that his *Baker* or *Brewer*, or *Cook* have not conveyed poison into his meat or drink. And that man that would be so wise and cautious as not to eat or drink till he could demonstrate this to himself, I know no other remedy for him but that in great gravity and wisdom he must die for fear of death. And for any man to urge that though men in temporal affairs proceed upon moral assurance, yet there is greater assurance required to make men seek Heaven and avoid Hell, seems to me to be highly unreasonable. For such an assurance of things as will make men circumspect and carefull to avoid a lesser danger ought in
all

all reason to awaken men much more to the avoiding of a greater, such an assurance as will sharpen mens desires and quicken their endeavours for the obtaining of a lesser good ought in all reason to animate men more powerfully and to inspire them with a greater vigour and industry in the pursuit of that which is infinitely greater. For why the same assurance should not operate as well in a great danger as in a less, in a great good as in a small and inconsiderable one, I can see no reason; unless men will say, that the greatness of an evil danger is an encouragement to men to run upon it, and that the greatness of any good and happiness ought in reason to dishearten men from the pursuit of it.

And now I think I may with reason entreat such as are atheistically inclined to consider these things seriously and impartially; and if there be weight in these considerations which I have offered to them to sway with reasonable men, I would beg of such that they would not suffer themselves to be byassed by prejudice or passion, or the interest of any lust or worldly advantage, to a contrary persuasion.

First, I would entreat them seriously and diligently to consider these things, because they are of so great moment and concernment

cernment to every man. If any thing in the world deserve our serious study and consideration, these principles of Religion do. For what can import us more to be satisfied in than whether there be a God, or not? whether our Souls shall perish with our bodies, or be immortal and shall continue for ever? And if so, whether in that eternal state which remains for men after this life, they shall not be happy or miserable for ever according as they have demeaned themselves in this world? If these things be so, they are of infinite consequence to us; and therefore it highly concerns us to enquire diligently about them, and to satisfy our minds concerning them one way or other. For these are not matters to be slightly and superficially thought upon, much less (as the way of atheistical men is) to be played and jested withall. There is no greater argument of a light and inconsiderate person, than prophanely to scoff at Religion. It is a sign that that man hath no regard to himself, and that he is not touched with a sense of his own interest, who loves to be jesting with edg'd tools and to play with life and death. This is the very mad-man that Solomon speaks of, *who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death, and saith, am I not in sport?*

To

Prov. 26.
18.

To examine severely and debate seriously the principles of Religion, is a thing worthy of a wise man; but if any man shall turn Religion into raillery, and think to confute it by two or three bold jests, this man doth not render Religion, but himself ridiculous, in the opinion of all considerate men; because he sports with his own life. If the principles of Religion were doubtful and uncertain, yet they concern us so nearly that we ought to be serious in the examination of them. And though they were never so clear and evident, yet they may be made ridiculous by vain and frothy men; as the gravest and wisest person in the world may be abused by being put into a *fools coat*, and the most noble and excellent Poem may be debased and made vile by being turned into *burlesque*. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more largely in my next discourse.

So that it concerns every man, that would not trifle away his soul and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, with the greatest seriousness to enquire into these matters whether they be so or not, and patiently to consider the arguments which are brought for them. For many have miscarried about these things, not because there is not reason and evidence enough for

G 4

them,

them, but because they have not had patience enough to consider them.

Secondly, Consider these things impartially. All wicked men are of a party against Religion. Some lust or interest ingageth them against it. Hence it comes to pass that they are apt to slight the strongest arguments that can be brought for it, and to cry up very weak ones against it. Men do generally and without difficulty assent to *Mathematical* truths, because it is no bodies interest to deny them; but men are slow to believe *moral* and *divine* Truths, because by their lusts and interest they are prejudiced against them. And therefore you may observe that the more vertuously any man lives, and the less he is enslaved to any lust, the more ready he is to entertain the principles of Religion.

Therefore when you are examining these matters, do not take into consideration any sensual or worldly interest, but deal clearly and impartially with your selves. Let not temporal and little advantages sway you against a greater and more durable interest. Think thus with your selves, that you have not the making of things true or false, but that the truth and existence of things is already fix'd and settled, and that the principles of Religion
are

are already either determinately true or false before you think of them, either there is a God, or there is not; either your Souls are Immortal, or they are not; one of these is certain and necessary, and is not now to be altered; the truth of things will not comply with our conceits, and bend it self to our interests. Therefore do not think what you would have to be, but consider impartially what is, and (if it be) will be whether you will or no. Do not reason thus; I would fain be wicked and therefore it is my interest that there should be no God, nor no life after this; and therefore I will endeavour to prove that there is no such thing, and will shew all the favour I can to that *side* of the *question*; I will bend my understanding and wit to strengthen the negative, and will study to make it as true as I can. This is fond, because it is the way to cheat thy self; and that we may do as often as we please, but the nature of things will not be imposed upon. If then thou be as wise as thou oughtest to be, thou wilt reason thus with thy self; my highest interest is not to be deceived about these matters, therefore setting aside all other considerations I will endeavour to know the truth and yield to that.

And now it is time to draw towards a
conclu.

conclusion of this long discourse. And that which I have all this while been endeavouring to convince men of and to persuade them to, is no other but what God himself doth particularly recommend to us as proper for humane consideration, unto Man he said, *behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.* Whoever pretends to reason, and calls himself a man, is oblig'd to acknowledge God and to demean himself religiously towards him. For God is to the understanding of man as the light of the Sun is to our eyes, the first and the plainest and the most glorious object of it. He fills Heaven and earth, and every thing in them does represent him to us. Which way soever we turn our selves, we are encountred with clear evidences and sensible demonstrations of a Deity. For (as the

Rom. 1. *Apostle reasons) The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead: εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸς ἀναπολογητός, so that they are without excuse; that is, those men that know not God have no apology to make for themselves. Or if men do know and believe that there is such a being as God, not to consider the proper consequences of such*

such a Principle, not to demean our selves towards him as becomes our relation to him and dependance upon him and the duty which we naturally owe him, this is great stupidity and inconsiderateness.

And yet he that considers the lives and actions of the greatest part of men would verily think that they understood nothing of all this. Therefore the Scripture represents wicked men as without understanding. *It is a Nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them: and elsewhere, have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge; Not that they are destitute of the natural faculty of understanding, but they do not use it as they ought; they are not blind but they wink, they detain the truth of God in unrighteousness, and though they know God, yet they do not glorify him as God, nor suffer the apprehensions of him to have a due influence upon their hearts and lives.*

Men generally stand very much upon the credit and reputation of their understandings, and of all things in the world hate to be accounted fools, because it is so great a reproach. The best way to avoid this imputation and to bring off the credit of our understandings is to be truly religious, *to fear the Lord, and to depart from*

Deut. 32.

28.

Psal. 14. 4

from evil. For certainly there is no such imprudent person as he that neglects God and his soul, and is careless and slothful about his everlasting concernments; because this man acts contrary to his truest reason and best interest; he neglects his own safety, and is active to procure his own ruine; he flies from happiness and runs away from it as fast as he can, but pursues misery, and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that *Solomon* does all along in the *Proverbs* give the title of *fool* to a wicked man, as if it were his proper name and the fittest character of him, because he is so eminently such: There is no fool to the sinner, who every moment ventures his Soul, and lays his everlasting interest at the stake. Every time a man provokes God he does the greatest mischief to himself that can be imagined. A mad man that cuts himself and tears his own flesh and dashes his head against the stones does not act so unreasonably as he, because he is not so sensible of what he does. Wickedness is a kind of *voluntary* frenzy and a *chosen* distraction, and every sinner does wilder and more extravagant things than any man can do that is craz'd and out of his wits, onely with this sad difference that he knows better what he does. For
to

to them who believe another life after this, an eternal state of happiness or misery in another world, (which is but a reasonable *postulatum* or demand among *Christians*) there is nothing in *Mathematicks* more demonstrable than the folly of wicked men; for it is not a clearer and more evident principle *that the whole is greater than a part*, than that eternity and the concernments of it are to be preferred before time.

I will therefore put the matter into a temporal Case, that wicked men who understand any thing of the rules and principles of worldly wisdom may see the imprudence of an irreligious and sinfull course, and be convinced *that this their way is their folly, even themselves being judges.*

Is that man wise, as to his body and his health, who onely cloaths his hands but leaves his whole body naked? who provides onely against the tooth-ach, and neglects whole troops of mortal diseases that are ready to rush in upon him? Just thus does he who takes care onely for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal soul; who is very solicitous to prevent small and temporal inconveniences, but takes no care to *escape the damnation of hell.*

Is he a prudent man, as to his temporal estate, that lays designs only for a day, without any prospect to, or provision for the Remaining part of his life? even so does he that provides for the short time of this life, but takes no care for all Eternity, which is to be wise for a moment, but a fool for ever, and to act as untowardly and as crossly to the reason of things as can be imagined, to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a short time.

Do we count him a wise man, who is wise in any thing but in his own proper profession and employment, wise for every body but himself; who is ingenious to contrive his own misery and to do himself a mischief, but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he, who is ingenious in his Calling but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our proper calling and profession than the very trades we live upon; and such is every sinner, who is *wise to do evil, but to do good hath no understanding.*

Is it wisdom in any man to neglect and disoblige him who is his best friend, and can be his forest enemy? or with one weak troop to go out to meet him that comes against him with thousands of thousands, to flie a small danger and run upon a greater? Thus does

does every wicked man that neglects and contemns God, *who can save or destroy him*; who strives with his *Maker and provoketh the Lord to jealousy*, and with the small and inconsiderable forces of a man takes the field against the *mighty God, the Lord of Hosts*; who fears them that can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fears not him, who after he hath kill'd, can destroy both body and soul in hell; and thus does he who for fear of any thing in this world ventures to displease God, for in so doing he runs away from men, and falls into the hands of the living God, he flies from a temporal danger and leaps into Hell.

Is not he an imprudent man, who in matters of greatest moment and concernment neglects opportunities never to be retriev'd, who standing upon the shore, and seeing the tide making haste towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to save himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there till the cruel sea rush in upon him and overwhelm him? And is he any better who trifles away this day of God's grace and patience, and foolishly adjourns the necessary work of repentance and the weighty business of Religion to a dying hour.

And to put an end to these questions, Is

Is he a prudent man, as to his temporal estate, that lays designs only for a day, without any prospect to, or provision for the Remaining part of his life? even so does he that provides for the short time of this life, but takes no care for all Eternity, which is to be wise for a moment, but a fool for ever, and to act as untowardly and as crossly to the reason of things as can be imagined, to regard time as if it were eternity, and to neglect eternity as if it were but a short time.

Do we count him a wise man, who is wise in any thing but in his own proper profession and employment, wise for every body but himself; who is ingenious to contrive his own misery and to do himself a mischief, but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he, who is ingenious in his Calling but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our proper calling and profession than the very trades we live upon: and such is every sinner, who is *wise to do evil, but to do good hath no understanding.*

Is it wisdom in any man to neglect and disoblige him who is his best friend, and can be his sorest enemy? or with one weak troop to go out to meet him that comes against him with thousands of thousands, to flie a small danger and run upon a greater? Thus
does

does every wicked man that neglects and contemns God, *who can save or destroy him*; who strives with his *Maker and provoketh the Lord to jealousy*, and with the small and inconsiderable forces of a man takes the field against the *mighty God, the Lord of Hosts*; who fears them that can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fears not him, who after he hath kill'd, can destroy both body and soul in hell; and thus does he who for fear of any thing in this world ventures to displease God, for in so doing he runs away from men, and falls into the hands of the living God, he flies from a temporal danger and leaps into Hell.

Is not he an imprudent man, who in matters of greatest moment and concernment neglects opportunities never to be retriev'd, who standing upon the shore, and seeing the tide making haste towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to save himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there till the cruel sea rush in upon him and overwhelm him? And is he any better who trifles away this day of God's grace and patience, and foolishly adjourns the necessary work of repentance and the weighty business of Religion to a dying hour.

And to put an end to these questions,
Is

Is he wise who hopes to attain the End without the means, nay, by means that are quite contrary to it? such is every wicked man who hopes to be blessed hereafter without being holy here, and to be happy, that is, to find a pleasure in the enjoyment of God and in the company of holy spirits by rendring himself as unsuitable and unlike to them as he can.

Wouldst thou then be truly wise? Be wise for thy self, wise for thy soul, wise for eternity. Resolve upon a religious course of life. *Fear God and depart from evil.* Look beyond things present and sensible unto things which are not seen and are eternal, labour to secure the great interests of another world, and refer all the actions of this short and dying life to that state which will shortly begin but never have an end: and this will approve it self to be wisdom at the last, whatever the world judge of it now. For not that which is approved of men now, but what shall finally be approved by God is true wisdom; that which is esteemed so by him who is the fountain and original of all wisdom, the first rule and measure, the best and most competent judge of it.

I deny

I deny not but that those that are wicked and neglect Religion may think themselves wise, and may enjoy this their delusion for a while: But there is a time a coming when the most prophane and atheistical, who now account it a peice of Gallantry and an argument of a great spirit and of a more than common wit and understanding to slight God and to baffle Religion and to level all the discourses of another world with the Poetical descriptions of the Fairy-land; I say, there is a day a coming when all these witty fools shall be unhappily undeceived, and not being able to enjoy their delusion any longer shall call themselves fools for ever.

But why should I use so much importunity to perswade men to that which is so excellent, so usefull, and so necessary? The thing it self hath allurements in it beyond all arguments: For if Religion be the best knowledge and wisdom I cannot offer any thing beyond this to your understandings to raise your esteem of it, I can present nothing beyond this to your affections to excite your love and desire. All that can be done is to set the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice; and if mens natural desire of wisdom and knowledge and happiness will not per-

H

swade

swade them to be religious, 'tis in vain to use arguments if the sight of these beauties will not charm mens affections, 'tis to no purpose to go about to compell a liking, and to urge and push forward a match to the making whereof consent is necessary. Religion is matter of our freest choice, and if men will obstinately and wilfully set themselves against it there is no remedy. *Pertinacia nullum remedium posuit Deus*, God has provided no remedy for the obstinacy of men; but if they will chuse to be fools and to be miserable, he will leave them to inherit their own choice and to enjoy the portion of sinners.

2 P E T.

2 P E T. iii. 3.

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

K Nowing this first. In the verse before, the Apostle was speaking of a famous prophecy before the accomplishment of which this sort of men whom he calls scoffers should come. That ye may be mindfull of the words which were spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the commandment of us the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour; Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, &c.

The prophecy here spoken of is probably that famous prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem which is in the Prophet Daniel, and before the fulfilling whereof

Mat. 24.
11.

our Saviour expressly tells us *false prophets should arise and deceive many.*

Now the *scoffers* here spoken of are the *false teachers* whom the *Apostle* had been describing all along in the foregoing *Chapter*, *there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you.* These, he tells us, should proceed to that height of impiety as to scoff at the principles of Religion and to deride the expectations of a future judgment, *In the last days shall come scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying where is the promise of his coming?*

In speaking to these words, I shall do these three things.

1. Consider the nature of the sin here mentioned, which is *scoffing* at Religion.

2. The character of the persons that are charg'd with the guilt of this sin, they are said *to walk after their own lusts.*

3. I shall represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice.

I. *First*, we will consider the nature of the sin here mentioned, which is *scoffing* at Religion, *There shall come scoffers*: These it seems were a sort of people that derided

ded our Saviour's prediction of his coming to judge the world. So the *Apostle* tells us in the next words, that they said *where is the promise of his coming?*

In those times there was a common persuasion among Christians *that the day of the Lord was at hand*, as the *Apostle* elsewhere tells us. Now 'tis probable, these *scoffers* twitted the Christians withall; and because Christ did not come when some looked for him they concluded he would not come at all. Upon this they derided the Christians as enduring persecution in a vain expectation of that which was never likely to happen. They saw all things continue *as they were from the beginning of the world*, notwithstanding the apprehensions of Christians concerning the approaching end of it; *For since the Fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the world.* Since the fathers fell asleep, *as it is*, which may either be rendred *from the time*, or else (which seems more agreeable to the atheistical discourse of these men) *saving or except that the fathers are fallen asleep, all things continue as they were*; *saving* that men die and one generation succeeds another, they saw no change or alteration. They looked upon all things as

going on in a constant course; One generation of men passed away and another came in the room of it, but the world remain'd still as it was. And thus for ought they knew things might hold on for ever. So that the principles of these men seem to be much the same with those of the *Epicureans*, who denied the providence of God and the immortality of mens souls; and consequently a future judgment which should sentence men to rewards and punishments in another world. These great and fundamental principles of all Religion they derided as the fancies and dreams of a company of melancholy men, who were weary of the world and pleased themselves with vain conceits of happiness and ease in another life. But as for them, they believed none of those things; and therefore gave all manner of licence and indulgence to their lusts.

But this belongs to the second thing I propounded to speak to, namely,

II. The character which is here given of these *scoffers*; They are said to walk after their own lusts. And no wonder if when they denied a future judgment they gave up themselves to all manner of sensuality,

St,

St. *Jude* in his *Epistle* gives much the same character of them that St. *Peter* here does, ver. 18, 19. *There shall come in the last days mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts, sensual, not having the spirit.* So that we see what kind of persons they are who prophanely scoff at Religion, men of sensual spirits and of licentious lives. For this character which the *Apostle* here gives of the *scoffers* of that age was not an accidental thing which happened to those persons, but is the constant character of them who deride Religion, and flows from the very temper and disposition of those who are guilty of this impiety; it is both the usual preparation to it, and the natural consequent of it.

To deride God and Religion is the highest kind of impiety. And men do not usually arrive to this degree of wickedness at first, but they come to it by several steps. The *Psalmist* very elegantly expresseth to us the several gradations by which men at last come to this horrid degree of impiety; *Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornfull.* Men are usually first corrupted by bad counsel and company, which is called walking in the

Psal. 1. 1.

11 4

counsel

counsel of the ungodly ! next they habituate themselves to their vicious practices, which is *standing in the way of sinners* ; and then at last they take up and settle in a contempt of all Religion, which is called *sitting in the seat of the scornfull*.

For when men once indulge themselves in wicked courses, the vicious inclinations of their minds sway their understandings, and make them apt to disbelieve those truths which contradict their lusts. Every inordinate lust and passion is a false byass upon mens understandings which naturally draws toward Atheism. And when mens judgments are once byassed they do not believe according to the evidence of things, but according to their humour and their interest. For when men live as if there were no God it becomes expedient for them that there should be none : And then they endeavour to perswade themselves so, and will be glad to find arguments to fortifie themselves in this persuasion. Men of dissolute lives cry down Religion, because they would not be under the restraints of it ; they are loth to be tied up by the strict laws and rules of it : 'Tis their interest more than any reason they have against it which makes them despise it, they hate it because they
are

are reprov'd by it. So our Saviour tells us, that *men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* John 3. 19, 20.

I remember it is the saying of one, who hath done more by his *Writings* to debauch the Age with Atheistical principles than any man that lives in it, *That when reason is against a man, then a man will be against reason.* I am sure this is the true account of such mens enmity to Religion, Religion is against them and therefore they set themselves against Religion. The principles of Religion and the doctrines of the *holy Scriptures* are terrible enemies to wicked men, they are continually flying in their faces and galling their consciences : And this is that which makes them kick against Religion and spurn at the doctrines of that *holy Book*. And this may probably be one reason why many men, who are observed to be sufficiently dull in other matters, yet can talk prophanely and speak against Religion with some kind of salt and smartness, because Religion is the thing that frets them ; and as in other things so in this *vexatio dat intellectum*, the inward trouble

ble and vexation of their minds gives them some kind of wit and sharpness in rallying upon Religion. Their consciences are galled by it, and this makes them winch and fling as if they had some metal. For, let men pretend what they will, there is no ease and comfort of mind to be had from atheistical principles. 'Tis found by experience, that none are more apprehensive of danger or more fearfull of death than this sort of men: Even when they are in prosperity they ever and anon feel many inward stings and lashes, but when any great affliction or calamity overtakes them they are the most poor spirited creatures in the whole world.

The sum is, the true reason why any man is an Atheist is because he is a wicked man. Religion would curb him in his lusts, and therefore he casts it off and puts all the scorn upon it he can. Besides, that men think it some kind of apology for their vices that they do not act contrary to any principle they profess: Their practice is agreeable to what they pretend to believe, and so they think to vindicate themselves and their own practices by laughing at those for fools who believe any thing to the contrary

III. The

III. The *third* thing I propounded was, to represent to you the heinousness and the aggravations of this vice. And to make this out we will make these three suppositions, which are as many as the thing will bear.

1. Suppose there were no God, and that the principles of Religion were false.

2. Suppose the matter were doubtfull, and the arguments equal on both sides.

3. Suppose it certain that there is a God, and that the principles of Religion are true. Put the case how we will, I shall shew that the humour is intolerable.

1. Suppose there were no God, and that the principles of Religion were false. Not that there is any reason for such a supposition, but onely to shew the unreasonableness of this humour; Put the case that these men were in the right, in denying the principles of Religion, and that all that they pretend were true; yet so long as the generality of mankind believes the contrary, it is certainly a great rudeness, or incivility at least, to deride and scoff at these things. Indeed upon this supposition there could be no such thing as sin, but yet it would be a great offence against the

the laws of civil conversation. Suppose then, the Atheist were wiser than all the world, and that he did upon good grounds know that all mankind, besides himself and two or three more, were mistaken about the matters of Religion; yet if he were either so wise, or so civil as he should be, he would keep all this to himself, and not affront other men about these things.

I remember that that *Law* which God gave to the people of *Israel*, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the Rulers of thy people*; is rendred by *Josephus* in a very different sense: *What other nations account Gods, let no man blaspheme*. And this is not so different from the *Hebrew* as at first sight one would imagine, for the same *Hebrew* word signifies both *Gods* and *Rulers*. But whether this be the meaning of that *Law* or not there is a great deal of reason in the thing. For though every man have a right in dispute against a false Religion, and to urge it with all its absurd and ridiculous consequences, as the *Ancient Fathers* did in their disputes with the *Heathen*; yet it is a barbarous incivility for any man scurrilously to make sport with that which others account Religion, not with any design to convince their reason but onely to provoke their rage.

But

But now the Atheist can pretend no obligation of conscience why he should so much as dispute against the principles of Religion, much less deride them. He that pretends to any Religion may pretend conscience for opposing a contrary Religion: But he that denies all Religion, can pretend no conscience for any thing. A man may be obliged indeed in reason and common humanity to free his neighbour from a hurtfull error; but supposing there were no God this notion of a Deity and the Principles of Religion have taken such deep root in the mind of man that either they are not to be extinguished, or if they be it would be no kindness to any man to endeavour it for him, because it is not to be done but with so much trouble and violence that the remedy would be worse than the disease.

