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LIFE of GOD

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IN THE

SOUL of MAN:

OR, THE

NATURE and EXCELLENCY,

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

A B R I D G E D

By **J O H N W E S L E Y, M. A.**

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Eph. iv. 18. *Alienated from the Life of God.*

Gal. ii. 20. *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*

Rom. viii. 14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.*

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T H E
L I F E of G O D
I N T H E
S O U L of M A N.

Mistakes about
Religion.

1. **I** Cannot speak of Religion, but I must lament, that among so many Pretenders to it, so few understand what it means; some placing it in the Understanding, in Orthodox Notions and Opinions; and all the Account they can give of their Religion is, that they are of this, or the other Persuasion, and have join'd themselves to one of those many Sects whereinto Christendom is most unhappily divided: Others place it in the outward Man, in a constant Course of external Duties, and a Model of Performances; if they live peaceably with their Neighbours, keep a temperate Diet, observe the Returns of Worship, frequenting the Church, or their Closet, and sometimes extend their Hands to the Relief of the Poor, they think they have sufficiently acquitted themselves: Others again put all Religion in the Affections, in rapturous Heats and extatick Devotion; and all they aim at is, to pray with Passion, and to think of Heaven with Pleasure; and to be affected with those kind and melting Expressions wherewith they court their Saviour, till they persuade themselves that they are mightily in love with him. Thus are these Things, which have any Resemblance of Piety, and, at best, are but Means for obtaining it, or particular Exercises of it, frequently mistaken for the whole of Religion; nay, sometimes Wickedness and Vice pretend to that Name. I speak not now of those gross Impieties wherewith the Heathens were wont to worship their Gods; there are but too many Christians, who would consecrate their

Vices, and hallow their corrupt Affections; whose rugged Humour, and sullen Pride, must pass for Christian Severity; whose fierce Wrath, and bitter Rage against their Enemies, must be called holy Zeal; whose Pettulancy towards their Superiors, or Rebellion against their Governors, must have the Name of Christian Courage and Resolution.

2. But certainly Religion is quite another Thing; and they who are acquainted with it, will entertain far different Thoughts, and disdain all those Shadows and false Imitations of it. They know, by Experience, that true Religion is an Union of the Soul with God; a real Participation of the Divine Nature; the very Image of God drawn up in the Soul; or, in the Apostle's Phrase, *it is Christ formed within us*. Briefly, I know not how the Nature of Religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a *Divine Life*; and, under these Terms, I shall discourse of it, shewing, first, how it is called a *Life*, and then, how it is termed *Divine*.

3. I choose