For if this notion of a Deity be founded in a natural fear, it is in vain to attempt to expell it; for whatever violence may be offer'd to nature by endeavouring to reason men into a contrary persuasion, nature will still recoil and at last return to it self, and then the fear will be augmented from the apprehension of the dangerous consequences of such an impiety. So that nothing can create more trouble to a man than to endeavour to dispossess him of this conceit

conceit, because nature is but irritated by the contest and the man's fears will be doubled upon him.

But if we suppose this apprehension of a Deity to have no foundation in nature, but to have had its rise from tradition which hath been confirmed in the world by the prejudice of education, the difficulty of removing it will almost be as great as if it were natural, that which men take in by education being next to that which is natural. And if it could be extinguish't, yet the advantage of it will not recompence the trouble of the cure. For, except the avoiding of persecution for Religion, there is no advantage that the principles of Atheism if they could be quietly settled in a man's mind can give him. The advantage indeed that men make of them is to give themselves the liberty to do what they please, to be more sensual and more unjust than other men; that is, they have the privilege to surfeit themselves and to be sick oftner than other men, and to make mankind their enemy by their unjust and dishonest actions, and consequently to live more uneasily in the world than other men.

So that the principles of Religion, the belief of a God, and another life, by obliging men to be vertuous do really promote

more their temporal happiness. And all the privilege that Atheism pretends to is to let men loose to vice, which is naturally attended with temporal inconveniences. And if this be true, then the Atheist cannot pretend this Reason of charity to mankind (which is the onely one I can think of) to dispute against Religion, much less to rally upon it. For it is plain, that it would be no kindness to any man to be undeceived in these principles of Religion, supposing they were false. Because the principles of Religion are so far from hindering that they promote a man's happiness even in this world, and as to the other world there can be no inconvenience in the mistake, for when a man is not it will be no trouble to him that he was once deceived about these matters.

And where no obligation of conscience nor of reason can be pretended, there certainly the laws of civility ought to take place. Now men do profess to believe that there is a God, and that the common principles of Religion are true, and to have a great veneration for these things. Can there then be a greater insolence, than for a man when he comes into company to rally and fall foul upon those things for which he knows the company have a reverence?

Can

Can one man offer a greater affront to another, than to expose to scorn him whom he owns and declares to be his best friend, the patron of his life, and the greatest benefactor he hath in the world? And doth not every man that owns a God say this of him?

But when the generality of Mankind are of the same opinion the rudeness is still the greater. So that whoever doth openly contemn God and Religion does *delinquere in majestatem populi & humani generis*, he does offend against the majesty of the People and that reverence which is due to the common apprehensions of Mankind, whether they be true or not; which is the greatest incivility that can be imagin'd.

This is the first consideration, and it is the least that I have to urge in this matter. But yet I have insisted the longer upon it, because it is such a one as ought especially to prevail upon those whom I am afraid are too often guilty of this vice, I mean those who are of better breeding, because they pretend to understand the laws of behaviour and the decencies of conversation better than other men.

2. Supposing it were doubtful whether there be a God or not, and whether the Principles of Religion were true or not, and that the Arguments were equal on both

both Sides; yet it would be a great folly to deride these things. And here I suppose as much as the Atheist can with any colour of reason pretend to. For no man ever yet pretended to demonstrate that there is no God, nor no life after this. For these being pure negatives are capable of no proof, unless a man could shew them to be plainly impossible. The utmost that is pretended is that the arguments that are brought for these things are not sufficient to convince. But if they were onely probable, so long as no arguments are produced to the contrary that cannot in reason be denied to be a great advantage.

But I will for the present suppose the probabilities equal on both sides. And upon this supposition I doubt not to make it appear to be a monstrous folly to deride these things. Because though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger and hazard is infinitely unequal.

If it prove true that there is no God the religious man may be as happy in this world as the atheist, nay the principles of Religion and Vertue do in their own nature tend to make him happier. Because they give satisfaction to his mind, and his conscience by this means is freed

I

from

from many fearful girds and twinges which the Atheist feels. Besides, that the practice of Religion and vertue doth naturally promote our temporal felicity. It is more for a man's health, and more for his reputation, and more for his advantage in all other worldly respects to lead a vertuous than a vitious course of life. And for the other world, if there be no God the case of the religious man and the Atheist will be alike, because they will both be extinguisht by death and insensible of any farther happiness or misery.

But then if the contrary opinion should prove true, that there is a God; and that the souls of men are transmitted out of this world into the other, there to receive the just reward of their actions: Then it is plain to every man at first sight, that the case of the religious man and the Atheist must be vastly different: Then, where shall the wicked, and the ungodly appear? And what think we shall be the portion of those who have affronted God, and derided his word, and made a mock of every thing that is sacred and religious? What can they expect but to be rejected by him whom they have renounced, and to feel the terrible effects of that power and Justice which they have despised?

So

So that though the arguments on both sides were equal, yet the danger is not so. On the one side there is none at all, but 'tis infinite on the other. And consequently, it must be a monstrous folly for any man to make a mock of those things which he knows not whether they be or not; and if they be, of all things in the world they are no jesting matters.

3. Suppose there be a God and that the principles of Religion are true, then is it not onely a heinous impiety but a perfect madness to scoff at these things. And that there is a God, and that the Principles of Religion are true, I have already in my former *discourse* endeavoured to prove; both from the things which are made, and from the general consent of mankind in these principles; of which universal consent no sufficient Reason can be given unless they were true. And supposing they are so, it is not onely the utmost pitch of impiety, but the highest flight of folly that can be imagined to deride these things. To be disobedient to the commands of God is a great contempt, but to deny his *Being*, and to make sport with his *word*, and to endeavour to render it ridiculous by turning the wise and weighty sayings of that *Holy Book* into raillery, is a most

direct

direct affront to the God that is above. Thus the *Psalmist* describes these atheistical persons as levelling their blasphemies immediately against the majesty of heaven. *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth;* they do mischief among men, but the affront is immediately to God.

Besides, that this prophane spirit is an argument of a most incorrigible temper. The *Wise man* every where speaks of the *scorner* as one of the worst sort of sinners and hardest to be reclaimed, because he *despiseeth instruction* and mocks at all the means whereby he should be reformed.

And then, is it not a most black and horrid ingratitude thus to use the Authour of our Beings and the Patron of our Lives; to make a scorn of him that made us, and to live in an open defiance of him *in whom we live, move, and have our beings*? But this is not all. As it is a most heinous so it is a most dangerous impiety, to despise him that can destroy us, and to oppose him who is infinitely more powerful than we are. *Will ye* (says the Apostle) *provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?* What *Gamaliel* said to the *Jews*, in another case, may with a little

little change be applied to this sort of men; If there be a God, and the principles of Religion be true *ye cannot overthrow them, therefore refrain from speaking against these things lest ye be found fighters against God.*

I will but add one thing more to shew the folly of this prophane temper. And that is this, that as it is the greatest of all other sins so there is in truth the least temptation to it. When the Devil tempts men with riches or honour to ruin themselves he offers them some kind of consideration, but the prophane person serves the Devil for nought, and sins only for sin's sake, suffers himself to be tempted to the greatest sins and into the greatest dangers for no other reward but the slender reputation of seeming to say that wittily which no wise man would say. And what a folly is this, for a man to offend his conscience to please his humour, and onely for his jest to lose two of the best Friends he hath in the world, God and his own soul?

I have done with the *three* things I propounded to speak to upon this Argument, And now I beg your patience to apply what I have said to these three purposes.

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly of prophaneness which by some is miscalled wit.

2. To caution men not to think the worse of Religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it.

3. To perswade men to employ that reason and wit which God hath given them, to better and nobler purposes in the service, and to the glory of that God who hath bestowed these gifts on men.

1. To take men off from this impious and dangerous folly. I know not how it comes to pass that some men have the fortune to be esteemed Wits onely for jesting out of the common road, and for making bold to scoff at those things which the greatest part of mankind reverence. As if a man should be accounted a Wit for reviling those in Authority, which is no more an argument of any man's wit than it is of his discretion. A wise man would not speak contemptuously of a great Prince though he were out of his Dominions, because he remembers that Kings have long hands, and that their power and influence does many times reach a great way farther than
their

their direct Authority. But God is a great King, and in his hand are all the corners of the earth; we can go no whither from his Spirit, nor can we flee from his presence; where-ever we are his eye sees us and his right hand can reach us. If men did truly consult the interest either of their safety or reputation, they would never exercise their wit in dangerous matters. Wit is a very commendable quality, but then a wise man should always have the keeping of it. It is a sharp weapon, as apt for mischief as for good purposes if it be not well managed. The proper use of it is to season conversation, to represent what is praiseworthy to the greatest advantage, and to expose the vices and follies of men, such things as are in themselves truly ridiculous: But if it be applied to the abuse of the gravest and most serious matters it then loses its commendation. If any man think he abounds in this quality and hath wit to spare there is scope enough for it within the bounds of Religion and decency, and when it transgresseth these it degenerates into insolence and impiety. All wit which borders upon prophaneness and makes bold with those things to which the greatest reverence is due deserves to be branded for folly.

And if we would preserve our selves from the infection of this vice we must take heed how we scoff at Religion, under any form, lest insensibly we derive some contempt upon Religion it self. And we must likewise take heed how we accustom our selves to a slight and irreverent use of the Name of God, and of the phrases and expressions of the Holy Bible, which ought not to be applied upon every light occasion. Men will easily slide into the highest degree of prophaneness who are not careful to preserve a due reverence of the great and glorious Name of God, and an awfull regard to the Holy Scriptures. None so nearly disposed to scoffing at Religion as those who have accustomed themselves to swear upon trifling occasions. For it is just with God to permit those who allow themselves in one degree of prophaneness to proceed to another, till at last they come to that height of impiety as to contemn all Religion.

2. Let no man think the worse of Religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it. For 'tis no disparagement to any person or thing to be laugh't at, but to deserve to be so. The most grave and serious matters in the whole world are liable to be abus'd. It is a known saying of

Epi.

Epictetus, that every thing hath two handles; By which he means, that there is nothing so bad but a man may lay hold of something or other about it that will afford matter of excuse and extenuation, nor nothing so excellent but a man may fasten upon something or other belonging to it whereby to reduce it. A sharp wit may find something in the wisest man whereby to expose him to the contempt of injudicious people. The gravest book that ever was written may be made ridiculous by applying the sayings of it to a foolish purpose. For a jest may be obtruded upon any thing. And therefore no man ought to have the less reverence for the principles of Religion, or for the holy Scriptures, because idle and prophane Wits can break jests upon them. Nothing is so easie as to take particular phrases and expressions out of the best Book in the world and to abuse them by forcing an odd and ridiculous sense upon them. But no wise man will think a good Book foolish for this reason, but the man that abuses it; nor will he esteem that to which every thing is liable to be a just exception against any thing. At this rate we must despise all things, but surely the better and the shorter way is to contemn those who would

would bring any thing that is worthy into contempt.

3. And lastly, to perswade men to employ that reason and wit which God hath given them to better and nobler purposes in the service and to the glory of that God who hath bestowed these gifts on men, as *Aholiab* and *Bezaleel* did their mechanical skill in the adorning and beautifying of God's Tabernacle. For this is the perfection of every thing, to attain its true and proper end; and the end of all those gifts and endowments which God hath given us is to glorifie the giver.

Here is subject enough to exercise the wit of men and angels: To praise that infinite goodness, and almighty power, and exquisite wisdom which made us and all things; and to admire what we can never sufficiently praise; To vindicate the wise and just providence of God, in the government of the world; and to endeavour, as well as we can upon an imperfect view of things, to make out the beauty and harmony of all the seeming discords and irregularities of the Divine administrations; To explain the oracles of the holy Scriptures, and to adore that great mystery of Divine love (which the Angels, better and nobler Creatures than we

we

we are, desire to pry into) God's sending his onely Son into the world to save sinners, and to give his life a ransom for them: These would be noble exercises indeed for the tongues and pens of the greatest Wits. And subjects of this nature are the best trials of our ability in this kind. Satyr and invective are the easiest kind of wit. Almost any degree of it will serve to abuse and find fault. For wit is a keen instrument, and every one can cut and gash with it, but to carve a beautiful image and to polish it requires great art and dexterity. To praise any thing well is an argument of much more wit, than to abuse. A little wit, and a great deal of ill nature will furnish a man for Satyr, but the greatest instance of wit is to commend well. And perhaps the best things are the hardest to be duly commended. For though there be a great deal of matter to work upon yet there is great judgment required to make choice, and where the subject is great and excellent it is hard not to sink below the dignity of it.

This I say on purpose to recommend to men a nobler exercise for their wits, and if it be possible, to put them out of conceit with that scolding humour which is so

easy,

easie, and so ill natur'd, and is not onely an enemy to Religion but to every thing else that is wise and worthy. And I am very much mistaken, if the State as well as the Church, the civil government as well as Religion, do not in a short space find the intolerable inconvenience of this humour.

But I confine my self to the consideration of Religion. And it is sad indeed, that in a Nation professing Christianity so horrid an impiety should dare to appear. But the Scripture hath foretold us that this sort of men should arise in the Gospel-age, and they did appear even in the Apostles days. That which is more sad and strange is, that we should persist in this prophaneness notwithstanding the terrible judgments of God which have been abroad in this Nation. God hath of late years manifested himself in a very dreadful manner, as if it were on purpose to give a check to this insolent impiety. And now that those judgments have done no good upon us we may justly fear that he will appear once for all. And 'tis time for him to shew himself when his very Being is call'd in question, and to come and judge the world when men begin to doubt whether he made it.

The

The *Scripture* mentions two things as the fore-runners and reasons of his coming to judgment, *infidelity*, and *prophane scoffing* at Religion. *When the Son of man* Luke 18.
comes, shall he find faith on the earth? 8.

And St. *Jude* out of an ancient prophecy of *Enoch* expressly mentions this as one reason of the coming of the Lord, *to convince ungodly sinners of all their hard speeches which they had spoken against him.* Jude 15. ver.

And if these things be a sign and reason of his coming, I wish that we in this Age had not too much cause to apprehend *the Judge to be at the door.* This impiety did fore-run the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the utter ruine of the Jewish Nation, and if it hold on amongst us may not we have reason to fear that either *the end of all things is at hand*, or that some very dismal calamity greater than any our eyes have yet seen does hang over us? But I would fain hope that God hath mercy still for us, and that men will pity themselves, and *repent, and give glory to God, and know in this their day the things that belong to their peace.* Which God of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of Christ, To whom with the Father, &c.

PROV.

P R O V. xiv. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a Nation;
but sin is the reproach of any
people.*

ONE of the first principles that is planted in the nature of man, and which lies at the very root and foundation of his being is the desire of his own preservation and happiness. Hence it is that every man is led by interest, and does love or hate, chuse or refuse things, according as he apprehends them to conduce to this end, or to contradict it. And because the happiness of this life is most present and sensible, therefore humane nature (which in this degenerate state is extremely sunk down into sense) is most powerfully affected

fect'd with sensible and temporal things: And consequently, there cannot be a greater prejudice rais'd against any thing than to have it represent'd as inconvenient and hurtfull to our temporal interests.

Upon this account it is that Religion hath extremely suffer'd in the opinion of many as if it were opposite to our present welfare, and did rob men of the greatest advantages and conveniences of life. So that he that would do right to Religion and make a ready way for the entertainment of it among men, cannot take a more effectual course than by reconciling it with the happiness of mankind and by giving satisfaction to our reason, that it is so far from being an enemy that it is the greatest friend to our temporal interests; and that it doth not onely tend to make every man happy consider'd singly and in a private capacity, but is excellently fitted for the benefit of humane society.

How much Religion tends even to the temporal advantage of private persons I shall not now consider, because my Text leads me to discourse of the other, namely, to shew how advantageous Religion and Vertue are to the publick prosperity of a Nation, which I take to be the meaning
of

of this *Aphorism* of Solomon, *Righteousness exalteth a Nation, &c.*

And here I shall not restrain *righteousness* to the particular vertue of justice, (though in this sense also this saying is most true) but enlarge it according to the *genius* and strain of the Book of the *Proverbs*, in which the words *wisdom* and *righteousness* are commonly used very comprehensively so as to signify all Religion and Vertue. And that this word is so to be taken in the Text may appear farther from the opposition of it to sin or vice in general; *Righteousness* exalteth a Nation, but *Sin* is the reproach of any People.

You see then what will be the subject of my present discourse; namely, that *Religion and Vertue are the great causes of publick happiness and prosperity.*

And though the truth of this hath been universally acknowledged and long enough experienced in the world, yet because the fashion of the age is to call every thing into question it will be requisite to satisfy mens reason about it. To which end I shall do these two things.

1. Endeavour to give an account of this Truth.

K

2. To

2. To vindicate it from the pretences and insinuations of atheistical persons.

I. shall give you this two-fold account of it.

1. From the justice of the Divine providence.

2. From the natural tendency of the thing.

1. From the justice of the Divine providence. Indeed, as to particular persons, the providences of God are many times promiscuously administered in this world; so that no man can certainly conclude God's love or hatred to any person by any thing that befalls him in this life. But God do's not deal thus with Nations. Because publick bodies and communities of men, as such, can onely be rewarded and punished in this world. For in the next, all those publick societies and combinations whercin men are now link'd together under severall Governments, shall be dissolved. God will not then reward or punish Nations, as Nations; But every man shall then give an account of himself to God, and receive his own reward, and bear his own burthen. For although God account it no disparagement to his justice

justice

justice to let particular good men suffer in this world and pass *through many tribulations into the kingdom of God*, because there is another day a coming which will be a more proper season of reward; yet in the usual course of his providence he recompenseth religious and vertuous Nations with temporal blessings and prosperity. For which reason St. *Austin* tells us that the mighty success and long prosperity of the *Romans* was a reward given them by God for their eminent justice and temperance, and other vertues. And on the other hand, God many times suffers the most grievous sins of particular persons to go unpunished in this world, because he knows that his justice will have another and better opportunity to meet and reckon with them. But the general and crying sins of a Nation cannot hope to escape publick judgments, unless they be prevented by a general repentance. God may defer his judgments for a time and give a People a longer space of repentance, he may stay till the iniquities of a Nation be full, but sooner or later they have reason to expect his vengeance. And usually the longer punishment is delay'd it is the heavier when it comes.

Now all this is very reasonable, because

K 2

this

this world is the onely season for National punishments. And indeed they are in a great degree necessary for the present vindication of the honour and majesty of the Divine Laws, and to give some check to the overflowing of wickedness. Publick judgments are the banks and shores upon which God breaks the insolency of sinners and stays their proud waves. And though among men the multitude of offenders be many times a cause of impunity, because of the weakness of humane Governments which are glad to spare where they are not strong enough to punish, yet in the government of God, things are quite otherwise. No combination of sinners is too hard for him, and the greater and more numerous the offenders are, the more his justice is concern'd to vindicate the affront. However God may pass by single sinners in this world, yet when a Nation combines against him, *when hand joyns in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished.*

This the *Scripture* declares to be the settled course of God's providence; That a righteous Nation shall be happy; *The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.* And on the other hand,
that

that he useth to shower down his judgments upon a wicked people, *he turneth a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

And the experience of all ages hath made this good. All along the History of the *Old Testament*, we find the interchangeable providences of God towards the People of *Israel* always suited to their manners. They were constantly prosperous or afflicted according as piety and vertue flourished or declined amongst them. And God did not onely exercise this providence towards his own People, but he dealt thus also with other Nations. The *Roman Empire* whilst the vertue of that people remained firm was *strong as iron*, as 'tis represented in the Prophecie of *Daniel*: But upon the dissolution of their manners the *iron* began to be *mixt with miry clay*, and the feet upon which that Empire stood, to be broken. And though God in the administration of his justice be not tied to precedents, and we cannot argue from Scripture examples that the providences of God towards other Nations shall in all circumstances be conformable to his dealings with the People of *Israel*; yet thus much may with great probability be collected from them, that

as God always blessed that People while they were obedient to him, and followed them with his judgments when they rebelled against him, so he will also deal with other Nations. Because the reason of those dispensations as to the main and substance of them seems to be perpetual, and founded in that which can never change, the justice of the Divine providence.

2dly. The truth of this farther appears, from the natural tendency of the thing. For Religion in general, and every particular vertue, doth in its own nature conduce to the publick Interest.

Religion, where-ever it is truly planted is certainly the greatest obligation upon conscience to all civil offices and moral duties. Chastity and temperance and industry do in their own nature tend to health and plenty. Truth and fidelity in all our dealings do create mutual love and good-will and confidence among men, which are the great bands of peace. And on the contrary, wickedness doth in its own nature produce many publick mischiefs. For as sins are link'd together and draw on one another, so almost every vice hath some temporal inconvenience annexed to it and naturally following

ing it. Intemperance and lust breed infirmities and diseases, which being propagated spoil the strain of a Nation. Idleness and luxury bring forth poverty and want; and this tempts men to injustice, and that causeth enmity and animosities, and these bring on *strife and confusion and every evil work*. This Philosophical account of publick troubles and confusions St. James gives us, *whence come wars and fightings among you? are they not hence, even from your lusts that war in your members?* Jam. 4. 1.

But I shall shew more particularly, that Religion and vertue do naturally tend to the good order and more easie government of humane Society, because they have a good influence both upon Magistrates and Subjects.

1. Upon Magistrates. Religion teacheth them to rule over men in the fear of God, because though they be Gods on earth yet they are subjects of Heaven, and accountable to Him who is higher than the highest in this world. Religion in a Magistrate strengthens his authority, because it procures veneration and gains a reputation to it. And in all the affairs of this world so much reputation is really so much power. We see that piety and Ver-

tue, where they are found among men of lower degree, will command some reverence and respect: But in persons of eminent place and dignity they are seated to a great advantage, so as to cast a lustre upon their very Place and by a strong reflexion to double the beams of Majesty. Whereas impiety and vice do strangely lessen greatness, and do secretly and unavoidably derive some weakness upon authority it self. Of this the *Scripture* gives us a remarkable instance in *David*. For among other things which made the *Sons of Zurviah too hard for him* this probably was none of the least, that they were particularly conscious to his crimes.

2. Religion hath a good influence upon the People; to make them obedient to Government, and peaceable one towards another.

1. To make them obedient to Government, and conformable to Laws; and that *not onely for wrath* and out of fear of the Magistrates power, which is but a weak and loose principle of obedience, and will cease when ever men can rebel with safety, and to advantage; but out of *Conscience*, which is a firm, and constant and lasting principle, and will hold a man fast when all other obligations will break. He that

that hath entertain'd the true principles of Christianity is not to be tempted from his obedience and subjection by any worldly considerations, because he believes that *whatsoever resisteth authority resisteth the ordinance of God*, and that *they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation*.

2. Religion tends to make men peaceable one towards another. For it endeavours to plant all those qualities and dispositions in men which tend to peace and unity, and to fill men with a spirit of universal love and good will. It endeavours likewise to secure every man's interest by commanding the observation of that great rule of equity, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*; by enjoyning that truth and fidelity be inviolably observed in all our words, promises and contracts. And in order hereunto it requires the extirpation of all those passions and vices which render men unfociable and troublesome to one another, as pride, covetousness and injustice, hatred and revenge and cruelty; and those likewise which are not so commonly reputed vices, as self-conceit and peremptoriness in a man's own opinion, and all peevishness, and incom-

incompliance of humour in things lawful and indifferent.

And that these are the proper effects of true piety the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles every where teacheth us. Now if this be the design of Religion to bring us to this temper, thus to heal the natures of men and to sweeten their spirits, to correct their passions and to mortifie all those lusts which are the causes of enmity and division, then it is evident that in its own nature it tends to the peace and happiness of humane society; and that if men would but live as Religion requires they should do the world would be a quiet habitation, a most lovely and desirable place in comparison of what now it is. And indeed the true reason why the societies of men are so full of tumult and disorder, so troublesome and tempestuous, is because there is so little of true Religion among men; so that were it not for some small remainders of piety and vertue which are yet left scatter'd among mankind, humane society would in a short space disband and run into confusion, the earth would grow wild and become a great forest, and mankind would become beasts of prey one towards another. And if this discourse
hold

hold true surely than one would think that vertue should find it self a seat wherever humane societies are, and that Religion should be owned and encouraged in the world until men cease to be governed by reason.

II. I come to vindicate this truth from the insinuations and pretences of atheistical persons. I shall mention two.

1. That Government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God and a state of rewards and punishments after this life.

2. That as for vertue and vice they are arbitrary things.

1. That Government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God or a state of rewards and punishments after this life. And this the Atheist does and must assert, otherwise he is by his own confession a declared enemy to Government and unfit to live in humane society.

For answer to this, I will not deny but that though the generality of men did not believe any superior Being nor any rewards and punishments after this life, yet notwithstanding this there might be some kind of Government kept up in the
world.

world. For supposing men to have reason, the necessities of humane nature and the mischiefs of confusion would probably compel them into some kind of order. But then I say withall, that if these principles were banished out of the world Government would be far more difficult than now it is, because it would want its firmest Basis and foundation; there would be infinitely more disorders in the world if men were restrained from injustice and violence onely by humane laws, and not by principles of conscience and the dread of another world. Therefore Magistrates have always thought themselves concerned to cherish Religion, and to maintain in the minds of men the belief of a God and another life. Nay that common suggestion of atheistical persons, that Religion was at first a politick device and is still kept up in the world as a State-engine to awe men into obedience, is a clear acknowledgment of the usefulness of it to the ends of Government, and does as fully contradict that pretence of theirs which I am now confuting as any thing that can be said.

2. That vertue and vice are arbitrary things founded onely in the imaginations of men and in the constitutions and
 customs

customs of the world, but not in the nature of the things themselves; and that *that* is vertue or vice, good or evil, which the Supream Authority of a Nation declares to be so. And this is frequently and confidently asserted by the ingenious *Hobbs* Author of a very bad Book, I mean the *Leviathan*.

Now the proper way of answering any thing that is confidently asserted is to shew the contrary, namely, That there are some things that have a natural evil and deformity in them, as perjury, perfidiousness, unrighteousness and ingratitude, which are things not onely condemned by the positive laws and constitutions of particular Nations and Governments but by the general verdict of humane nature: And that the vertues contrary to these have a natural goodness and comeliness in them, and are suitable to the common principles and sentiments of humanity.

And this will most evidently appear by putting this supposition. Suppose the reverse of all that which we now call vertue were solemnly enacted, and the practice of fraud, and rapine, and perjury, and falseness to a man's word, and all manner of vice and wickedness were
 est.

established by a Law. I ask now, if the case between vertue and vice were thus alter'd, would that which we now call vice in process of time gain the reputation of vertue, and that which we now call vertue grow odious and contemptible to humane nature? If it would not, then is there something in the nature of good and evil, of vertue and vice, which does not depend upon the pleasure of Authority, nor is subject to any arbitrary Constitution. But that it would not be thus I am very certain, because no Government could subsist upon these terms. For the very enjoying of fraud and rapine and perjury and breach of trust doth apparently destroy the greatest end of Government, which is to preserve men in their rights against the encroachments of fraud and violence. And this end being destroyed humane societies would presently fly in pieces and men would necessarily fall into a state of war. Which plainly shews that vertue and vice are not arbitrary things, but that there is a natural and immutable and eternal reason for that which we call goodness and vertue, and against that which we call vice and wickedness.

Thus I have endeavoured to evidence
and

and vindicate this truth. I shall onely draw an Inference or two from this discourse, and so conclude.

1. If this discourse be true, then those who are in place of power and authority are peculiarly concerned to maintain the honour of Religion.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of it.

1. Magistrates are concerned to maintain the honour of Religion, which doth not onely tend to every man's future happiness, but is the best instrument of Civil Government and of the temporal prosperity of a Nation. For the whole design of it is to procure the private and publick happiness of mankind, and to restrain men from all those things which would make them miserable and guilty to themselves, unpeaceable and troublesome to the world. Religion hath so great an influence upon the felicity of men that it ought to be upheld, and the veneration of it maintained, not onely out of a just dread of the Divine vengeance in another world, but out of regard to the temporal peace and prosperity of men. It will requite all the kindness and
ho-

honour we can do it by the advantages it will bring to Civil Government, and by the blessings it will draw down upon it. God hath promised that *those that honour him, he will honour*, and in the common course of his providence he usually makes this good, so that the civil Authority ought to be very tender of the honour of God and Religion, if for no other reason yet out of *reason of State*.

It were to be wisht that all men were so piously disposed, that Religion by its own authority and the reasonable force of it might be sufficient to establish its Empire in the minds of men. But the corruptions of men will always make a strong opposition against it. And therefore at the first planting of the Christian Religion in the world God was pleased to accompany it with a miraculous power: But after it was planted this extraordinary power ceased, and God hath now left it to be maintained and supported by more ordinary and humane ways, by the countenance of Authority, and the assistance of Laws; which were never more necessary than in this degenerate age, which is prodigiously sunk into Atheism and prophaneness, and is running head-long into an humour of scoffing at God and Religion

ligion and every thing that is sacred. For some ages before the Reformation Atheism was confined to *Italy*, and had its chief residence at *Rome*. All the mention that is of it in the History of those times that Papists themselves give us in the lives of their own Popes and Cardinals, excepting two or three small Philosophers that were retainers to that Court. So that this Atheistical humour among Christians was the spawn of the gross superstitious and corrupt manners of the Romish Church and Court. And indeed nothing is more natural than for extreames in Religion to beget one another, like the vibrations of a *pendulum* which the more violently you swing it one way the farther it will return the other. But in the last age, Atheism travel'd over the *Alpes* and infected *France*, and now of late it hath crossed the Seas and invaded our Nation and hath prevailed to amazement: For I do not think that there are any people in the World that are generally more indisposed to it and can worse brook it, seriousness and zeal in Religion being almost the natural temper of the *English*. So that nothing is to me matter of greater wonder, than that in a grave and sober Nation prophaneness should ever come

to gain so much ground, and the best and the wisest Religion in the world to be made the scorn of fools. For besides the prophane and atheistical discourses about God and Religion, and the bold and senseless abuses of this *sacred Book* the great instruments of our salvation, which are so frequent in the publick places of resort; I say, besides these (I speak it knowingly) a man can hardly pass the streets without having his ears grated and pierced with such horrid and blasphemous oaths and curses as are enough, if we were guilty of no other sin, to sink a Nation. And this not onely from the *Tribe* that wear Liveries, but from those that go before them and should give better example. Is it not then high time that the Laws should provide by the most prudent and effectual means to curb these bold and insolent defiers of Heaven, who take a pride in being monsters, and boast themselves in the follies and deformities of humane nature? The Heathens would never suffer their Gods to be reviled, which yet were no Gods. And shall it among the professors of the true Religion be allowed to any man to make a mock of Him that made Heaven and Earth, and to breath out blasphemies against Him

Him who gives us life and breath and all things? I doubt not but hypocrisie is a great wickedness and very odious to God, but by no means of so pernicious example as open prophaneness. Hypocrisie is a more modest way of sinning, it shews some reverence to Religion, and does so far own the worth and excellency of it as to acknowledge that it deserves to be counterfeited: Whereas prophaneness declares openly against it, and endeavours to make a party to drive it out of the world.

2. It concerns every one to live in the practice of Religion and Vertue; Because the publick happiness and prosperity depends upon it. It is most apparent that of late years Religion is very sensibly declin'd among us. The manners of men have almost been universally corrupted by a Civil War. We should therefore all jointly endeavour to retrieve the ancient vertue of the Nation, and to bring into fashion again that solid and substantial, that plain and unaffected piety, (free from the extreams both of superstition and enthusiasm) which flourished in the age of our immediate Forefathers. Which did not consist in idle talk but in real effects, in a sincere love of God and of our neighbour,

in a pious devotion and reverence towards the Divine Majesty, and in the vertuous actions of a good life; in the denial of *ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and in living *soberly and righteously and godly in this present world*. This were the true way to reconcile God to us, to stop the course of his judgments, and to bring down the blessings of Heaven upon us.

God hath now been pleased to settle us again in peace both at home and abroad, and he hath put us once more into the hands of our own counsel. Life and Death, blessing and cursing, prosperity and destruction are before us. We may chuse our own fortune, and if we be not wanting to our selves we may under the influences of God's grace and assistance, which is never wanting to our sincere endeavours, become a happy and a prosperous People.

The good God make us all wise to know and to do the things that belong to the temporal peace and prosperity of the Nation, and to the eternal happiness and salvation of every one of our souls; which we humbly beg for the sake of Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

P S A L M

P S A L M xix. II.

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

IN this Psalm David celebrates the glory of God from the consideration of the greatness of his Works, and the perfection of his Laws. From the greatness of his Works, *verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, &c.* From the perfection of his Laws, *verse 7. The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, &c.* And among many other excellencies of the Divine Laws, he mentions in the last place the benefits and advantages which come from the observance of them, *verse 11. and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

I have already shown how much Religion

L 3

gion

gion tends to the publick welfare of mankind ; to the support of Government, and to the peace and happiness of humane Societies. My work at this time shall be to shew that Religion and obedience to the Laws of God do likewise conduce to the happiness of particular persons, both in respect of this world and the other. For though there be but little express mention made in the *Old Testament* of the immortality of the Soul and the rewards of another life, yet all Religion does suppose these principles, and is built upon them.

I. And *First*, I shall endeavour to shew how Religion conduceth to the happiness of this life; and that both in respect of the inward and outward man.

First, As to the mind; to be pious and religious brings a double advantage to the mind of man. 1. It tends to the improvement of our understandings. 2. It brings peace and pleasure to our minds.

1. It tends to the improvement of our understandings. I do not mean onely that it instructs us in the knowledge of divine and spiritual things, and makes us to understand the great interest of our souls and the concernments of eternity better, but that in general it does raise and enlarge the minds

minds of men and make them more capable of true knowledge. And in this sense I understand the following Texts; *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightning the eyes; The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments; Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, which plainly refers to political prudence; I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy Testimonies are my meditation, I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts; Through thy precepts I get understanding; The enterance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple.*

Now Religion doth improve the understandings of men by subduing their lusts, and moderating their passions. The lusts and passions of men do sully and darken their minds, even by a natural influence. Intemperance and sensuality and fleshly lusts do debase mens minds, and clog their spirits, make them gross and foul, listless and unactive; they sink us down into sense, and glew us to these low and inferiour things like *birdlime* they hamper and entangle our souls, and hinder their flight upwards; they indispose and unfit our

minds for the most noble and intellectual considerations. So likewise the exorbitant passions of wrath and malice, envy and revenge, do darken and distort the understandings of men, do tincture the mind with false colours and fill it with prejudice and undue apprehensions of things.

There is no man that is intemperate or lustful, or passionate but besides the guilt he contracts which is continually fretting and disquieting his mind, besides the inconveniences he brings upon himself as to his health, he does likewise stain and obscure the brightness of his Soul and the clearness of his discerning faculty. Such persons have not that free use of their reason that they might have; their understandings are not bright enough, nor their spirits pure and fine enough for the exercise of the highest and noblest acts of reason. What clearness is to the eye that purity is to our mind and understanding, and as the clearness of the bodily eye doth dispose it for a quicker sight of material objects, so doth the purity of our minds, that is, freedom from lust and passion, dispose us for the clearest and most perfect acts of reason and understanding.

Now Religion doth purifie our minds and refine our spirits by quenching the
fire

fire of lust and suppressing the fumes and vapours of it, and by scattering the clouds and mists of passion. And the more any man's soul is cleansed from the filth and dregs of sensual lusts the more nimble and expedite it will be in its operations. The more any man conquers his passions, the more calm and sedate his spirit is, and the greater equality he maintains in his temper, his apprehensions of things will be the more clear and unprejudic'd, and his judgment more firm and steady. And this is the meaning of that saying of *Solomon*, *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding, but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly, Ira furor brevis est*-----Anger is a short fit of madness, and he that is passionate and furious deprives himself of his reason, spoils his understanding, and helps to make himself a fool: whereas he that conquers his passions and keeps them under, doth thereby preserve and improve his understanding. Freedom from irregular passions doth not onely signify that a man is wise, but really contributes to the making of him such.

2. Religion tends to the ease and pleasure, the peace and tranquillity of our minds; wherein happiness chiefly consists and which all the wisdom and Philosophy
of

of the world did always aim at, as the utmost felicity of this life. And that this is the natural fruit of a religious and vertuous course of life, the Scripture declares to us in these Texts; *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;* Psal. 97. 11. *Great peace have all they that love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them; Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;* Psal. 119. 165. Pro. 3. 17. *The fruit of righteousness is peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever;* Isa. 32. 17. The plain sense of which Texts is that pleasure and peace do naturally result from a holy and good life. When a man hath once engag'd himself in a Religious course, and is habituated to piety and holiness, all the exercises of Religion and devotion, all acts of goodness and vertue are delightfull to him. To honour and worship God, to pray to him and to praise him, to study his will, to meditate upon him and to love him, all these bring great pleasure and peace along with them. What greater contentment and satisfaction can there be to the mind of man, when it is once purifi'd and refin'd from the dregs of sensual pleasures and delights, and rais'd to its true height and pitch, than to contemplate and admire the infinite excellencies and perfections of God

God, to adore his greatness and to love his goodness? How can the thoughts of God be troublesome to any one who lives soberly and righteously and godly in the world? No man that loves goodness and righteousness hath any reason to be afraid of God, or to be disquieted with the thoughts of him. There is nothing in God that is terrible to a good man, but all the apprehensions which we naturally have of him speak comfort and promise happiness to such a one. The consideration of his attributes is so far from being a trouble to him that it is his recreation and delight. It is for wicked men to dread God, and to endeavour to banish the thoughts of him out of their minds; but a holy and vertuous man may have quiet and undisturb'd thoughts even of the justice of God, because the terrour of it doth not concern him.

Now Religion doth contribute to the peace and quiet of our minds these two ways. *First*, By allaying those passions which are apt to ruffle and discompose our spirits. Malice and hatred, wrath and revenge are very fretting and vexatious and apt to make our minds sore and uneasy, but he that can moderate these affections will find a strange ease and pleasure in

in his own spirit. *Secondly*, by freeing us from the anxieties of guilt, and the fears of divine wrath and displeasure; than which nothing is more stinging and tormenting and renders the life of man more miserable and unquiet. And what a spring of peace and joy must it needs be to apprehend upon good grounds that God is reconcil'd to us and become our friend; that all our sins are perfectly forgiven and shall never more be remembred against us! What unexpressible comfort does overflow the pious and devout soul from the remembrance of a holy and well-spent life and a conscience of its own innocency and integrity! And nothing but the practice of Religion and Vertue can give this ease and satisfaction to the mind of man. For there is a certain kind of temper and disposition which is necessary to the pleasure and quiet of our minds, and consequently to our happiness: and that is holiness and goodness, which as it is the perfection so is it likewise the happiness of the Divine nature: And on the contrary, the chief part of the misery of wicked men, and of those accursed spirits the Devils is this, that they are of a disposition contrary to God; they are envious and malicious and cruel, and of such a temper as

is naturally a torment and disquiet to it self. And here the foundation of Hell is laid, in the evil disposition of mens minds; and till this be cur'd, which can onely be done by Religion, it is as impossible for a man to be happy, that is, pleas'd and contented within himself, as it is for a sick man to be at ease. Because such a man hath that within him which torments him, and he cannot be at ease till that be remov'd. The man's spirit is out of order and off the hinges, and till that be put into its right frame he will be perpetually disquieted and can find no rest within himself. The *Prophet* very fitly describes to us the unquiet condition of wicked men, *The* Isa. 57. *wicked is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace (saith my God) to the wicked.* 10. 21. So long as sin and corruption abound in our hearts they will be restlessly working, like wine which will be in a perpetual motion and agitation till it have purg'd it self of its dregs and foulness.

Secondly, Religion does likewise tend to the happiness of the outward man. Now the blessings of this kind are such as either respect our *health*, or *estate*, or *reputation*, or *relations*; and in respect of all these Religion is highly advantageous to us.

r. As to our health, a Religious and vertuous life doth eminently conduce to that, and to long life as a consequent of it. And in this sense I understand these following Texts; *My Son forget not my Law, but let thy heart keep my Commandments; for length of days, and long life, shall they add to thee; and v. 7, and 8. Fear the Lord and depart from evil, it shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones; and v. 16. among the temporal advantages of wisdom or Religion this is mention'd as the first and principal, length of days is in her right hand; and v. 18. she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and again, Whoso findeth me, findeth life, but he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; (that is injurious to his own life) all they that hate me love death; all which is undoubtedly true in a spiritual sense, but is certainly meant by Solomon in the natural sense. And these promises, of the blessings of health and long life to good men are not only declaratory of the good pleasure and intention of God towards them, but likewise of the natural tendency of the thing. For Religion doth oblige men to the practice of those vertues which do in their own nature conduce to the preservation of our health, and the lengthning of*

our

Prov. 3.
1, 2.

Prov. 8.
35, 36.

our days; such as temperance and chastity and moderation of our passions. And the contrary vices to these do apparently tend to the impairing of mens health and the shortning of their days. How many have wasted and consum'd their bodies by lust, and brought grievous pains and mortal diseases upon themselves. See how the wise man describes the sad consequences of this sin, *He goes as an Oxe to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his Liver; as a Bird hasteneth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life; and v. 25, 26, 27. Let not thy heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths; for she hath cast down many wounded; yea many young men hath been slain by her; her house is the way to Hell (that is to the grave) going down to the chambers of death. How many have been ruin'd by intemperance and excess, and most unnaturally have perverted those blessings which God hath given for the support of nature to the overthrow and destruction of it? How often hath mens malice and envy and discontent against others terminated in a cruel revenge upon themselves? How many by the wild fury and extravagancy of their own passions have put their bodies into a combustion, and fir'd their spirits; and by stirring up their*

rage

Prov. 7.
22, 23.

rage and choler against others have arm'd that fierce humour against themselves?

2. As to our estates, Religion is likewise a mighty advantage to men in that respect. Not only in regard of God's more especial providence and peculiar blessing which usually attends good men in their undertakings and crowns them with good success, but also from the nature of the thing. And this, I doubt not, is the meaning of those expressions of the *Wise man* concerning the temporal benefits and advantages of wisdom or Religion; *In her left hand are riches and honour; They that love me shall inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures*; and this Religion principally does, by charging men with truth and fidelity and justice in their dealings, which are a sure way of thriving and will hold out when all fraudulent arts and devices will fail. And this also *Solomon* observes to us; *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely, but he that perverteth his way shall be known*; his indirect dealing will be discover'd one time or other, and then loses his reputation, and his interest sinks. Falshood and deceit onely serve a present turn, and the consequence of them is pernicious; but truth and fidelity are of lasting advantage; *The righteous hath an*
ever

Pro. 3. 16

Pro. 8. 21

Pro. 10. 9

Pro. 10. 5

everlasting foundation; The lip of truth is established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. And Religion does likewise engage men to diligence and industry in their Callings, and how much this conduces to the advancement of mens fortunes daily experience teaches, and the *Wise-man* hath told us, *The diligent hand makes rich*; and again, *Seest thou a man diligent in business, he shall stand before Princes, he shall not stand before mean persons.*

And where men by reason of the difficult circumstances of their condition cannot arrive to any eminency of estate, yet Religion makes a compensation for this by teaching men to be contented with that moderate and competent fortune which God hath given them. For the shortest way to be rich is not by enlarging our estates, but by contracting our desires. What *Seneca* says of Philosophy, is much more true of Religion, *præstat opes sapientia, quas cuicumque fecit supervacuas dedit*, it makes all those rich to whom it makes riches superfluous, and they are so to those who are taught by Religion to be contented with such a portion of them as God's Providence hath thought fit to allot to them

3. As to our reputation. There is no-
M thing

thing gives a man a more firm and establish'd reputation among wise and serious persons (whose judgment is onely valuable) than a prudent and substantial Piety. This doth many times command reverence and esteem from the worse sort of men, and such as are no great friends to Religion; and sometimes the force of truth will extort an acknowledgment of its excellency, even from its greatest enemies. I know very well that good men may, and often do, blemish the reputation of their piety by over-acting some things in Religion; by an indiscreet zeal about things wherein Religion is not concerned, by an ungratefull austerity and sowerness which Religion doth not require; by little affectations, and an imprudent ostentation of devotion; but a substantial and solid, a discreet and unaffected piety, which makes no great noise and show, but expresses it self in a constant and serious devotion, and is accompanied with the fruits of goodness and kindness and righteousness towards men, will not onely give a man a credit and value among the sober and the vertuous, but even among the vicious and more degenerate sort of men. Upon this account it is that the Apostle adviseth Christians, if they would recommend them-

themselves to the esteem of God and men, earnestly to mind the weighty and substantial parts of Religion; *Let not then your good be evil spoken of; for the Kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

It is true indeed, there are some persons of so profligate a temper, and of such an inveterate enmity to all goodness, as to scorn and reproach even Religion and Vertue it self. But the reproach of such persons does not really wound a man's reputation. For why should any man be troubled at the contumelies of those whose judgment deserves not to be valued, who despise goodness and good men out of malice and ignorance? If these reproaches which they cast upon them were the censures of wise and sober men, a man's reputation might be concern'd in them; but they are the rash words of inconsiderate and injudicious men, the extravagant speeches of those who are unexperienc'd in the things they speak against; and therefore no wise man will be troubl'd at them, or think either Religion or himself disparaged by them.

4. As to our Relations. Religion also conduceth to the happiness of these, as it derives a large and extensive blessing upon all that belongs to us; the goodness of God being so diffusive as to scatter his blessings round about the habitations of the just; and to shew mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his Commandments. So David tells us, *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his Commandments; His seed shall be mighty upon earth, The generation of the upright shall be blessed? Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endureth for ever.* And so Solomon; *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his Childrens Children; and again, In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and his Children shall have a place of refuge.* But the wicked derives a curse upon all that is related to him, he is said to trouble his own house; and again, *The wicked are overthrown and are not, but the house of the righteous shall stand.*

But setting aside the consideration of God's Providence, Religion doth likewise in its own nature tend to the welfare of those who are related to us; because it lays the strictest obligations upon men to take care of their Families and Relations,

and

and to make the best provision both for their comfortable subsistence here in this world and their salvation in the next. And those who neglect those duties the Scripture is so far from esteeming them Christians that it accounts them worse than Heathens and Infidels, *He that provideth not for his own, especially those of his own house, is worse than an Infidel, and hath deny'd the faith.* This I know is spoken in respect of temporal provision, but it holds à fortiori as to the care of their souls.

Besides, it is many times seen that the posterity of holy and good men, especially of such as have evidenc'd their piety towards God by bounty and charity to men, have met with unusual kindness and respect from others, and have by a strange and secret disposition of Divine providence been unexpectedly car'd and provided for; and that, as they have all the reason in the world to believe, upon the account and for the sake of the piety and charity of their Parents. This David tells us from his own particular observation; *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.* And that by the *righteous* is here meant the *good and mercifull man* appears

M 3

appears

Ver. 26. appears from the description of him in the next words, *He is ever merciful and leneth, and his seed is blessed.* And on the contrary, the posterity of the wicked do many times inherit the fruit of their fathers sins and vices; and that not onely by a just judgment of God, but from the natural course and consequence of things. And in this sense that expression in *Job* is often verifi'd, that *God lays up the iniquity of wicked men for their Children.* And doth not experience testifie that the intemperate and unjust do many times transmit their bodily infirmities and diseases to their Children, and entail a secret curse upon their estates, which does either insensibly waste and consume it, or eat out the heart and comfort of it? Thus you see how Religion in all respects conduces to the happiness of this life.

Job 21.
19.

II. Religion and Vertue do likewise most certainly and directly tend to the eternal happiness and salvation of men in the other world. And this is incomparably the greatest advantage that redounds to men by being Religious, in comparison of which all temporal considerations are *less than nothing and vanity.* The worldly advantages that Religion brings to men
in

in this present life are a sensible recommendation of Religion even to the lowest and meanest spirits: But to those who are rais'd above sense and aspire after immortality, who believe the perpetual duration of their souls and the resurrection of their bodies; to those who are throughly convinc'd of the inconsiderableness of this short dying life and of all the concernments of it, in comparison of that eternal state which remains for us in another life; to these, I say, the consideration of a future happiness and of those unspeakable and everlasting rewards which shall then be given to holiness and vertue, is certainly the most powerfull motive and the most likely to prevail upon them. For those who are perswaded that they shall continue for ever cannot chuse but aspire after a happiness commensurate to their duration, nor can any thing that is conscious to its self of its own immortality be satisfyed and contented with any thing less than the hopes of an endless felicity. And this hope Religion alone gives men, and the Christian Religion onely can settle men in a firm and unshaken assurance of it. But because all men who have entertain'd any Religion have consented to these principles, of the *immortality of the*
M 4 *soul*

soul and the *recompences* of another world, and have always promis'd to themselves some rewards of piety and vertue after this life; and because I did more particularly design from this *Text* to speak of the temporal benefits and adavantages which redound to men from Religion, therefore I shall content my self to shew very briefly how a religious and vertuous life doth conduce to our future happiness. And that upon these two accounts; from the promise of God, and from the nature of the thing.

1 Tim. 4.
8. 1. From the promise of God. *Godliness* (saith the Apostle) *hath the promise of the life that is to come.* God hath all along in the Scripture suspended the promise of eternal life upon this condition. He hath peremptorily declar'd that without obedience and holiness of life no man shall ever see the Lord. And this very thing, that it is the constitution and appointment of God, might be argument enough to us (if there were no other) to convince us of the necessity of obeying the Laws of God in order to our happiness, and to perswade us thereunto. For eternal life is the gift of God, and he may do what he will with his own. He is master of his own favours and may dispense

dispense them upon what terms and conditions he pleases. But it is no hard condition that he hath imposed upon us. If Religion brought no advantages to us in this world, yet the happiness of heaven is so great as will abundantly recompence all our pains and endeavours; there is temptation enough in the reward to engage any man in the work. Had God thought fit to have impos'd the most grievous and difficult things upon us, ought we not to have submitted to them and to have undertaken them with cheerfulness upon such great and glorious encouragements? As *Naaman's* servants said to him in another case, *Had he bid thee doe some great thing wouldest thou not have done it?* So if God had said that without poverty and actual martyrdom *no man shall see the Lord,* would not any man that believes heaven and hell and understands what these words signifie and what it is to escape extream and eternal misery, and to enjoy unspeakable and endless glory, have been willing to accept these conditions? *How much more, when he hath onely said, wash and be clean; and Let every man that hath this hope in Him, purifie himself as he is pure?* But God hath not

not dealt thus with us, nor is the imposing of this condition of eternal life a meer arbitrary constitution, therefore I shall endeavour to shew,

2dly, That a Religious and Holy life doth from the very nature and reason of the thing conduce to our future happiness, by way of necessary disposition and preparation of us for it. We cannot be otherwise happy but by our conformity to God, without this we cannot possibly love him nor find any pleasure or happiness in communion with him. For we cannot love a nature contrary to our own, nor delight to converse with it. Therefore Religion, in order to the fitting of us for the happiness of the next life, does design to mortifie our lusts and passions, and to restrain us from the inordinate love of the gross and sensual delights of this world; to call off our minds from these inferiour things, and to raise them to higher and more spiritual objects, that we may be disposed for the happiness of the other world, and taught not to relish the delights of it; whereas should we set our hearts onely upon these things, and be able to taste no pleasure in any thing but what is sensual and earthly, we must

must needs be extremely miserable when we come into the other world, because we should meet with nothing to entertain our selves withall, no employment suitable to our disposition, no pleasure that would agree with our deprav'd appetites and vicious inclinations. All that Heaven and Happiness signifies is unsuitable to a wicked man, and therefore could be no felicity to him. But this I shall have occasion to speak more fully to in my last Discourse.

From all that hath been said, the reasonableness of Religion clearly appears which tends so directly to the happiness of men, and is upon all accounts calculated for our benefit. Let but all things be truly considered and cast up and it will be found that there is no advantage to any man from an irreligious and vicious course of life. I challenge any one to instance in any real benefit that ever came to him this way. Let the sinner declare what he hath found by experience. Hath lewdness and intemperance been more for his health than if he had liv'd chastly and soberly? Hath falsehood and injustice prov'd at the long run more for the advancement and

secu.

security of his estate than truth and honesty would have done? Hath any vice that he hath lived in made him more true friends, and gain'd him a better reputation in the world than the practice of holiness and vertue would have done? Hath he found *that* peace and satisfaction of mind in an evil course, and *that* quiet enjoyment of himself, and comfortable assurance of God's favour, and good hopes of his future condition, which a religious and vertuous life would have given him? Nay on the contrary, have not some of his vices weaken'd his body and broken his health, have not others dissipated his estate and reduc'd him to want? What notorious vice is there that doth not blemish a man's reputation, and make him either hated or despis'd, and that not only by the wise and the vertuous but even by the generality of men? But was ever any wicked man free from the stings of a guilty conscience and the torment of a restless and uneasie mind, from the secret dread of Divine displeasure, and of the vengeance of another world? Let the sinner freely speak the very inward sense of his soul in this matter, and spare not; and I doubt not, if he will deal clearly and impartially, but that

that he will acknowledge all this to be true, and is able to confirm it from his own sad experience. For this is the natural fruit of sin and the present revenge which it takes upon sinners, besides that fearful punishment which shall be inflicted on them in another life.

What reason then can any man pretend against Religion, when it is so apparently for the benefit not onely of humane society but of every particular person; when there is no real interest of this world but may ordinarily be as effectually promoted and pursued to as great advantage, nay usually to far greater, by a man that *lives soberly and righteously and godly in the world*, than by any one that leads the contrary course of life? Let no man then say, with those prophane persons whom the Prophet speaks of, *It is in vain to serve the Lord, and what profit is it that we have kept his Commandments?* God has not been so hard a master to us that we have reason thus to complain of him. He hath given us no Laws but what are for our good, nay so gracious hath he been to us as to link together our duty and our interest, and to make those very things the instances of our obedience which are the natural means and causes of our happiness.

ness. The Devil was so far in the right, when he charg'd *Job* that he did not *serve God for nought*. 'Tis he himself that is the hard master and makes men serve him for nought, who rewards his drudges and slaves with nothing but shame and sorrow and misery. But God requires no man's service upon hard and unreasonable terms. The greatest part of our work is a present reward to it self, and for whatever else we do or suffer for him, he offers us abundant consideration. And if men did but truly and wisely love themselves they would upon this very ground if there were no other, become Religious. For when all is done there is no man can serve his own interest better than by serving God. Religion conduceth both to our present and future happiness, and when the Gospel chargeth us with piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, and temperance and chastity in reference to our selves, the true interpretation of these Laws is this, God requires of men in order to their eternal happiness that they should do those things which tend to their temporal welfare, that is. in plainer words, he promises to make us happy for ever upon condition that we will but do that which is best
for

for our selves in this world. To conclude, Religion is founded in the interest of men rightly apprehended. So that if *the God of this world* and the lusts of men did not *blind their eyes*, so as to render them unfit to discern their true interest, it would be impossible, so long as men love themselves and desire their own happiness to keep them from being religious; for they could not but conclude that to be their interest, and being so convinc'd they would resolve to pursue it and stick to it.

PHIL.

PHIL. III. 8.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

IN the beginning of this Chapter the *Apostle* makes a comparison between the Jewish and the Christian Religion, and shews the Christian to be in truth and substance what the Jewish was onely in type and shadow, v. 3. *We are the Circumcision which worship God in the spirit.* And then he enumerates the several priviledges he was partaker of by virtue of his being born in the Jewish Church, v. 4, 5, 6. *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, if any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, &c.* And yet he tells us he was contented to forgoe all these advantages for Christ and the

N

Christian

Christian Religion, v. 7. *But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ.* And not onely these, but if there were any thing else that men value in this world he was willing to hazard that also upon the same account, v. 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*

In which words the Apostle declares the high esteem he had for the Christian Religion which he calls the *knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord*; the excellency whereof appear'd so great to him that he valued nothing in comparison of the advantages which he had by the knowledge of it.

My design at this time from this Text is to represent the excellency of this knowledge of the Christian Religion above that of any other Religion or Institution in the world. And here I shall not consider the external evidence which we have of the truth of Christianity and of the Divinity of its doctrine, in which respect it hath incomparably the advantage of any other Religion: but onely the internal excellencies of the Doctrine it self, abstracting from the Divine authority of it: And that in these four respects:

First,

First, As it does more clearly reveal to us the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all Religion.

Secondly, As it give us a more certain and perfect Law for the government of our lives.

Thirdly, As it propounds to us more powerfull Arguments to perswade men to the obedience of this Law.

Fourthly, As it furnishes us with better motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of this life. Now these are the greatest advantages that any Religion can have, To give men right apprehensions of God, a perfect rule of good life, and efficacious arguments to perswade men to be good, and patiently to bear the evils and sufferings of this life. And these shall be the heads of my following discourse.

I. The Christian Religion doth more clearly reveal to us the nature of God, than any Religion ever did. And to have right apprehensions of God is the great foundation of all Religion. For according as mens notions of God are such will their Religion be. If men have gross and false conceptions of God their Religion will

N 2

be

be absurd and superstitious. If men fancy God to be an ill-natur'd Being arm'd with infinite power, one that delights in the misery and ruine 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 worship.

Now the Christian Religion gives us a more perfect, and a more lovely character of God than any Religion ever did. It represents him to us as a pure spirit, (which the Heathens did not generally believe) and that he is to be worship'd in such a manner as is most suitable to his spiritual nature, (which not onely the Heathens but even the Jews themselves were extremely mistaken about) *God is a spirit* (says our Saviour) *and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* It is true indeed God himself did command sacrifices to the Jews, and all those external and troublesome observances of which their Religion did consist: But then it is to be consider'd, that he did not institute this way of Worship because it was most suitable to his own nature, but

but because of the carnality of their hearts and the proneness of that people to Idolatry. God did not prescribe these things because they were best, but because the temper of that People would then admit of nothing better. And this the Scripture gives us several intimations of, *Thou desirest not sacrifice, thou delightest not in burnt-offerings,* saith David: And elsewhere more expressly to this purpose; *I spake not unto your Fathers* (says God by the prophet Jeremiah) *nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them forth out of the Land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice: A sufficient intimation that God did not primarily intend to appoint this way of worship, and to impose it upon them as that which was most proper and agreeable to him, but that he condescended to it as most accommodate to their present state and inclination. And in this sense also some understand what God says to the same people by the Prophet Ezekiel, that he gave them statutes that were not good.*

And as the Christian Religion gives a more perfect, so a more amiable and lovely character of the Divine nature. No

Religion that ever was in the world does so fully represent the goodness of God and his tender love to mankind, which is the best and most powerfull argument to the love of God. The Heathens did generally dread God, and looked upon him as fierce and cruel and revengefull; and therefore they endeavoured to appease him by the horrid and barbarous sacrifices of men, and of their own children. And all along in the *Old Testament* God is generally represented as very strict and severe. But there are no where so plain and full declarations of his mercy and love to the sons of men as are made in the *Gospel*. In the *Old Testament* God is usually styl'd *the Lord of Hosts, the great and the terrible God*: But in the *New Testament* he is represented to us by milder titles, *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies, and the God of all consolations; the God of all patience, the God of love and peace*; nay he is said to be *love it self and to dwell in love*. And this difference between the style of the *Old* and *New Testament* is so remarkable, that one of the greatest *Seets* in the Primitive Church (I mean that of the *Gnosticks*) did upon this very ground found their *heresie* of two Gods; the *one* evil and fierce and

cruel,

cruel, whom they call'd the God of the *Old Testament*; the *other* good and kind and mercifull, whom they call'd the God of the *New*. So great a difference is there between the representations which are made of God in the Books of the Jewish and the Christian Religion, as to give at least some colour and pretence for an imagination of two Gods.

II. Christian Religion hath given us a more certain and perfect Law for the government of our lives. It hath made our duty more plain and certain in many instances, than either the Philosophy of the *Heathen*, or the precepts of *Moses* had done. It commands universal love and kindness and good will among men, a readiness to forgive our greatest enemies, *to doe good to them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us*. And does inculcate these precepts more vehemently, and forbid malice and hatred and revenge and contention more strictly and peremptorily than any Religion ever did before: as will appear to any one that does but attentively read our *Saviour's Sermon upon the Mount*.

N 4

And

And as Christianity hath given us a more *certain* so likewise a more *perfect* Law for the government of our lives. All the precepts of it are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties of us 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 humane nature and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and vertue. The Laws of our Religion are such as are generally usefull and beneficial to the world, as do tend to the outward peace and the health, to the inward comfort and contentment, and to the universal happiness of mankind. They command nothing that is unnecessary and burdensome, as were the numerous rites and ceremonies of the Jewish Religion, but what is reasonable, and usefull, and substantial: And 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 either to the regular 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

and passions, to reproach our understandings and to make our selves fools and beasts; in a word, nothing but what tends either to our private harm and prejudice, or to publick disorder and confusion.

And that this is the tenour of the Laws of the Gospel will appear to any one from our *Saviour's* Sermons and Discourses: particularly that upon the Mount; wherein he charges his Disciples and followers to be humble, and meek, and righteous, and mercifull, and pure, and peaceable, and patient under sufferings and persecutions, and good and kind to all even to those that are evil and injurious to us, and to endeavour to excell in all goodness and vertue. This will appear likewise from the Writings of the holy Apostles; I will instance but in some few passages in them. *St. Paul* represents to us the design of the Christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admirable sense and weight; *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appear'd to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.* The same Apostle makes this the main and fundamental condition of the Covenant of the Gospel on our part, *Let every one* Tit. 2. 11, 12.
2 Tim. 2. 19.
that

that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. St. James describes the Christian doctrine (which he calls *the wisdom that is from above*) by these characters, *It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easie to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisie.* St. Peter calls the Gospel, *the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and vertue; whereby (saith he) are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of a divine nature having escap'd the corruption that is in the world through lust; and upon this consideration he exhorts them to give all diligence to add to their faith the several vertues of a good life, without which he tells them they are barren and unfruitfull in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I will conclude with that full and comprehensive passage of St. Paul to the Philippians, Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, (ὅσα σεμνά, whatsoever things are of venerable esteem) whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure (or chaste) whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any vertue, if there be any praise, think on these things.*

But

But the perfection and the reasonableness of the Laws of Christianity will most plainly appear by taking a brief survey of them. And they may all be referr'd to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of humane nature and to make men singly and personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of humane Society.

First, Such as tend to the perfection of humane nature and to make men good singly and personally consider'd. And the precepts of this kind may be distributed likewise into two sorts, such as enjoin piety towards God, or such as require the good order and government of our selves in respect of the enjoyments and pleasures of this life.

1. Such as enjoin Piety towards God. All the duties of Christian Religion which respect God are no other but what natural light prompts men to, excepting the two Sacraments (which are of great use and significancy in the Christian Religion) and praying to God in the name and by the mediation of Jesus Christ. For the sum of natural Religion as it refers more immediately to God is this, That we should inwardly reverence and

and love God, and that we should express our inward reverence and love of him by external worship and adoration, and by our readiness to receive and obey all the revelations of his will : And that we should testify our dependence upon him, and our confidence of his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for mercy and help for our selves and others ; And that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many favours and benefits which every day and every minute we receive from him, by continual praises and thanksgivings : And that on the contrary we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give that honour and reverence which is due to him, to any other ; that we should not worship him in any manner that is either unsuitable to the excellency and perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will ; that we should carefully avoid the prophane and irreverent use of his Name by cursing, or customary swearing, and take heed of the neglect or contempt of his Worship or any thing belonging to it. This is the sum of the first part of natural Religion, and these are the general heads of those duties which every man's reason tells him he owes to God ;

God : And these are the very things which the Christian Religion does expressly require of us, as might be evidenc'd from particular Texts in the *New Testament*. So that there is nothing in this part of Christianity but what agrees very well with the reason of mankind.

2. Such precepts as require the good order and government of our selves in respect of the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. Christian Religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste, all manner of sobriety and temperance and moderation in reference to our appetites and passion ; and forbids whatever is unnatural, and unreasonable, and unhealthfull in the use of pleasures and of any of God's creatures. Hither belong all those Texts which require of us that we should *not* Rom. 8. 1. *walk after the flesh but after the spirit,* that we should *cleanse our selves from all* 2 Cor. 7. *filthiness of flesh and spirit,* that we should *be holy in all manner of conversation.* 1 Pet. 1. St. John distributes the lusts and irregular 15. appetites of men into three kinds, voluptuousness, covetousness, and ambition, answerably to the three sorts of tempting objects that are in the world, pleasures, riches and honours, *All that is in the* 1 Joh. 2. *world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the* 15. *eyes,*

eyes, and the pride of life, &c. And Christianity doth strictly forbid all these, *Take heed and beware of Covetousness* (says our Saviour, and he adds this excellent reason) *for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* It forbids pride and ambition and vain glory, and commands humility and modesty and condescension to others; *Learn of me* (says our Saviour) *for I am meek and lowly in spirit; Mind not high things, but condescend to them that are of low degree; Let nothing be done through vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* And in reference to sensual pleasures it forbids all irregularity and excess, and strictly enjoyns purity and temperance; cautioning us *to take heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness; chargeing us to walk decently as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness; to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.* Now all these precepts do not onely tend to beget in us such vertues and dispositions as are reasonable and suitable to our nature and every way for our temporal convenience and advantage, but such as do likewise exceedingly dispose us to piety and

Luke 12.
15.

Mat. 11.
29.

Rom. 12.
16.

Phil. 2.3.

Luke 21.
36.

Rom. 13.
13.

1 Pet. 2.
11.

and religion by purifying our souls from the dross and filth of sensual delights. For covetousness debaseth a man's spirit, and sinks it into the earth; intemperance and lust cloud a man's understanding, and indispose it for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine. Thus you see how the Precepts of Christianity do tend to the perfection of humane nature, considering men singly and personally.

Secondly, The other sort of Precepts are such as tend to the peace and happiness of humane Society. And the reason of mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end than the Laws of Christianity are. For they command all those vertues which are apt to sweeten the spirits and allay the passions and animosities of men one towards another. They require us *to love our neighbour* (that is every man in the world, even our greatest enemies) *as our selves.* And for this end among others was the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, the Feast of love instituted: that by commemorating the love of our dying Saviour, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another.

And by this Law of loving all men
even

even our enemies, Christian Religion discovers it self not onely to be the most innocent and harmless, but the most generous and best natur'd Institution that ever was in the world. For in pursuance of this general precept it commands us, *to do good to all men; if it be possible, and as much as in us lies to live peaceably with all men; to be kind one to another, ready to gratifie and oblige men; to be tender-hearted and compassionate towards those that are in want or misery, and ready to supply and relieve them; to sympathize with one another in our joys and sorrows, to mourn with those that mourn, and to rejoyce with them that rejoyce; to bear one anothers burdens, and to forbear one another in love; to be easily reconcil'd to them that have offended us, and to be ready to forgive from our hearts the greatest injuries that can be done to us, and that without bounds and limits even to seventy seven times; as our Saviour expresseth it.*

The Laws of Christianity do likewise secure both the private interests of men and the publick peace, by confirming and enforcing all the dictates of nature concerning Justice and Equity, and our doing to others as we would have them

to

to do to us; and by commanding obedience to humane Laws which decide mens rights and submission to government under pain of damnation: And by forbidding whatever is contrary to these, violence and oppression, defrauding and overreaching one another, perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trusts, oaths or promises, undutifulness to superiours, sedition and rebellion against Magistracy and Authority: And if there be any thing else that is apt to disturb the peace of the world and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sowerness of disposition, and rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness and sinister interpretation of things, all cross and distastfull humours, and what ever else may render the conversation of men grievous and uneasy to one another: All these are either exprelly, or by clear consequence and deduction forbidden in the new Testament.

And now what could any Religion do more towards the reforming of the dispositions and manners of men? What Laws can be devis'd more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to its highest perfection, to procure the tranquillity of mens minds and the peace and happiness of the world, than these precepts of

O

Chri

Christianity are? Several of which (as those of *loving our enemies*, of *not revenging injuries*, of *rendering good for evil*, &c.) though they have been esteem'd reasonable by some of the wisest among the Heathen, yet by reason of the degeneracy of the world, and of the obscurity and uncertainty of humane reason, they never obtain'd to have the estimation and force of natural Laws. So that we owe to Christianity the discovery of the most certain and perfect Rule of life that ever the world was acquainted withall.

III. Christian Religion propounds the most powerfull arguments to perswade men to the obedience of these Laws. The Gospel offers such considerations to us, as are fit to work very forceably upon two of the most swaying and governing passions in the mind of man, our hopes and our fears. To encourage our hopes it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in case of obedience; and to awaken our fear it threatens sinners with the most dreadfull and durable torments, in case of disobedience. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and*

Rom. 2.
7, 8.

im-

immortality, it promiseth *eternal life*: But unto them that obey not the truth, but obey *unrighteousness*, it threatens *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*. And this is that which makes the doctrine of the Gospel so powerfull an instrument for the reforming of the world, that it proposes to men such glorious rewards and such terrible punishments as no Religion ever did; and to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the reality, and certainty of these things than ever the world had before. This account the *Apostle* gives us of the success and efficacy of the Gospel upon the minds of men, and for this reason he calls it *the power of God unto salvation*, because therein *the wrath of God is reveal'd from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. Before the revelation of the Gospel the wickedness and impenitency of the Heathen-world was a much more excusable thing, because they were in a great measure ignorant of the rewards of another life, and had generally but very uncertain and obscure apprehensions of those things which urge men most powerfully to forsake their sins, and are the most prevalent arguments to a good life. So *St. Paul* tells the *Athe-*

Rom. 1.
15, 18.

O 2

atians

AR. 17. *nians* the most knowing among the Hea-
 30, 31. then, *The times of this ignorance God*
winked at, but now commandeth all men
every where to repent; because he hath ap-
pointed a day in the which he will judge the
world in righteousness by that man whom
he hath ordained, whereof he hath given
assurance unto all men, in that he hath rai-
sed him from the dead. The Resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the dead hath given
 the world that full assurance of another life
 after this and of a future Judgment
 which it never had before, for *He* whom
 God rais'd from the dead did declare and
 testify that *it was he who was ordain'd of*
 God to be the Judge of quick and dead. And
 AR. 10. the firm belief of a future Judgment,
 42. which shall render to every man according
 to his deeds, if it be well consider'd, is to
 a reasonable nature the most forcible mo-
 tive of all other to a good life; because
 it is taken from the consideration of the
 greatest and most lasting happiness and
 misery that humane nature is capable of.
 So that the Laws of Christianity have the
 firmest sanction of any Laws in the world
 to secure the obedience and observance of
 them: For what can restrain men from
 sin if the terrours of the Lord and the
 evident danger of eternal destruction will
 not?

not? What encouragement can be given
 to goodness beyond the hopes of Hea-
 ven and the assurance of an endless feli-
 city?

IV. The Christian Religion furnisheth
 us with the best motives and considerations
 to patience and contentedness under the
 evils and afflictions of this life. This was
 one great design of Philosophy, to sup-
 port men under the evils and calamities
 which this life is incident to, and to for-
 tify their spirits against sufferings. And to
 this end the wisest among the Heathens
 rack'd their wits and cast about every
 way, they advanc'd all sorts of princi-
 ples and manag'd every little argument
 and consideration to the utmost advan-
 tage. And yet after all these attempts
 they have not been able to give any con-
 siderable comfort and ease to the mind of
 man under any of the great evils and
 pressures of this life. *The bed is shorter than*
that a man can stretch himself upon it, and
the covering narrower than that a man can
wrap himself in it. All the wise sayings
 and advices which Philosophers could
 muster up to this purpose have prov'd
 ineffectual to the common people and the
 generality of mankind, and have help'd
 only

onely to support some few stout and obstinate minds, which without the assistance of Philosophy would have held up pretty well of themselves.

Some of the Philosophers have run so far back for arguments of comfort against pain as to call every thing into question, and to *doubt* whether there were any such thing as sense or pain. And yet for all that when any great evil has been upon them, they would *certainly* sigh and groan as pitifully and cry out as loud as other men.

Others have sought to ease themselves of all the evil of affliction by disputing subtilly against it, and pertinaciously maintaining that afflictions are no real evils but onely in opinion and imagination, and therefore a wise man ought not to be troubl'd at them. But he must be a very wise man that can forbear being troubl'd at things that are very troublesome. And yet thus *Possidonius* (as *Tully* tells us) distinguish'd, he could not deny pain to be *very troublesome* but for all that he was resolv'd, *never to acknowledge it to be an evil*. But sure it is a very slender comfort that relies upon this nice distinction between things being *troublesome* and being *evils*, when all the evil

of

of affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us. But when the best that can be is made of this argument, it is good for nothing but to be thrown away as a stupid Paradox and against the common sense of mankind.

Others have endeavoured to delude their trouble by a graver way of reasoning, that these things are fatal and necessary and therefore no body ought to be troubled at them, it being in vain to be troubled at that which we cannot help. And yet perhaps it might as reasonably be said on the other side that this very consideration, *that a thing cannot be help'd*, is one of the justest causes of trouble to a wise man. For it were some kind of comfort if these evils were to be avoided, because then we might be carefull to prevent them another time; but if they be necessary then my trouble is as fatal as the calamity that occasions it, and though I know it is in vain to be troubled for that which I cannot help yet I cannot chuse but be afflicted. It was a smart reply that *Augustus* made to one that ministred this comfort to him of the fatality of things, *Hoc ipsum est* (says he) *quod me male habet*, this was so far from giving any ease to his mind that *this was the very thing that troubled him*. O 4

Others

Others have try'd to divert and entertain the troubles of other men by pretty and plausible sayings, such as this, *That if evils are long they are but light, if sharp I but short,* and a hundred such like. Now am apt to imagine that it is but a very small comfort that a plain and ordinary man, lying under a sharp fit of the Stone for a week together, receives from this fine Sentence. For what pleasure soever men that are at ease and leisure may take in being the Authours of witty sayings, I doubt it is but poor consolation that a man under great and stinging afflictions finds from them.

The best moral argument to patience, in my opinion, is the advantage of patience it self. To bear evils as quietly as we can is the way to make them lighter and easier. But to toss and fling and to be restless is good for nothing but to fret and enrage our pain, to gall our sores and to make the burthen that is upon us sit more uneasy. But this is properly no consideration of comfort, but an art of managing our selves under afflictions so as not to make them more grievous than indeed they are.

But now the arguments which Christianity propounds to us are such as are a just and reasonable encouragement to men to bear

bear

bear sufferings patiently. Our Religion sets before us not the example of a stupid Stoick, who had by obstinate principles harden'd himself against all sense of pain beyond the common measures of humanity, but an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like our selves, that had a tender sense of the least suffering and yet patiently endur'd the greatest; of *Jesus the Authour and finisher of our faith,* Heb. 1. 22 *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* God thought it expedient that the first Christians should by great hardships and persecutions be train'd up for glory, and to animate and encourage them hereto the *Captain of our salvation was crown'd by sufferings.* Heb. 2. 10 Much more should the consideration of this pattern arm us with patience against the common and ordinary calamities of this life, especially if we consider his example with this advantage that though his sufferings were wholly undeserv'd, and not for himself but for us, yet he bore them patiently.

But the main consideration of all is, the glory which shall follow our sufferings as the reward of *them*, if they be for God and his cause; and if upon any other innocent account,

count,

2 Cor. 4. 17. count, as reward of our patience. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Christian Religion hath secur'd us that we shall be infinite gainers by our sufferings. And who would not be content to suffer upon terms of such advantage? to pass through many tribulations into the Kingdom of God, and to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness? The assurance of a future blessedness is a cordial that will revive our spirits more in the day of adversity, than all the wise sayings and considerations of Philosophy.

These are the arguments which Christianity propounds to us, and they are firm and sound at the bottom; they have strength and substance in them, and are apt to work upon humane nature, and the most ordinary understanding is capable of the force of them. In the strength and vertue of this great example, and in contemplation of this glorious reward, with what resolution and cheerfulness, with what courage and patience did vast numbers of all sorts of people in the first Ages of Christianity, not only men but women, not only those of greater spirit and more generous education but those of the poorest and lowest condition, not onely the learned and the wise but the

igno-

ignorant and illiterate, encounter all the rage and malice of the world and embrace torments and death? Had the precepts and counsels of Philosophy ever any such effect upon the minds of men? I will conclude this with a passage in the life of *Lipsius*, who was a great studier and admirer of the *Stoical* Philosophy. When he lay upon his death-bed, and one of his friends who came to visit him told him that he needed not use arguments to perswade him to patience under his pains, the Philosophy which he had studied so much would furnish him with motives enough to that purpose, he answers him with this ejaculation, *Domine Jesu, da mihi patientiam Christianam, Lord Jesus, give me Christian patience.* No patience like to that which the considerations of Christianity are apt to work in us.

And now I have as briefly and plainly as I could endeavour'd to represent to you the excellency of the Christian Religion, both in respect of the clear discoveries which it makes to us of the nature of God which is the great foundation of all Religion, and likewise in respect of the perfection of its Laws and the power of its arguments to perswade men both to obey and suffer the will of God. By which you may see, what

what the proper tendency and design of this Religion is, and what the Laws and precepts of it would make men if they would truly observe them and live according to them, substantially Religious towards God, chaste and temperate, patient and contented in reference to themselves and the dispensations of God's providence towards them, just and honest, kind and peaceable and good natur'd towards all men. In a word, the Gospel describes God to us in all respects such a one as we would wish him to be, gives us such Laws as every man that understands himself would chuse to live by, propounds such arguments to perswade to the obedience of these Laws as no man that wisely loves himself and hath any tenderness for his own interest and happiness either in this world or the other, can refuse to be mov'd withall.

And now methinks I may with some confidence challenge any Religion in the world to shew such a compleat body and collection of holy and reasonable Laws establish'd upon such promises and threatenings as the Gospel contains. And if any man can produce a Religion that can reasonably pretend to an equal or a greater confirmation than the Gospel hath, a Religion

ligion the precepts and promises and threatenings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of Christianity are apt to make men; if any man can produce such a Religion, I am ready to be of it. Let but any man shew me any Book in the world, the doctrines whereof have the seal of such miracles as the doctrine of the Scriptures hath; a Book which contains the heads of our duty so perfectly, and without the mixture of any thing that is unreasonable, or vicious, or any ways unworthy of God; that commands us every thing in reason necessary to be done, and abridgeth us of no lawfull pleasure without offering us abundant recompence for our present self-denial; a Book the rules whereof, if they were practic'd, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, better magistrates and better subjects and better in all relations, and which does offer to the understanding of men more powerfull arguments to perswade them to be all this; let any man, I say, shew me such a Book, and I will

I will lay aside the Scripture and preach out of *that*.

And do we not all profess to be of this excellent Religion, and to study and believe this holy Book of the Scriptures? But alas! who will believe that we do so, that shall look upon the actions and consider the lives of the greatest part of Christians? How grossly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the Gospel, by our ungodliness and worldly lusts by living intemperately or unjustly, or prophanely in this present world? As if *the grace of God which brings salvation*, had never appear'd to us, as if we had never hear'd of Heaven or Hell, or believ'd not one word that the Scripture says concerning them, as if we were in no expectation of *the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*, whom God hath appointed to judge the world in righteousness, and who will bestow mighty rewards upon those who faithfully serve him, but will come *in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Let us not then deceive our selves by pretending to this excellent knowledge of *Christ Jesus our Lord*, if we do not frame
our

our lives according to it. For though we know *these things* never so well, yet we are not *happy unless we do them*: Nay, we are but the more miserable for knowing them if we do them not; Therefore it concerns every one of us to consider seriously what we believe; and whether our belief of the Christian Religion have its due effect upon our lives. If not, all the Precepts and Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel will rise up in judgment against us, and the Articles of our Faith will be so many Articles of Accusation, and the great weight of our charge will be this that we did not obey that Gospel which we profess'd to believe, that we made confession of the Christian Faith but liv'd like Heathens. Not to believe the Christian Religion, after so great evidence and confirmation as God hath given to it, is very unreasonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet to live as if it were false, is the greatest repugnancy and contradiction that can be. He that does not believe Christianity, either hath, or thinks he hath some reason for with-holding his assent from it. But he that believes it, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he hath no reason for what he does, and is convinc'd that he
ought

ought to do otherwise: And he is a miserable man indeed that does those things for the doing of which he continually stands condemn'd by his own mind, and accordingly God will deal more severely with such persons. He will pardon a thousand defects in our understandings, if they do not proceed from gross carelessness and neglect of our selves; but the faults of our wills have no excuse, because we knew to do better and were convinc'd in our minds that we ought not to have done so.

Dost thou believe that *the wrath of God is reveal'd from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, and dost thou still allow thy self *in ungodliness and worldly lusts*? Art thou convinc'd that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, and dost thou still persist in a wicked course? Art thou fully perswaded that *no whoremonger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor unrighteous person shall have any inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ*, and dost thou for all that continue to practise these vices? What canst thou say (*man*) why it should not be to thee according to thy faith? If it so fall out that thou art miserable and undone for ever, thou hast no reason to be surpriz'd

as if some unexpected thing had happen'd to thee. It is but with thee just as thou believ'dst it would be when thou didst these things. For how couldst thou expect that God should accept of thy good belief when thou didst so notoriously contradict it by a bad life? How couldst thou look for other but that God should condemn thee for the doing of those things for which thine own Conscience did condemn thee all the while thou wast doing of them; When we come into the other world there is no consideration that will sting our consciences more cruelly than this, that we did wickedly when we knew to have done better, and chose to make our selves miserable when we understood the way to have been happy. To conclude, we Christians have certainly the best and the holiest, the wisest and most reasonable Religion in the world; but then we are in the worst condition of all mankind, if the best Religion in the world do not make us good.

I JOHN. 5. 3.

*-----And his commandments are
not grievous.*

ONE of the great prejudices which men have entertain'd against the Christian Religion is this, that it lays upon men *heavy burdens and grievous to be born*, that the Laws of it are very strict and severe, difficult to be kept and yet dangerous to be broken; That it requires us to govern and keep under our passions, and to contradict many times our strongest inclinations and desires, *to cut off our right hand and to pluck out our right eye, to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us*; to forgive the greatest injuries

that are done to us, and to make reparation for the least that we do to others; to be contented with our condition, patient under sufferings, and ready to sacrifice our dearest interests in this world, and even our very lives, in the cause of God and Religion: All these seem to be *hard sayings* and *grievous commandments*.

For the removal of this prejudice I have chosen these words of the Apostle, which expressly tells us the contrary, that *the commandments of God are not grievous*.

And though this be a great truth if it be impartially consider'd, yet it is also a great paradox to men of corrupt minds and vicious practices, who are prejudic'd against Religion and the holy Laws of God by their interest and their lusts. This seems a strange *proposition* to those who look upon Religion at a distance and never try'd the experiment of a holy life, who measure the Laws of God not by the intrinsic goodness and equity of them, but by the reluctancy and opposition which they find in their own hearts against them.

Upon this account it will be requisite to take some pains to satisfy the reason of men concerning this truth and if it be possible

sible to make it so evident that those who are unwilling to own it may yet be sham'd to deny it. And methinks I have this peculiar advantage in the argument I have now undertaken that every reasonable man cannot chuse but wish me success in this attempt, because I undertake the proof of that which it is every man's interest that it should be true: And if I can make it out, this pretence against Religion will not onely be baffled but we shall gain a new and forcible argument to persuade men over to it.

Now the easiness or difficulty of the observation of any Laws or commands depends chiefly upon these *three* things.

First, Upon the Nature of the Laws themselves and their suitableness or unsuitableness to those to whom they are given.

Secondly, Upon the ability or weakness of those on whom these Laws are impos'd for the keeping of them. For easiness and difficulty are relative terms and refer to some power, and a thing may be difficult to a weak man which yet may be easie to the same person when assisted with a greater strength.

Thirdly, Upon the encouragement that

is given to the observation of them. For the proposal of great rewards does very much qualifie and allay the difficulty of any undertaking.

Now if I can make these three things evident: 1. That the Laws of God are reasonable, that is, suitable to our nature and advantageous to our interest. 2. That we are not destitute of sufficient power and ability for the performance of them. And, 3. That we have the greatest encouragements to this purpose: Then have we all imaginable reason to assent to the truth of this Proposition that *the commandments of God are not grievous.*

I. The Laws of God are reasonable, that is, suitable to our nature and advantageous to our interest. 'Tis true God hath a soveraign right over us as we are his creatures, and by virtue of this right he might without injustice have impos'd difficult tasks upon us and have requir'd hard things at our hands. But in making Laws for us he hath not made use of this right. He hath commanded us nothing in the Gospel that is either unsuitable to our reason, or prejudicial to our interest; nay, nothing that is severe and against the grain of our nature, but when either the appa-
rent

rent necessity of our interest does require it, or an extraordinary reward is promis'd to our obedience. *He hath shew'd thee, O man what is good, and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This is the sum of the natural Law, that we should behave our selves reverently and obediently towards the Divine Majesty, and justly and charitably towards men; and that in order to the fitting of us for the better discharge of these duties, we should govern our selves in the use of sensual delights with temperance and moderation. And if we go over the Laws of Christianity, we shall find that, excepting a very few particulars, they enjoyn the very same things; onely they have made our duty more clear and certain. But this I have had occasion to make out largely in the foregoing *discourse*, and therefore I shall say the less to it now.

As to the several parts of God's worship and service, *prayer and thanksgiving, bearing and reading the word of God, and receiving of the Sacrament*; these are all no less for our own comfort and advantage than for the honour of God and Religion. And there is nothing of difficulty

or trouble in the external performance of them, but what hypocrisie can make tolerable to it self: And certainly they must be not onely much more easie, but even delightfull, when they are directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections.

As for those Laws of Religion which concern our duty to our selves, as *temperance* and *chastity*; or to others, as the several branches of *justice* and *charity*, comprehended in those general rules, *of loving our neighbour as our selves*, and *of doing to others as we would have them to do to us*: There is nothing in all these Laws but what is most reasonable and fit to be done by us, nothing but what if we were to consult our own interest and happiness, and did rightly understand our selves, we would chuse for our selves; nothing but what is easie to be understood, and as easie to be practis'd by an honest and a willing mind.

Now the practice of all these is suitable to our nature, and agreeable to the frame of our understandings; proper to our condition and circumstances in this world, and preparatory to our happiness in the next. And no man's reason did ever dictate to him the contrary of any of these; that it is
fit

fit for a Creature not to love God, to be undutifull to his great Sovereign, and ungratefull to his best benefactor; that it is reasonable for a man to debauch himself by intemperance and brutish sensuality; to hate, defraud and oppress other men. Our very natural reason, if we will but listen to the dictates of it, is an enemy to all these sins and a law against all these vices.

And as the practice of all piety and vertue is agreeable to our reason, so is it likewise for the interest of mankind; both of private persons, and of publick Societies, as I have already shown. Some vertues plainly tend to the preservation of our health, others to the improvement and security of our estates, all to the peace and quiet of our minds; and which is somewhat more strange, to the advancement of our esteem and reputation; for though the world be generally bad, and men are apt to approve nothing so much as what they do themselves; yet, I know not how it comes to pass, men are commonly so just to vertue and goodness, as to praise it in others even when they do not practise it themselves.

And as for those precepts of Christianity which seem to be most harsh and difficult

cult at first appearance, (as *repentance* and *restitution*, *mortification* of our *lusts* and *passions*, *humility*, *patience* and *contentedness* with our condition, and *resignation* of our selves to the will of God; *forgiving* and *loving* our *enemies*, and *self-denial* for the cause of God and Religion) if we look well into them and consider thoroughly the nature and tendency of them, even these will appear to be both reasonable in themselves, and upon one account or other really for our advantage.

What more reasonable than *repentance*, than that a man when he hath done amiss and contrary to his duty should be heartily sorry for it, and resolve to do so no more? And how grievous soever it be, it is necessary, being the onely way to pardon and peace. And in case our offence against God hath been complicated with injury to men, it is but reasonable we should make *restitution* as far as we are able, according to the nature of the injury. For without this our repentance is not real, because we have not done what we can to undo our fault as much as we can, or at least to hinder the injurious consequences of it from proceeding any farther: Nor can any man be judg'd

to be truly sorry for his sin that retains the profit and advantages of it to himself. Besides, that till reparation be made to the utmost of our power we can have no peace in our own consciences, nor any well-grounded hopes of forgiveness from God.

Mortification of our *lusts* and *passions*, though, like *repentance*, it have something in it that is troublesome, yet nothing that is unreasonable, or really to our prejudice. If we give way to our *Passions*, we do but gratifie our selves for the present in order to our future disquiet; but if we resist and conquer them, we lay the foundation of perpetual peace and tranquillity in our minds. If we govern our selves in the use of sensual delights by the *Laws* of God and reason, we shall find our selves more at ease than if we should let loose the reins to our appetites and lusts. For the more we gratifie our lusts the more craving they will be, and the more impatient of denial. *Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops*, every lust is a kind of hydropick distemper, and the more we drink the more we shall thirst. So that by retrenching our inordinate desires we do not rob our selves of any true pleasure, but onely prevent the pain and trouble of farther dissatisfaction.

Humi-

Humility, though it may seem to expose a man to some contempt, yet it is truly the readiest way to honour: as on the contrary, *pride* is a most improper and absurd means for the accomplishing of the end it aims at. All other vices do in some measure attain their end; covetousness does usually raise an estate, and ambitious endeavours do often advance men to high places; but pride and insolence and contempt of others do infallibly defeat their own design. They aim at respect and esteem but never attain it, for all mankind do naturally hate and slight a proud man.

What more reasonable than *patience* and *contentedness*, and that we should in all things *resign* up our selves to the will of God, who loves us as well as we do our selves, and knows what is good for us better than we do our selves? this certainly is the best way to prevent anxiety and perplexity of mind, and to make the worst condition as tolerable as it can be, and much more easie than it would be otherwise.

As for that peculiar *Law* of Christianity which forbids *revenge*, and commands us to *forgive injuries* and to *love our enemies*, no man can think it grievous who considers the pleasure and sweetness of love and the glorious victory of over-coming

coming evil with good, and then compares these with the restless torment and perpetual tumults of a malicious and revengeful spirit.

And lastly, *Self-denial* for the cause of God and Religion; this is neither unreasonable nor to our disadvantage. If we consider our infinite obligations to God, we have no reason to think much to sacrifice to him our dearest interests in this world; especially if we consider withall, how disproportionably great the reward of our sufferings shall be in another world. Besides that the interest of Religion is of so great concernment to the happiness of mankind, that every man is bound for that reason to assert the truth of it with the hazard of any thing that is most valuable to him in this world.

II. We are not destitute of sufficient power and strength for the performing of God's commands. Had God given us Laws but no power to keep them, his commandments would then indeed have been grievous. 'Tis true we have contracted a great deal of weakness and impotency by our wilfull degeneracy from goodness, but that grace which the Gospel offers to us for our assistance is sufficient for us. And this seems to be the particular

particular reason why the Apostle says here in the *Text* that *his commandments are not grievous*, because he offers us an assistance proportionable to the difficulty of his commands, and the necessity of our condition: for it follows immediately after the *Text*, *for whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world.* Therefore the *commandments of God are not grievous*, because every Child of God, *that is*, every Christian is endued with a power whereby he is enabled to resist and conquer the temptations of the world. The same Apostle elsewhere encourages Christians upon the same consideration, *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* Though we be encompass'd with many and potent enemies who make it their business to tempt and to deter us from our duty, yet our case is not hard so long as we have a greater strength on our side: And this the Apostle tells us is the case of every Christian, *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* Are there legions of Devils who are continually designing and working our ruine? there are also myriads of good Angels who are more chearfull and officious to do us good. For I doubt not, but as those who are bent to do wickedly will never

want

* Joh. 4. 4.

want tempters to urge them on and to push them forward in an evil course; so on the other hand, those who apply themselves seriously to the business of Religion, and yield themselves tractable to good motions, will find the good spirit of God more ready and active to encourage them than the Devil can be to pull them back; unless we think that God hath given a greater power and a larger commission to the Devil to do men mischief, than to his holy Spirits and his holy Angels for our assistance and encouragement. But then we are to understand that this assistance is onely offer'd to men, and not forc'd upon them whether they will or no. For if we beg God's grace but neglect to make use of it, if we implore his assistance for the mortifying of our lusts but will not contribute our own endeavours, God will withdraw his grace and take away his holy Spirit from us. Nay, if after we have begun well we do notoriously slacken our endeavours, we forfeit the Divine assistance: If when by God's grace we have in a good measure conquer'd the first difficulties of Religion, and gain'd some habitual strength against sin; if after this we grow careless and remiss, and neglect our guard, and lay our selves open to temptations

tations

tions, God's Spirit will not always strive with us : Notwithstanding all the promises of the Gospel and the mighty assistances there offer'd to us, if we love any lust, and will with *Sampson* lay our head in *Dalilah's* lap, we shall be insensibly robb'd of our strength and become like other men.

III. We have the greatest encouragement to the observance of God's commands. Two things make any course of life easie ; present pleasure, and the assurance of a future reward. Religion gives part of its reward in hand, the present comfort and satisfaction of having done our duty ; and for the rest, it offers us the best security that Heaven can give. Now these two must needs make our duty very easie ; a considerable reward in hand, and not onely the hopes but the assurance of a far greater recompence hereafter.

1. Present peace and satisfaction of mind, and unexpressible joy and pleasure flowing from the testimony of a good conscience. This is present payment, besides that it is the earnest of a future and greater happiness. And this does naturally spring up in the mind of a good man ; great
peace

peace have they that love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them. All Acts of piety and vertue are not onely delightful for the present, but they leave peace and contentment behind them : a peace that no outward violence can interrupt or take from us. The pleasures of a holy life have moreover this peculiar advantage of all worldly joys, that we shall never be weariness of them ; we cannot be cloy'd by the frequent repetition of these pleasures, nor by the long enjoyment of them. I know that some vices pretend to bring great pleasure along with them, and that the delights of a sensual and voluptuous life make a glorious show and are attended with much pomp and noise, like the sports of children and fools which are loud and clamorous ; or, as *Solomon* elegantly compares them, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, which makes a little noise and a sudden blaze that is presently over. But the serious and the manly pleasures, the solid and substantial joys, are onely to be found in the ways of Religion and Vertue. The most sensual man that ever was in the world never felt his heart touch'd with so delicious and lasting a pleasure as that which springs from a clear conscience, and a mind fully satisfied with its own actions.

Q. 2. But,

2. But the great encouragement of all is the assurance of a future reward. The firm persuasion whereof is enough to raise us above any thing in this world, and to animate us with courage and resolution against the greatest difficulties. So the *Apostle* reasons; *His commandments are not grievous; for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith.* The belief of a future happiness and glory was that which made the primitive Christians so victorious over the world, and gave them the courage to resist all the pleasures and terrors of Sense. It cannot be deny'd, but that a religious course of life is liable to be incumbred with many difficulties which are naturally grievous to flesh and blood. But a Christian is able to comfort himself under all these with the thoughts of his end, which is *everlasting life*. He considers the goodness of God which he believes would not deny him the free enjoyment of the things of this world, were it not that he hath such joys and pleasures in store for him as will abundantly recompence his present self denial and sufferings.

Let us now put both these together, the pleasures of Religion and the rewards of it, and they cannot but appear to be a
mighty

mighty encouragement. With what pleasures does a man that lives a holy and a virtuous life despise the pleasures of sin, and notwithstanding all the allurements of sense persist resolutely in his course? And how is such a man confirm'd in his purpose and animated in his holy resolution, when he finds that God and his own conscience do applaud his choice; when all along in the course of Religion and a virtuous life, in his conflicts with sin and resistance of temptations, he hath for his present reward the two great pleasures of innocence and of victory, and for his future encouragement the joyful hopes of a Crown and a Kingdom? A recompence so great, as is sufficient to make a lame man walk, enough to make any one willing to offer violence to his strongest passions and inclinations. A man would be content to strive with himself and to conflict with great difficulties, in hopes of a mighty reward. What poor man would not cheerfully carry a great burthen of gold and silver, that were assur'd to have the greatest share of it for his pains, and thereby to be made a man for ever? Whatever difficulties Religion is attended withall they are all sweeten'd and made easie by the proposal of a great and eternal reward.

Q. a

But

But are there no difficulties then in Religion? Is every thing so plain and easie? Are all the ways of vertue so smooth and even as we have here represented them? Hath not our Saviour told us, that *strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it?* Does not the Apostle say, *that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God?* And, *that all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution?* And does not the Scripture every where speak of *striving and wrestling, and running, and fighting; of labouring, and watching, and giving all diligence?* And is there nothing grievous in all this?

This is a very material objection, and therefore I shall be the more carefull to give a satisfactory answer to it. And that I may do it the more distinctly be pleas'd to consider these six things. 1. That the suffering of persecution for Religion is an extraordinary case, which did chiefly concern the first Ages of Christianity. 2. That this discourse concerning the easiness of God's commands does all along suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the entrance upon a Religious course. 3. Nor is there any reason it should exclude our after care and diligence. 4. All the difficulties of Religion are very much mitigated
and

Mat 7.14.

Act. 14.
22.2 Tim 2.
12.

and allayed by hope and by love. 5. There is incomparably more difficulty and trouble in the ways of sin and vice than in the ways of Religion and Vertue. 6. If we do but put vertue and vice, a religious and a wicked course of life in equal circumstances; if we will but suppose a man as much accusom'd and inur'd to the one as he has been to the other, then I shall not doubt to pronounce that the advantages of ease and pleasure will be found to be on the side of Religion.

I. The suffering of persecution for Religion is an extraordinary case, and did chiefly concern the first Ages of Christianity. And therefore the general sayings of our Saviour and his Apostles concerning the persecuted state of Christians are to be limited, as doubtless they were intended, principally to those first times and by no means to be equally extended to all Ages of the Church. At first indeed whoever embrac'd the profession of Christianity did thereby expose themselves to all the sufferings which the power and malice of the world could afflict them withall: But since *the Kingdoms of the Earth became the Kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ*, and the Governours of the world began to be Patrons of the Church, 'tis so far from being universally
Q. 3 true

true, that every Christian hath suffer'd the violence of persecution, that it hath been a rare case and happen'd onely in some few ages, and to some persons. So that this is accidental to a state of Religion, and therefore ought not to be reckon'd among the ordinary difficulties of it. And when it happens God gives extraordinary supports, and promises mighty rewards to make it tolerable.

II. This discourse concerning the easiness of God's commands does all along suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course, except onely in those persons who have had the happiness to be train'd up to Religion by the easie and insensible degrees of a pious and vertuous education. These indeed are freed from a great deal of pains and difficulty which others who are reclaim'd from a bad course of life must expect to undergo. They are in a great measure excused from the pangs of the new birth, from the pains of a sudden and violent change, from the terrours of an affrighted mind, and from the deep and piercing sorrows of a more solemn repentance. Whereas those who have lived wickedly before must look to meet with a great deal more trouble, because they are put upon changing the whole course
of

of their life at once, and must contend with inveterate habits, and offer no small violence to themselves in plucking up those vices which have been rooted in them by long custome and continuance. This indeed is grievous and must needs be sensibly painful, like the *plucking out of a right eye*, or the *cutting off a right hand*: For in this case a man must strive against the very bent and inclination of his strongest appetites, against the tyranny of custome and the mighty power of a second nature. But this is no just reflection upon religion, because this does not proceed from the nature of God's laws but from an accidental indisposition in our selves, which Religion is apt to remove: And if we will but allow some time of trouble and uneasiness for the cure, when that is once wrought the commands of God will be more easie and delightfull to us than ever our sins and lusts were.

III. Nor does this exclude our after care and diligence. For when the *Apostle* says that *the commandments of God are not grievous*, he does by no means intend to insinuate that they are calculated for slothfull and lazy persons, that they are so easie as to require no industry and endeavour on our part; he onely aims to prevent a tacit objection which lies at the bot-

tom of many mens hearts, as if Religion were a most grievous and intolerable burthen, and there were more trouble and less pleasure in it than in any other action of humane life. This he utterly denies, but does not hereby intend to exclude such diligence and industry as men use about other matters. And if I should tell you, that the business of Religion does not require a very vigorous prosecution and great earnestness of endeavour, I shall speak quite besides the holy *Scriptures* which so frequently command *seeking* and *striving* and *labouring*, besides many other such *phrases* that import diligence and earnestness. And indeed it were unfit that so excellent and glorious a reward as the *Gospel* promises should stoop down like fruit upon a full-laden bough to be pluck'd by every idle and wanton hand; that Heaven should be prostituted to the lazy desires and faint wishes, to the cheap and ordinary endeavours of slothful men. God will not so much disparage eternal life and happiness, as to bestow it upon those who have conceived so low an opinion of it as not to think it worth the labouring for. And surely this is sufficient to recommend Religion to any considerate man, if the advantages of it be much greater than of any worldly design that we can pro-

pound

pound to our selves, and the difficulties of it not greater. If the same seriousness and industry of endeavour, which men commonly use to raise a fortune and advance themselves in the world, will serve to make a man a good man and to bring him to Heaven, what reason hath any man to complain of the hard terms of Religion? And I think I may truly say that usually less than this does it. For God considers our condition in this world and the pressing necessities of this life, that we are flesh as well as spirit and that we have great need of these things, and therefore he allows us to be very sedulous and industrious about them. However this I am sure of, that if men would be as serious to save their immortal souls as they are to support these dying bodies; if they would but provide for eternity with the same solicitude and real care as they do for this life; if they would but seek Heaven with the same ardour of affection, and vigour of prosecution as they seek earthly things; if they would but love God as much as many men do the World, and mind godliness as much as men usually do gain; if they would but go to Church with as good a will as men ordinarily do to their Markets and Fairs, and be in as good earnest at their devotions as men commonly are in driving

ving

ving a bargain ; if they would but endure some troubles and inconveniences in the ways of Religion with the same patience and constancy as they can do storms, and foul ways and mischances, when they are travelling about their worldly occasions ; If they would but avoid bad company as men use to do cheaters, and reject the temptations of the devil and the world as they would do the kind words and insinuations of a man whom they verily believe to have a design to over-reach them ; I am confident that such a one could not fail of Heaven, and would be much surer of it upon these terms, than any man that doth all the other things could be of getting an estate, or of attaining any thing in this world.

And cannot every man do thus much ? All that I have said signifies no more but that men should use their sincere endeavours, and this surely every man can do. For to use our sincere endeavours is nothing else but to do as much as we can, and it is non-sense for any man to deny that he can do as much as he can. And if we would do thus much we are sure of God's grace and assistance, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. But men expect that Religion should cost them no pains, that happiness should drop into their
laps

laps without any design and endeavour on their part, and that after they have done what they please while they live God should snatch them up to Heaven when they dye. But though *the commandments of God be not grievous*, yet it is fit to let men know that they are not thus easie.

IV. All the difficulties of Religion are very much allay'd and sweeten'd by *hope* and by *love*. By the *hopes* of a mighty reward ; so great as is enough to raise us above our selves, and to make us break through all difficulties and discouragements : And by the *love* of God, who hath taken all imaginable ways to endear himself to us. He gave us our beings, and when we were fallen from that happiness to which at first we were design'd, he was pleas'd to restore us to a new capacity of it by sending his onely Son into the world to die for us. So that if we have any sense of kindness we cannot but love him who hath done so much to oblige us, and if we love him entirely nothing that he commands will be grievous to us ; nay, so far from that, that the greatest pleasure we are capable of will be to please him. For nothing is difficult to love. It will make a man deny himself and cross his own inclinations to pleasure them whom he loves. It is a passion of a
strange

strange power where it reigns, and will cause a man to submit to those things with delight which in other circumstances would seem grievous to him. *Jacob serv'd for Rachel seven years, and after that seven years more; and they seem'd unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.* Did but the love of God rule in our hearts, and had we as real an affection for him as some men have for their friends, there are no such difficulties in Religion but what love would conquer, and the severest parts of it would become easie when they were once undertaken by a willing mind.

V. There is incomparably more trouble in the ways of sin and vice than in those of Religion and Vertue. Every notorious sin is naturally attended with some inconvenience of harm, or danger, or disgrace; which the sinner seldom considers till the sin be committed, and then he is in a labyrinth, and in seeking the way out of a present inconvenience he intangles himself in more. He is glad to make use of indirect arts, and laborious crafts, to avoid the consequence of his faults; and many times is fain to cover one sin with another, and the more he strives to disentangle himself the more is he *snar'd in the work of his own hands.* Into what perplexities did *David's* sin bring him? such as
by

by all his power and arts he could not free himself from: He was glad to commit a greater crime to avoid the shame of a less, and could find no other way to conceal his adultery but by plunging himself into the guilt of murder. And thus it is proportionably in all other vices. The ways of sin are *crooked paths*, full of windings and turnings; but *the way of holiness* and vertue is a *high way*, and lies so plain before us that *wayfaring men, though fools shall not err therein.* There needs no skill to keep a mans self true and honest, if we will but resolve to deal justly and to *speak the truth to our neighbour* nothing in the whole world is easier: For there is nothing of artifice and reach required to enable a man to speak as he thinks, and to do to others as he would be dealt withal himself.

And as the ways of sin are full of intricacy and perplexities, so likewise of trouble and disquiet. There is no man that wilfully commits any sin but his conscience smites him for it, and his guilty mind is frequently gall'd with the remembrance of it, but the reflection upon honest and vertuous actions hath nothing of regret and disquiet in it. No man's conscience ever troubled him for not being honest, no man's reason ever challeng'd him for not being
drunk,

drunk, no man ever broke his sleep or was haunted with fears of divine vengeance because he was conscious to himself that he had *liv'd soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world*. But with the ungodly it is not so. There is no man that is knowingly wicked but he is guilty to himself, and there is no man that carries guilt about him but he hath received a sting into his Soul which makes him restless, so that he can never have any perfect ease and pleasure in his mind.

I might have descended to particular Instances, and have shewn how much more troublesome the practice of every sin and vice is than the exercise of the contrary grace and vertue; but that would be too large a Subject to be brought within the limits of a single discourse.

VI. Let but vertue and vice, a religious and wicked course of life be put in equal circumstances, do but suppose a man to be as much accusom'd and inur'd to the one as he has been to the other, and then I doubt not but the advantages of ease and pleasure, will be found to be on the side of Religion: and if we do not put the case thus we make an unequal comparison. For there is no man but when he first begins a wicked course feels a great deal of regret in his mind, the terrours of his conscience and the fears of damna-

damnation are very troublesome to him. It is possible that by degrees a man may harden his conscience, and by a long custome of sinning may in a great measure wear off that tender sense of good and evil which makes sin so uneasy: But then if in the practice of a holy life a man may by the same degrees arrive to far greater peace and tranquillity of mind than ever any wicked man found in a sinful course, if by custome vertue will come to be more pleasant than ever vice was, then the advantage is plainly on the side of Religion. And this is truly the case. It is troublesome at first for a man to begin any new course, and to do contrary to what he hath been accusom'd to; but let a man but habituate himself to a religious and vertuous life, and the trouble will go off by degrees and unspeakable pleasure succeed in the room of it. It is an excellent rule which *Pythagoras* gave to his Scholars, *optimum vitæ genus eligito, nam consuetudo faciet jucundissimum*; pitch upon the best course of life, resolve always to do that which is most reasonable and vertuous, and *custom will soon render it the most easie*. There is nothing of difficulty in a good life but what may be conquer'd by custome as well as the difficulties of any other course, and when a man is once us'd to it the pleasure of it will be greater than of any other course. Let

Let no man then decline or forsake Religion for the pretended difficulties of it, and lay aside all cares of God's commandments upon this suggestion that they are impossible to be kept. For you see they are not only possible but easie. And those who upon pretence of the trouble and difficulties of Religion abandon themselves to a wicked course of life may easily be convinc'd that they take more pains to make themselves miserable than would serve to bring them to happiness. There is no man that is a servant of sin, and a slave to any baselust, but might if he pleas'd get to Heaven with less trouble than he goes to Hell.

So that upon consideration of the whole matter, there is no reason why any man should be deterr'd from a holy and vertuous life for fear of the labour and pains of it. Because every one that is wicked takes more pains in another way, and is more industrious onely to a worse purpose. Now he that can travel in deep and foul ways ought not to say that he cannot walk in fair. He that ventures to run upon a precipice when every step he takes is with danger of his life and his soul, ought not to pretend any thing against the plain and safe paths of Religion, which will entertain us with pleasure all along in the way, and crown us with happiness at the end.

2 TIM.

2 TIM. 2. 19.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.

THe whole verse runs thus : *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his : And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

In which words the Apostle declares to us the terms of the covenant between God and man. For the word *θεμελιος* which is here translated *foundation*, according to the usual signification of it, is likewise (as learned men have observ'd) sometimes used for an instrument of contract whereby two parties do oblige themselves mutually to each other. And this notion of the word agrees very well with what follows concerning the *seal* affix'd to it, which is very suitable to a *Covenant* but

R

not

not at all to a *foundation*. 'Tis true indeed, as the learned *Grotius* hath observed, there used anciently to be inscriptions on foundation-stones, and the word *σφραγίς* which we render *seal* may likewise signify an *inscription*; and then the sense will be very current thus, *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this inscription*. But it is to be considered, that though *σφραγίς* may signify an *inscription*, yet it is onely an *inscription* upon a *seal* which hath no relation to a foundation, but is very proper to a covenant or mutual obligation. And accordingly the *seal* affixt to this *instrument*, or *covenant* between God and man is in allusion to the custom of those countries said to have an inscription on both sides agreeable to the condition of the persons contracting. On God's part there is this *impress* or inscription, *The Lord knoweth them that are his*, that is, God will own and reward those that are faithfull to him: And on our part, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity*.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, that is, that calls himself a Christian. For to name the name of any one or to have his name call'd upon by us does
ac-

according to the use of this Phrase among the *Hebrews*, signifie nothing else but to be denominated from him. Thus 'tis frequently used in the *Old Testament*, and sometimes in the *New*, *Do they not* Jam. 2.7: *blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?* that is, the name or title of Christians; and that expression, *if ye* 1 Pet. 2: *be reproached for the name of Christ*, is at 14. the sixteenth verse varied, *if any man suffer as a Christian*. So that to name the name of Christ is to call our selves Christians.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. The word *ἀδικία* is often taken strictly for injustice or unrighteousness, but sometimes used more largely for sin and wickedness in the general. And so it seems to be used here in the Text, because there is no reason from the context to restrain it to any particular kind of sin or vice, and because Christianity lays an equal obligation upon men to abstain from all sin. *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*, that is, every Christian obligeth himself by his profession to renounce all sin and to live a holy life.

In speaking to this argument I shall do these two things. R 2 1. Shew

1. Shew what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives.

2. Endeavour to persuade those who call themselves Christians to answer this obligation.

I. What obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon men to live holy lives. He that calls himself a Christian professeth to entertain the Doctrine of Christ, to live in the imitation of his holy example, and to have solemnly engaged himself to all this. I shall speak briefly to these, and then come to that which I principally intend, to persuade men to live accordingly.

1. He that professeth himself a Christian professeth to entertain the doctrine of Christ, to believe the whole Gospel, to assent to all the articles of the Christian faith, to all the precepts and promises and threatenings of the Gospel. Now the great design, the proper intention of this doctrine is to take men off from sin, and to direct and encourage them to a holy life. It teacheth us what we are to believe concerning God and Christ, not with any design to entertain our minds with

with the bare speculation of those truths but to better our lives. For every article of our faith is a proper argument against sin, and a powerfull motive to obedience. The whole history of Christ's appearance in the world, all the discourses and actions of his life, and the sufferings of his death do all tend to this; the ultimate issue of all is the *destroying of sin*; So St. John tells us, *for this purpose was the Son of God manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.* But this is most expressly and fully declar'd to us, *Tit. 2. 11, 12, 13, 14. The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie unto himself a peculiar, people zealous of good works.*

The precepts of the Gospel do strictly command holiness, and that universal; the purity of our souls, and the chastity of our bodies; *to cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; to abstain from all kind of evil; to be holy in all manner of conversation.*

tion. They require us to endeavour after the highest degrees of holiness that are attainable by us in this imperfect state, to

Mat. 5.
48.

be holy as he that hath called us is holy; to be perfect as our father which is in heaven is perfect.

And all the *promises* of the Gospel are so many encouragements to obedience and a holy life; *having therefore these promises, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit and perfect holiness in the fear of God.* We are told by St. Peter that these exceeding great and precious promises are given to us that by these *we might be partakers of a Divine nature, having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust; and that we might give all diligence to add to our faith vertue, and to vertue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance and patience and brotherly-kindness and charity.*

2. Pet. 1.4

And the *threatnings* of the Gospel are so many powerfull arguments against sin.

Rom. 1.
16, 18.

Therefore the Apostle calls the Gospel *the power of God unto salvation, because therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* So that if we call our selves Christians we profess to embrace the
holy

holy doctrine of the Christian Religion which is perfectly opposite to all impiety and wickedness of life. We profess to be governed by those laws which do strictly enjoin holiness and vertue. We profess to be perswaded that all the promises and threatnings of the Gospel are true, which offer such great and glorious rewards to obedience and threaten transgression and disobedience with such dreadfull punishments. And if so, we are obliged both by our reason and our interest to live accordingly.

2. He that professeth himself a Christian professeth to live in the imitation of Christ's example and to follow his steps *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* The Son of God came into the world not onely by his Doctrine to instruct us in the way to happiness and by his death to make expiation of sin, but by his life to be an example to us of holiness and vertue. Therefore in Scripture we find several *Titles* given him which import his exemplariness, as of a *Prince* and a *Captain*, a *Master* and a *Guide*. Now if he be our pattern we should endeavour to be like him, *to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus; to walk in love as he also hath loved us and given himself for us.*

R 4

We

We should aspire after the highest degree of holiness, make it our constant and sincere endeavour to please God and do his will and *to fulfill all righteousness* as he did. Does any man profess himself a Christian and yet abandons himself to intemperance and filthy lusts? is this like our Saviour? Are we cruel and unmercifull? is this like the High Priest of our profession? Are we proud and passionate, malicious and revengefull? is this to be like-minded with Christ who was meek and lowly in Spirit, who prayed for his enemies and offer'd up his blood to God on the behalf of them that shed it? If we call our selves Christians we profess to have the life of Christ continually before us, and to be always correcting and reforming our lives by that pattern.

3. He that calls himself a Christian hath solemnly engaged himself to renounce all sin and to live a holy life. By Baptism we have solemnly taken upon us the profession of Christianity, and engaged our selves to renounce the Devil and all his works, and obediently to keep God's commandments. Anciently those who were baptized put off their garments, which signified the putting off the body of sin; and were immers'd and buried in the wa-
ter,

ter, to represent their death of sin; and then did rise up again out of the water, to signify their entrance upon a new life. And to these customs the Apostle alludes when he says, *How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein; Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him in baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin. So that by Baptism we profess to be entered into a new state, and to be endued with a new nature; to have put off the old man with his deeds; to have quitted our former conversation, which is corrupt according to the deceitfull lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to have put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And therefore Baptism is called the putting on of Christ; As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Now*
Gal. 3. 27.
if

if we profess to have put on Christ we must quit and renounce our lusts, because these are inconsistent, as appears by the opposition which the Apostle makes between them; *Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.*

Rom. 13.
14.

And as we did solemnly covenant with God to this purpose in Baptism, so we do solemnly renew this obligation so often as we receive the blessed Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. Therefore the cup in the Sacrament is called the *new Covenant in his Blood*, that is, this represents the shedding of Christ's blood by which rite the covenant between God and man is ratified. And as by this God doth confirm his promises to us, so we do oblige our selves to be faithfull and obedient to him, *and if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, that is, after we are become Christians, *we account the blood of the Covenant a common thing*, that is, we make nothing of the solemnest rite that ever was used in the world for confirmation of any covenant, the shedding of the blood of the son of God. And that this was always understood to be the meaning of this holy Sacrament, to renew our Covenant with

with God, and solemnly to confirm our resolutions of a holy life is very plain from that account which *Pliny** gives us of the worship of the Christians in a Letter to *Trajan* the Emperour; in which he tells him *that they assembled early in the morning before day, to sing a Hymn to Christ as God; and then (saith he) they do sacramento se obstringere, bind themselves by a sacrament or oath not to rob or steal or commit adultery, not to break their word or falsifie their trust, and after they have eaten together they depart home.* Which is plainly an account of the Christians celebrating of the holy Sacrament, which it seems was then look'd upon as an *oath* whereby Christians did solemnly covenant and engage themselves against all wickedness and vice.

* *Plin.*
Epist. L.
10. Epist.
97.

Thus you see what obligation the profession of Christianity lays upon us to holiness of life. From all which it is evident that the Gospel requires something on our part. For the Covenant between God and us is a mutual engagement, and as there are *blessings* promised on his part so there are *conditions* to be performed on ours. And if we live wicked and unholy lives, if we neglect our duty towards God we have no title at all to the

the blessings of this Covenant. The contrary doctrine to this hath been greedily entertained to the vast prejudice of Christianity, as if in this new Covenant of the Gospel God took all upon himself, and required nothing or as good as nothing, of us, that it would be a disparagement to the freedom of God's grace to think he expects any thing from us. That the Gospel is all promises and our part is onely to believe and embrace them, that is to be confident that God will perform them if we can but think so, though we do nothing else; which is an easie condition to fools but the hardest in the world to a wise man, who if his salvation depended upon it could never perswade himself to believe that the holy God without any respect at all to his repentance and amendment would bestow upon him forgiveness of sins and eternal life, onely because he was confident that God would do so. As if any man could think that it were a thing so highly acceptable to God that men should believe of him that he loves to dispense his grace and mercy upon the most unfit and unreasonable terms. A Covenant does necessarily imply a mutual obligation, and the Scripture plainly tells us what are the

the terms and conditions of this Covenant both on God's part and ours, namely, that he *will be our God* and we *shall be his people*. But he hath no-where said that though we be not *his people* yet he will be *our God*. The *seal* of this Covenant hath two *inscriptions* upon it; one on God's part, that he will *know them that are his*; and another on our part, that we shall *depart from iniquity*. But if we will not submit to this condition God will not know us, but will bid us depart from him. So our Saviour tells us, *I will say unto* Mat. 7. *them depart from me ye workers of iniquity,* 23. *I know you not.* If we deal falsely in covenant with God and break loose from all our engagements to him, we release God from all the promises that he hath made to us. If we neglect to perform those conditions upon which he hath suspended the performance of his promises, we discharge the obligation on God's part, and he remains faithfull though he deny us that happiness which he promised under those conditions which we have neglected.

II. I come now to the *second* thing propounded, and that is to perswade those who profess Christianity to answer those obli-

obligations to a holy life which their Religion lays upon them. We all call our selves Christians, and would be very much offended at any man that should deny us this title. But let us not cheat our selves with an empty and insignificant name, but if we will call our selves Christians let us fill up this great title, and make good our profession by a suitable life and practice. And to perswade us hereto, I will urge these three considerations.

1. The indecency of the contrary.
2. The great scandal of it to our blessed Saviour and his holy Religion, and
3. The infinite danger of it to our own souls.

1. Consider how unbecoming it is for a man to live unsuitably to his profession. If we call our selves Christians we profess to entertain the doctrine of the Gospel, to be taught and instructed by the best master, to be the disciples of the highest and most perfect institution that ever was in the world, to have embraced a Religion which contains the most exact rules for the conduct and government of our lives, which lays down the plainest

precepts,

precepts, sets before us the best patterns and examples of a holy life, and offers us the greatest assistances and encouragements to this purpose. We profess to be furnished with the best arguments to excite us to holiness and vertue, to be awed with the greatest fears and animated with the best hopes of any men in the world.

Now whoever makes such a profession as this obligeth himself to live answerably, to do nothing that shall grossly contradict it. Nothing is more absurd than for a man to act contrary to his profession, to pretend to great matters and perform nothing of what he pretends to. Wise men will not be caught with pretences nor be imposed upon with an empty profession, but they will enquire into our lives and actions and by these they will make a judgment of us. They cannot see into our hearts nor pry into our understandings to discover what it is that we inwardly believe, they cannot discern those secret and supernatural principles that we pretend to be acted by : But this they can do, they can examine our actions and behold our good or bad works, and try whether our lives be indeed answerable to our profession and do really excell the lives of

of

of other men who do not preterid to such great things. There are a great many fagacious persons who will easily find us out, will look under our mask, and see through all our fine pretensions, and will quickly discern the absurdity of telling the world that we believe one thing when we do the contrary.

If we profess to believe the Christian Religion, we expose our selves to the scorn and contempt of every discerning man if we do not live up to it. With what face can any man continue in the practice of any known sin that professeth to believe the holy doctrine of the Gospel which forbids all sin under the highest and severest penalties? If we did but believe the history of the Gospel as we do any ordinary credible story, and did we but regard the Laws of Christianity as we do the laws of the Land; were we but persuaded, that fraud and oppression, lying and perjury, intemperance and uncleanness, covetousness and pride, malice and revenge, the neglect of God and Religion will bring men to hell as certainly as treason and felony will bring a man under the sentence, of the Law: Had we but the same awe and regard for the threatenings and promises of the Gospel that we have

have for the frowns and smiles of those who are in power and authority, even this would be effectual to keep us from sin. And if the Gospel have not this effect upon us it is an argument that we do not believe it.

'Tis to no purpose to go about to persuade men that we do heartily entertain the doctrine of Christ, *that doctrine* which hath all the characters of piety and justice, of holiness and vertue upon it; which obligeth men to *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are chaste, whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report,* if we have no regard to these things in our lives. He that would know what a man believes, let him attend rather to what he does than to what he talks. He that leads a wicked life makes a more credible and effectual profession of infidelity than he who in words onely denies the Gospel. It is the hardest thing in the world to imagine that *that* man believes Christianity who by ungodliness and worldly lusts does deny and renounce it. If we profess ourselves Christians, it may justly be expected from us that we should evidence this by our actions, that we should live at another rate than the Heathens did

that we who worship a holy and just God should not allow our selves the liberty to sin as those did who worshipped such Gods as were examples of sin and patrons of their vices. Thou who professest thy self a Christian may'st not walk in the lusts of the flesh and of uncleanness as those did who worshipped a lustfull *Jupiter* and a wanton *Venus*. Thou may'st not be intemperate as those were who worshipped a drunken *Bacchus*. Thou may'st not be cruel and unmerciful as those were who worshipped a fierce *Saturn*: Nor may'st thou steal as those did who worshipped a thievish *Mercury*. Thou must remember that thou art a Christian, and when thou art ready to debase thy self to any vile lust consider what title thou bearest, by what name thou art called, whose disciple thou art; and then say to thy self, shall I allow my self in any impiety or wickedness of life who pretend to be instructed by that grace of God which teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts? Shall I cherish any sinful passion who pretend to have mortified all these and to have *put off the old man with his deeds*?

It is not being gilded over with the external profession of Christianity that will
avail

avail us, our Religion must be a vital principle inwardly to change and transform us. What the Apostle says concerning Circumcision we may apply to them that are baptized and make an outward profession of Christianity; Baptism verily profiteth if we obey the Gospel, but if we walk contrary to the precepts of it our Baptism is no Baptism, and our Christianity is Heathenism. If by our lives and actions we do contradict that Religion which we profess, we do by this very thing prove our selves to be counterfeits and hypocrites; and that we have onely taken up our Religion for a fashion, and received it according to custom; we were born in a Countrey where it is revered, and therefore we are of it. And the reason why we are Christians rather than Jews, or Turks, or Heathens, is because Christian Religion had the fortune to come first in our way and to bespeak us at our entrance into the world.

Are we not ashamed to take up a profession upon such slight grounds, and to wear about us such an empty title? It should make our blood to rise in our faces to consider what a distance there is between our Religion and our lives. I re-

member *Tully* upbraids the Philosophers very smartly for living unsuitably to their Doctrines. A Philosopher (saith he) is unpardonable if he miscarry in his life, *quod in officio cujus magister esse vult labitur; artemque vitæ professus, delinquit in vita;* because he is faulty in that wherein he pretends to be a master, and whilst he professeth an Art of living better than other men he miscarries in this life. With how much greater reason may we challenge Christians for the miscarriages of their lives, which are so directly contrary to their profession? It may justly be suspected that so perfect an institution as the Gospel is, which the Son of God came from Heaven on purpose to propagate in the world, should make men more strictly holy and vertuous, and set the professors of it at a greater distance from all impurity and vice than ever any institution in the world did. If a man profess any other Art or Calling it is expected that he should be skilled in it and excell those who do not pretend to it. 'Tis the greatest disparagement to a Physician that can be to say of him, that he is in other respects an excellent man onely he hath no great skill in diseases, and the methods of cure, because this is his Profession: He might be pardon'd

don'd for other defects, but the proper skill of his Art may justly be expected from him. So for a Christian; to say of him, the worst thing in him is his life; he is very orthodox in his opinions, but he's an ill-natur'd man, one of very violent passions, he will be very frequently drunk, he makes no conscience of his dealings, he is very uncharitable to all that differ from him: This man is faulty in his profession, he is defective in that which should be his excellency; he may have orthodox opinions in Religion, but when all is done there is no such error and heresie, nothing so fundamentally opposite to Religion as a wicked life. A Christian does not pretend to have a better wit or a more piercing understanding than a Turk or Heathen, but he professeth to live better than they, to be more chaste and more temperate, more just and more charitable, more meek and gentle, more loving and peaceable than other men: If he fail in this, where is the Art the man boasts of? to what purpose is all this noise and stir about the Gospel and the holy doctrine of Christ? If any man profess himself a Christian and do not live better than others he is a mere pretender and *Mountebank* in Religion,

he's a bungler in his own *Art* and unskill'd in his proper profession. This is the first, the indecency of the thing.

2. Consider how great a scandal this must needs be to our blessed Saviour and his holy Religion. The Christian Religion hath undergone many a hard censure for the miscarriages of the professors of it. The impieties and vices of those who call themselves Christians have caused many sharp reflexions upon Christianity, and made the Son of God and the Blessed Saviour of the world to wear the odious names of deceiver and impostor. If a man did design to do the greatest spight to Religion he could not give it a deeper wound, he could not take a more effectual course to disparage it than by a lewd and debauched life. For this will still be an objection in the minds of those who are strangers and enemies to our Religion. If the Gospel were so excellent an institution as it is reported to be, surely we should see better effects of it in the lives of those who profess it. When we would perswade a Heathen to our Religion, and tell him how holy a God we serve, what excellent patterns we imitate, what spiritual and divine precepts of holiness and virtue our Religion does contain; may not he

he reply, would you have me to believe you when I see you do not believe yourselves? If you believed your Religion you would live according to it. For if the Gospel were every word of it false, if there were neither a Heaven to be hoped for nor a Hell to be feared after this life, how could many Christians live worse than they do?

As we would not proclaim to the world that the Gospel is an unholy and vicious Institution, let us take heed that we bring no scandal upon it by our lives, lest the enemies of our Religion say as *Salvian* tells us they did in his time, *Si Christus Sancta docuisset Christiani sancte vixissent*, surely if Christ had taught so holy a doctrine Christians would have lived holier lives. *Tully* tells us that one of the shrewdest arguments that ever was brought against Philosophy was this, *quosdam perfectos Philosophos turpiter vivere*, that some great Philosophers led very filthy lives. *Celsus* and *Porphyry*, *Hierocles* and *Julian*, among all their witty invectives against Christian Religion have nothing against it that reflects so much upon it as do the wicked lives of so many Christians. The greatest enmity to Religion is to profess it and to live unanswerably to it.

This consideration ought greatly to affect us. I am sure the Apostle speaks of it with great passion and vehemency, *For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.* A Jew or a Turk is not so great an enemy to Christianity as a lewd and vicious Christian. Therefore let me beseech Christians, as they tender the honour of their Saviour and the credit of their Religion, that they would conform their lives to the holy precepts of Christianity. And if there be any who are resolved to continue in a vicious course to the injury and disparagement of Christianity, I could almost entreat of them that they would quit their profession and renounce their Baptism, that they would lay aside their title of Christians and initiate themselves in Heathenish rites and superstitions, or be circumcised for *Jews* or *Turks*: For it were really better, upon some accounts, that such men should abandon their Profession, than keep on a vizard which serves to no other purpose but to scare others from Religion.

3. And Lastly, let us consider the danger

ger we expose our selves to by not living answerably to our Religion. And this, I hope, may prevail upon such as are not moved by the former considerations. Hypocrites are instanc'd in Scripture, as a sort of sinners that shall have the sharpest torments and the fiercest damnation. When our Saviour would set forth the great severity of the Lord towards the evil servant he expresseth it thus, *he shall cut him in sunder and appoint him his portion with Hypocrites.* So that the punishment of Hypocrites seems to be made in the measure and standard of the highest punishment. Thou professest to believe in Christ and to hope in him for salvation, but in the mean time thou livest a wicked and unholy life, thou dost not believe but presume on him, and wilt find at the great day that this thy confidence will be thy confusion, and he whom thou hopest will be thy Advocate and Saviour will prove thy Accuser and thy Judge. What our Saviour says to the Jews, *There is one that accuseth you even Moses in whom ye trust* may very well be applied to false Christians, there is one that accuseth you and will condemn you, even *Jesus in whom ye trust.*

The

The profession of Christianity and mens having the name of Christ named upon them will be so far from securing them from Hell, that it will sink them the deeper into it. Many are apt to pity the poor Heathens who never heard of the name of Christ, and sadly to condole their case, but as our Saviour said upon another occasion, *Weep not for them, weep for your selves.* There's no such miserable person in the world as a degenerate Christian, because he falls into the greatest misery from the greatest advantages and opportunities of being happy. Dost thou lament the condition of *Socrates*, and *Cato*, and *Aristides*, and doubt what shall become of them at the day of Judgment? and canst thou, who art an impious and prophane Christian, think that thou shalt escape the damnation of Hell?

Dost thou believe that the moral Heathen shall be cast out? and canst thou who hast led a wicked life under the profession of Christianity have the impudence to hope that thou shalt sit down with *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob* in the Kingdom of God? No, those sins which are committed by Christians under the enjoyment of the Gospel are of deeper dye and clothed with blacker aggravations

tions than the sins of Heathens are capable of. A Pagan may live without God in the world, and be unjust towards men, at a cheaper rate and upon easier terms than thou who art a Christian. Better had it been thou hadst never known one syllable of the Gospel, never heard of the name of Christ than that having taken it upon thee thou shouldst not *depart from iniquity.* Happy had it been for thee, that thou hadst been born a Jew, or a Turk, or a poor Indian, rather than that being bred among Christians and professing thy self of that number thou shouldst lead a vitious and unholy life.

I have insisted the longer upon these arguments, that I might, if possible, awaken men to a serious consideration of their lives, and perswade them to a real reformation of them; that I may oblige all those who call themselves Christians to live up to the essential and fundamental Laws of our Religion; to love God, and to love our neighbour; to do to every man as we would have him to do to us, to mortifie our lusts, and subdue our passions, and sincerely to endeavour to grow in every grace and vertue, and to abound in all the fruits of righteous-

ness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

This indeed would become our profession and be honourable to our Religion, and would remove one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the Gospel. For how can we expect that the doctrine of God our Saviour should gain any considerable ground in the world, so long as by the unworthy lives of so many Christians 'tis represented to the world at so great disadvantage; If ever we would have Christian Religion effectually recommended, it must be by the holy and unblameable lives of those who make profession of it. Then indeed it would look with so amiable a countenance as to invite many to it, and carry so much majesty and authority in it as to command reverence from its greatest enemies, and make men to acknowledge that God is in us of a truth and to glorifie our Father which is in Heaven.

The good God grant that as we have taken upon us the profession of Christianity, so we may be carefull so to live that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; that the grace of God which bringeth salvation

salvation may teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.

PHIL.

PHIL. III. 20.

*For our Conversation is in
Heaven.*

FOR the understanding of which words we need to look back no further than the 18th. verse of this Chapter, where the Apostle with great vehemency and passion speaks of some among the *Philippians*, who indeed profess'd Christianity but yet would do any thing to decline suffering for that profession; *there are many that walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the Cross of Christ*; they cannot endure to suffer with him and for him, they are so sensual and wedded to this world that they will do any thing to avoid persecution; so he describes them in the next verse, *whose end is destruction, whose God is*

is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Now in opposition to these sensual and earthly-minded men the Apostle gives us the character of the true Christians, they are such as mind Heaven and another world, and prefer the hopes of that to all the interests of this life, *our conversation is in Heaven.*

For the right understanding of which phrase be pleased to observe, that it is an allusion to a City or Corporation, and to the privileges and manners of those who are free of it. And Heaven is several times in Scripture represented to us under this notion of a City. It is said of *Abraham* that he looked for a City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. It is called likewise the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. And the same Apostle speaking of the uncertain condition of Christians in this world says of them, that here they have no continuing City, but look for one that is to come.

Now to this City the Apostle alludes here in the Text, when he says *our conversation is in Heaven.* For the word *πολίτευμα*, which is rendered *conversation*, may either signify the privilege of Citizens

tizens, or their *conversation* and manners, or may take in both these.

In the first sense of the *privilege* of Citizens, we find *πολιτεία* a word of near affinity with this sometimes us'd; with a great sum (says the Captain to Paul) obtained I τὴν πολιτείαν ταύτην, *this freedom.* According to this sense, ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα may very well be rendered, as *Tertullian* often does this Text, *municipatus noster, our Citizenship is in Heaven*; an allusion perhaps (as the learned Dr. Hammond observes) to those who though they were not born at *Rome*, and it may be lived at a great distance from it, had yet *jus civitatis Romanæ*, the privilege of *Roman* Citizens. In like manner the Apostle here describes the condition of Christians. 'Tis true we are born here in this world and live in it, but we belong to another Corporation; we are denizens of another Countrey and free of that City which is above.

In the other sense of the *conversation* of Citizens we find the verb *πολιτεύεσθε* used towards the beginning of this *Epistle*, *Let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ.* And why may not the word *πολίτευμα* in the Text, without any inconvenience include both these? as if the Apostle

Apostle had said, there are some that mind earthly things, and are so addicted to them that rather than part with them they will forsake their Religion; but as for us, we consider that we are Citizens of Heaven, and accordingly we converse and demean our selves in this world as those that are free of another City and do belong to it.

So that to have *our conversation in heaven* does imply these two things.

First, The serious thoughts and considerations of Heaven.

Secondly, The effect which those thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

These two things take up the meaning of my Text, and shall be the subject of the following discourse.

I. The serious thoughts and considerations of Heaven, that is, of the happy and glorious state of good men in another life. And concerning this, there are two things principally which offer themselves to our consideration. *First*, The happiness of this state. *Secondly*, The way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happiness.

First,

First, We will consider the happiness of this state. But what, and how great this happiness is, I am not able to represent to you. These things are yet in a great measure within the veil, and it does not now fully *appear what we shall be*. The Scriptures have reveal'd so much in general concerning the reality and unspeakable felicities of this state as may satisfy us for the present, and serve to inflame our desires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it; as *namely*, that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world; that it is very great; and that it is eternal; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

1. It is incomparably beyond any happiness in this world. It is free from all those sharp and bitter ingredients which do abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mix'd, and uncertain, and unsatisfying; nay so far are they from giving us satisfaction, that the very sweetest of them are satiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixt. There is something of *vanity* mingled with all our earthly enjoyments and *that* causeth *vexation of spirit*.

There

There

There is no sensual pleasure but is either purchas'd by some pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great estate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor lost without trouble. Dignity and greatness is troublesome almost to all mankind, it is commonly uneasy to them that have it and it is usually hated and envy'd by those that have it not. Knowledge, that is one of the best and sweetest pleasures of humane life; and yet if we may believe the experience of one, who had as great a share of it as any of the Sons of men ever had, he will tell us, that *this also is vexation of spirit; for in much wisdom there is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.*

Eccles. i.
17, 18.

Thus it is with all the things of this world; the best of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and sorrow in them: but the happiness of the next life is free from alloy and mixture. In the description of the *new Jerusalem* it is said, that *there shall be no more curse, and there shall be no night there, nothing to embitter our blessings, or obscure our glory.* Heaven is the proper region of happiness, there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

Rev. 22.
3, 5.

But the enjoyments of this world as
they

they are mix'd, so they are uncertain. So wavering and inconstant are they that we can have no security of them, when we think our selves to have the fastest hold of them they slip out of our hands we know not how. For this reason *Solomon* very elegantly calls them things *that are not, Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings and flie like an Eagle towards heaven.* So fugitive are they, that after all our endeavours to secure them they may break loose from us and in an instant vanish out of our sight, *riches make to themselves wings, and flie like an Eagle,* intimating to us that riches are often accessory to their own ruin. Many times the greatness of a man's estate, and nothing else, hath been the cause of the loss of it, and of taking away the life of the owner thereof. The *fairness* of some mens fortune hath been a temptation to those who have been more powerfull to *ravish* it from them, thus *riches make to themselves wings.* So that he that enjoys the greatest happiness of this world does still want one happiness more, to secure to him for the future what he possesses for the present. But the happiness of Heaven is a steady and constant light, fixt and unchangeable

T 3

as

as the fountain from whence it springs, *the father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness nor shadow of turning.*

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unsatisfying. This is the *vanity of vanities*, that every thing in this world can trouble us but nothing can give us satisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are so phantastical, that we can neither be well with these things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneasie. If we be poor we think our selves miserable, and when we come to be rich we commonly really are so. If we are in a low condition we fret and murmur, and if we chance to get up and to be rais'd to greatness we are many times farther from contentment than we were before. So that we pursue the happiness of this world just as little children chase birds, when we think we are come very near it and have it almost in our hands it flies farther from us than it was at first.

Nay, so far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us satisfaction, that the sweetest of them are most apt to satiate and cloy us. All the pleasures of this world

world are so contriv'd as to yeild us very little happiness. If they go off quickly they signifie nothing, and if they stay long we are sick of them. After a full draught of any sensual pleasure we presently loath it, and hate it as much after the enjoyment as we courted it and long'd for it in the expectation. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full satisfaction so we shall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with a new pleasure and contentment. In the felicities of Heaven these two things shall be reconcil'd, which never met together in any sensual delight, long and full enjoyment and yet a fresh and perpetual pleasure. As in God's *presence there is fulness of joy, so at his right hand there shall be pleasures for evermore.*

2. The happiness of the other life is not onely incomparably beyond any happiness of this world (that, it may be, is no great commendation of it) but it is very great in it self. The happiness of Heaven is usually in Scripture describ'd to us by such pleasures as are manly and excellent, chaste and intellectual, infinitely more pure and refin'd than those of sense; and if the Scripture at any time descend to the metaphors of a *feast*, and a *banquet*, and a

marriage, it is plainly by way of accom-
modation to our weakness and condescen-
tion to our capacities.

But the chief ingredients of this happi-
ness, so far as the Scripture hath thought
fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of
our knowledge, and the height of our love,
and the perpetual society and friendship of
all the blessed inhabitants of those glorious
mansions; and the joyfull concurrence of
all these in chearfull expressions of grati-
tude, in the incessant praises and admira-
tion of the fountain and author of all this
happiness. And what can be more de-
lightfull than to have our understand-
ings entertain'd with a clear sight of the
best and most perfect Being, with the
knowledge of all his works and of the
wise designs of his providence here in the
world? than to live in the reviving pre-
sence of God, and to be continually atten-
ding upon him whose favour is life, and
whose glory is much more above that of
any of the Princes of this world than the
greatest of them is above the poorest
worm? The Queen of *Sheba* thought
Solomon's Servants happy in having the
opportunity by standing continually be-
fore him to hear his wisdom; but in the
other world it shall be a happiness to Sa-
lomon

lomon himself, and to the wisest and great-
est persons that ever were in this world,
to stand before this great King to admire
his wisdom and to behold his glory. Not
that I imagine the happiness of Heaven
to consist in a perpetual gazing upon God,
and in an idle contemplation of the glories
of that place. For as by that blessed sight
we shall be infinitely transported, so the
Scripture tells us we shall be also trans-
form'd into the image of the divine per-
fections; we *shall see God and we shall be
like him*, and what greater happiness can
there be than to be like the happiest and
most perfect Being in the world? Besides,
who can tell what employment God may
have for us in the next life? We need not
doubt but that he who is happiness it self,
and hath promis'd to make us happy, can
easily find out such employments and de-
lights for us in the other world as will be
proper and suitable to that state.

But then besides the improvement of our
knowledge, there shall be the most delight-
full exercise of love. When we come to
heaven we shall enter into the society of
the blessed Angels and of *the spirits of
just men made perfect*, that is, freed from
all those passions and infirmities which
do now render the conversation, even of
the

the best men, sometimes troublesome to one another. We shall then meet with all those excellent Persons, those brave Minds, those innocent and charitable Souls whom we have seen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we shall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends, and perhaps with many of our enemies, to whom we shall then be perfectly reconcil'd notwithstanding all the warm contests and peevish differences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of Religion. For Heaven is a state of perfect love and friendship, there will be nothing but kindness and good nature there, and all the prudent Arts of endearment and wise ways of rendering conversation mutually pleasant to one another. And what greater happiness can be imagin'd than to converse freely with so many excellent persons, without anything of folly or disguise, of jealousy or design upon one another? For then there will be none of those vices and passions, of covetousness and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peevishness, which do now so much spoil the pleasure and disturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, schisms and divisions will then be effectually hinder'd

der'd

der'd not by force but by love, not by compulsion but by that *charity which never fails*; and all those controversies in Religion which are now so hotly agitated will then be finally determin'd, not as we endeavour to end them now by Canons and Decrees, but by a perfect knowledge and convincing light.

And when this blessed society is met together and thus united by love, they shall all joy in gratitude to their great Patrons and Benefactors, *to him that sits upon the Throne and to the lamb that was slain, to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath lov'd us and wash'd us from our sins in his own blood.* And they shall sing everlasting songs of praise to God for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodness, and admirable wisdom, and almighty power, which are clearly seen in the creation and government of the world and of all the Creatures in it; particularly for his favours to mankind, for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his mercifull providences towards them in this world: But above all for the redemption of their souls by the death of his Son for the free forgiveness of their sins, for the gracious assistance of his
holy

holy Spirit, and for conducting them safely through all the snares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world to the secure possession of that glory and happiness which then they shall be partakers of, and are bound to praise God for to all eternity. This, this shall be the employment of the blessed spirits above, and these are the chief ingredients of our happiness which the Scripture mentions. And if there were no other as there may be ten thousand more for any thing I can tell, yet generous and vertuous minds will easily understand how great a pleasure there is in the improvement of our knowledge, and the exercise of love, and in a gratefull and perpetual acknowledgement of the greatest benefits that creatures are capable of receiving.

3. This happiness shall be eternal. And though this be but a circumstance and do not enter into the nature of our happiness, yet it is so material a one that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would strangely damp and allay all our joys to think that they should sometime have an end. And the greater our happiness were, the greater trouble it would be to us to consider that it must have a period. It would make a
man

man sorrowfull indeed to think of leaving such vast possessions. Indeed if the happiness of heaven were such as the joys of this world are, it were fit they should be as short; for after a little enjoyment it would cloy us, and we should soon grow weary of it: But being so excellent, it would scarce be a happiness if it were not eternal. It would imbitter the pleasures of heaven, as great as they are, to see to an end of them, though it were at never so great a distance; to consider that all this vast treasure of happiness would one day be exhausted, and that after so many years were past we should be as poor and miserable again as we were once in this world. God hath so order'd things, that the vain and empty delights of this world should be temporary and transient, but that the great and substantial pleasures of the other world should be as lasting as they are excellent. For Heaven as it is an *exceeding*, so it is an *eternal weight of glory*. And this is that which crowns the joys of heaven and banishes all fear and trouble from the minds of the blessed. And thus to be secur'd in the possession of our happiness is an unspeakable addition to it. For that which is eternal as it shall never determine, so it can never
be

be diminish'd ; for to be diminish'd and to decay is to draw nearer to an end, but that which shall never have an end can never come nearer to it.

O vast *eternity* ! how dost thou swallow up our thoughts and entertain us at once with delight and amazement ? This is the very top and highest pitch of our happiness, upon which we may stand secure and look down with scorn upon all things here below ; and how small and inconsiderable do they appear to us, compar'd with the vast and endless enjoyments of our future state ? But oh vain and foolish souls ! that are so little concern'd for eternity ; that for the trifles of time, and *the pleasures of sin which are but for a season*, can find in our hearts to forfeit an everlasting felicity. Blessed God ! why hast thou prepar'd such a happiness for those who neither consider it, nor seek after it ? *Why is such a price put into the hands of fools, who have no heart to make use of it ; who fondly chuse to gratifie their lusts rather than to save their souls, and sottishly prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin before a blessed immortality ?*

4. And lastly, This happiness is far above any thing that we can now conceive
or

or imagine. It is so great that it cannot now *enter into the heart of man*. We cannot from the experience of any of those pleasures and delights which we have been acquainted withall in this world frame an equal *Idea* and conception of it. So that when we come to Heaven we shall be ready to say of it as the Queen of *Sheba* did of *Solomon's* wisdom and prosperity, that *half of it hath not been told us* ; that the felicities and glories of that state do far exceed all the fame which we heard of them in this world. For who can say how great a good God is ? and how happy he who is the fountain of happiness can make those souls that love him, and those whom he loves ?

In this imperfect state we are not capable of a full representation of those glories. *We cannot now see God and live*. A full description of Heaven and of the pleasures of that state would let in joys upon us too big for our narrow capacities, and too strong for weak mortality to bear. *We are now but Children, and we speak as Children, and understand and think as Children* concerning these things ; but in the other state we shall grow up *to be men*, and then we shall *put away these childish thoughts ; now we know but in part, but*
when

^{13.9, 10,}
^{11.} I Cor. when that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect shall be done away; now we see through a glass darkly (*εὐαγγέλιον*, in a riddle) but then we shall see face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall know even as also we are known, as the Apostle discourseth excellently concerning this very matter.

No sooner shall we enter upon the joys of the other world, but our minds shall be rais'd to a strength and activity as much above that of the most knowing persons in this world as the thoughts of the greatest Philosopher and wisest man upon earth are above the thoughts of a child or a fool. No man's mind is now so well fram'd to understand any thing in this world, as our understandings shall then be fitted for the knowledge of God and of the things that belong to that state. In the mean time let us bless God that he hath reveal'd so much of this happiness to us as is necessary to excite and encourage us to seek after it.

The *Second* thing to be consider'd concerning our future happiness, is the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that in short is by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, in and through the mercies
of

of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ indeed is the author of our salvation, but obedience is the condition of it; so the Apostle tells us, that Christ is the author of ^{Heb. 5.1.} eternal salvation to them that obey him. It is the grace of God in the Gospel which brings or offers this salvation to us, but then it is by the denying of ungodliness ^{Tit. 2.11.} and worldly lusts, and by living soberly, ^{12.} and righteously, and godly in this present world that we are to wait for the blessed hope. Our Saviour promises this happiness to the pure in heart, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*; and elsewhere the Scripture doth exclude all others from any share or portion in this blessedness, so the Apostle assures us that ^{Heb. 12. 14.} without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

And holiness is not onely a condition but a necessary qualification for the happiness of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reasoning, *we shall be like him, for we shall see him*. To see God is to be happy, but unless we be like him we cannot see him. The sight and presence of God himself would be no happiness to that man who is not like to God in the temper and disposition of his mind. And from hence the Apostle infers in the next verse, *every man that hath this hope in him*
puri-

purifieth himself even as he is pure. So that if we live wicked lives, if we allow our selves in the practice of any known sin, we interrupt our hopes of Heaven and render our selves unfit for eternal life. By this means we defeat all the designs of God's grace and mercy towards us, and salvation it self cannot save us if we make our selves incapable of that happiness which God offers. Heaven is in Scripture call'd *an inheritance among them that are sanctified, and the inheritance of the Saints in light*; so that it is not enough that this *inheritance* is promis'd to us, but we must be qualify'd and prepar'd for it, and *be made meet to be made partakers of it.*

And this life is the time of our preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and disposition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life he shall retain in the next. 'Tis true indeed, heaven perfects those holy and vertuous dispositions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main state, *he that is filthy will be filthy still, and he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still.* If we do not in a good degree mortifie our lusts and passions here
death

death will not kill them for us, but we shall carry them with us into the other world. And if God should admit us so qualify'd into the place of happiness, yet we shall bring that along with us which would infallibly hinder us from being happy. Our sensual inclinations and desires would meet with nothing there that would be suitable to them, and we should be perpetually tormented with those appetites which we brought with us out of this world, because we should find nothing there to gratifie them withall. For as the Apostle says in another sense, *The kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* The happiness of heaven consists in such things as a wicked man hath no gust and relish for. So that if a covetous, or ambitious, or voluptuous man were in Heaven, he would be just like the rich man in Hell, tormented with a continual thirst, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires; and would not be able, amidst all the plenty and treasures of that place, to find so much as one drop of suitable pleasure and delight to quench and allay that heat. So likewise our fierce and unruly passions; if we should carry them with us into the other world, how inconsistent would they be

with happiness? They would not onely make us miserable our selves, but be a trouble to all those with whom we should converse. If a man of an envious and malicious, of a peevish and passionate temper, were admitted into the mansions of the blessed, he would not onely be unhappy himself, but would disturb the quiet of others, and raise storms even in those calm regions. Vain man! that dreamest of being happy without any disposition or preparation for it. To be happy, is to enjoy what we desire and to live with those whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven suitable to the desires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and the delights of that state are purely spiritual, and are onely to be relish'd by those who have *purified themselves as God is pure*. But if thou be carnal and sensual, what are these things to thee? What happiness would it be to thee to see God, and to have him always in thy view who was never in all thy thoughts; to be tied to live for ever in his company who is of a quite contrary temper and disposition to thy self, whose presence thou darest, and whom whilst thou wast in this world thou couldst never endure to think upon? So that the pleasures
of

of Heaven it self could signifie no good or happiness to that man who is not so dispos'd as to take pleasure in them. Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt souls to live and breath in, and the whole employment and conversation of that place, as it would be unsuitable, so would it also be unacceptable to a sensual and vicious person.

From all this it appears how necessary it is for us to prepare our selves for this blessed state, by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every lust and inordinate passion in our souls. For till this be done we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world. And thus I have done with the *first* thing imply'd in this phrase of *having our conversation in heaven*, viz. the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven; or the happiness of that state, and of the way and means whereby that happiness is to be attained.

II. The *having our conversation in heaven* does imply likewise the effect which those considerations ought to have upon our hearts and lives: As

1. To convince us of the vanity of this world. God hath on purpose made this

world troublesome and uneasie to us, that there might be no sufficient temptation to reasonable and considerate men to take them off from the care and thought of their future happiness; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection or court us with any advantage in comparison of everlasting life and glory.

When we come to die and eternity shall present it self to our serious and waking thoughts, then things will put on another face, and those things which we valued so much in this life will then appear to be nothing worth; but those things which we neglected, to be of infinite concernment to us, and worthy to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives. And if we would consider these things in time, while the opportunities of life and health are before us, we might be convince'd at a cheaper rate, and come to be satisfi'd of the vanity of this world before we despair'd of the happiness of the other.

2. To make us very active and industrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that so we may be qualify'd and dispos'd for the happiness of the

the next. Men are usually very industrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in the world; did we but value heaven half as much as it deserves we should take infinitely more pains for that. So often as we consider the glories that are above, how does it accuse our sloth and condemn our folly that we are less concerned for our souls than most men are for their bodies, that we will not labour half so much for an eternal inheritance as men ordinarily do for these corruptible things?

Let us remember that we are hastening apace to another world, and that our eternal happiness now lies at the stake. And how should it quicken our endeavours to have such a reward set before us, to have Crowns and Scepters in our eyes? would we but often represent to our minds the glorious things of another world, what fervours should we feel in our hearts? we should be all life, and spirit, and wing; and should do God's will, almost with the same readiness and delight, as the *Angels* do who continually behold the face of their Father. The consideration of heaven and the firm persuasion of our future happiness should actuate all the powers of our souls, and be continually inspiring us with new vigour

in the ways of holiness and vertue. How should this thought swell our resolutions and confirm our purposes of obedience, that if we have our *fruit unto holiness* our end will be *everlasting life*.

3. To mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be provided we be sure that it leads to happiness. The incomparably greater good of the next life will to a wise and considerate man weigh down all the evils of this. And the Scripture tells us that there is no comparison between them. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* The evils of this life afflict men more or less according as the soul is fortified with considerations proper to support us under them. When we consider that we have but a little while to be here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly Countrey where we shall meet with all the delights we can desire, it ought not to trouble us much to endure storms and foul ways, and to want many of those accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of Travellers, and we must take things as we find them and not look to have every thing just

to

to our mind. These difficulties and inconveniences will shortly be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are safely landed in our own Country, with what pleasure shall we look back upon those rough and boisterous Seas which we have escap'd? The more troubles we have past through the kinder usage we shall find when we come to our Father's house. So the Apostle tells us, that *our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* When we come to heaven our happiness shall then be as real as our miseries were here upon earth, and far greater and more lasting. And what great matter is it though we suffer a while in this world, provided we escape the endless unsufferable torments of the next; though we have not our good things in this life, if infinitely greater be reserv'd for us and we shall receive them with interest in the other?

Several of the evils and calamities of this life would be unsufferable indeed, if there were nothing better to be hoped for hereafter. If this were true, Christians would not onely be of all *men* but of all *creatures the most miserable.* But our Religion

ligion

gion hath abundantly assur'd us to the contrary. And the assurance of this was that which made the primitive Christians to embrace sufferings with so much cheerfulness, *to glory in tribulation, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and more enduring substance.* The seven brethren in the History of the *Maccabees* upon this persuasion would not accept deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. That storm of stones which was pour'd upon St. Stephen was no more to him than a common shower when he saw the heavens open'd, and Jesus (in whose cause he suffer'd) *standing on the right hand of God.*

4. To make us sincere in all our professions, words and actions, did men firmly believe the rewards of another world their Religion would not be onely in shew and pretence, but in life and reality, no man would put on a *form of godliness* that were destitute of *the power of it*; we should do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own Consciences; and be as curious of our thoughts, and most retir'd actions, as if we were in an open theatre and in the presence of the greatest assembly. For in the next life
men

men shall not be rewarded for what they seem'd to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or speak, or do, we should always remember that the day of revelation is coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclos'd, when all disguises shall be laid aside, and every ones mask shall be taken off, and all our actions and designs shall be brought upon the publick stage and expos'd to the view of men and Angels. *There is nothing now hidden which shall not then be reveal'd, nor secret which shall not be made known.*

5. To arm us against the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terrour of it is infinitely increas'd by the fearful apprehensions of what may follow it. But the comfortable hopes of a blessed immortality do strangely relieve the fainting spirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great measure to take away the terrour of it. I know that the thoughts of death are dismal even to good men, and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement than when we are conflicting with this last Enemy, and there is no such comfortable consideration to a dying man as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that
looks

looks upon death onely as a passage to glory, may welcome the messengers of it as bringing him the best and most joyfull news that ever came to him in his whole life. and no man can stay behind in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

And now I have done with the *two* things implied in this phrase, of *having our conversation in heaven*, viz. the serious thoughts and considerations of heaven, and the effect of these thoughts and considerations upon our hearts and lives.

I crave your patience but a little longer, till I make some reflection upon what hath been deliver'd concerning the happiness of good men after this life. I have told you that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world, that it is great in itself, and eternal in its duration, and far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. And now after all this, I am very sensible how much all that I have said comes short of the greatness and dignity of the thing. So that I could almost begin again and make a new attempt upon this subject. And indeed who would not be loth to be taken off from so delightfull an argument? Methinks 'tis good for us to be here, and to let our minds dwell upon these

these considerations. We are unworthy of heaven and unfit to partake of so great a glory, if we cannot take pleasure in the contemplation of those things now, the possession whereof shall be our happiness for ever.

With what joy then should we think of those *great and glorious things which God hath prepar'd for them that love him, of that inheritance incorruptible, undefil'd, which fadeth not away, reserv'd for us in the heavens?* How should we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour when we shall make our escape out of these prisons, when we shall pass out of *this howling wilderness* into *the promis'd Land*, when we shall be remov'd from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill-natured world; when we shall be past all storms, and secur'd from all further danger of shipwreck, and shall be safely landed in the regions of bliss and immortality?

O blessed time! *When all tears shall be wip'd from our eyes, and death and sorrow shall be no more; When mortality shall be swallow'd up of life, and we shall enter upon the possession of all that happiness and glory which God hath promis'd, and our faith hath believ'd, and our hopes have*

rais'd

rais'd us to the expectation of ; when we shall be eas'd of all our pains, and resolv'd of all our doubts, and be purg'd from all our sins and be free'd from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes, and have all the happiness secur'd to us beyond the power of time and change : When we shall know God and other things without study, and love him and one another without measure, and serve and praise him without weariness, and obey his will without the least reluctancy ; and shall still be more and more delighted in the knowing, and loving, and praising, and obeying of God to all eternity.

How should these thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives ? The great disadvantage of the arguments fetch'd from another world is this, that those things are at a great distance from us, and not sensible to us ; and therefore are not apt to affect us so strongly, and to work so powerfully upon us. Now to make amends for this disadvantage we should often revive these considerations upon our mind, and inculcate upon our selves the reality and certainty of these things together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We should reason thus with

with our selves ; If good men shall be so unspeakably happy, and consequently wicked men so extremely miserable in another world : If these things be true and will one day be found to be so, why should they not be to me as if they were already present ? why should not I be as much afraid to commit any sin as if hell were naked before me, and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned ? and why should I not be as careful to serve God and keep his commandments, as if heaven were open to my view, and I saw *Jesus* standing at the right hand of God with crowns of glory in his hand ready to be set upon the heads of all those who continue faithful to him ?

The lively apprehensions of the nearness of death and eternity are apt to make mens thoughts more quick and piercing, and according as we think our selves prepar'd for our future state to transport us with joy, or to amaze us with horreur. For the soul that is fully satisfi'd of his future bliss is already entred into heaven, has begun to take possession of glory, and has (as it were) his blessed Saviour in his arms, and may say with old *Simeon*, *Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* But
etc.

the thoughts of death must needs be very terrible to that man who is doubtfull or despairing of his future condition. It would daunt the stoutest man that ever breathed, to look upon death when he can see nothing but hell beyond it. When the Apparition at *Endor* told *Saul*, *to morrow thou and thy Sons shall be with me*, these words struck him to the heart, so that he fell down to the ground, and there was no more strength left in him. It is as certain that we shall die as if an express messenger should come to every one of us from the other world and tell us so. Why should we not then always live as those that must die, and as those that hope to be happy after death? To have these apprehensions vigorous and lively upon our minds this is to have our conversation in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord *Jesus Christ*, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.

FINIS.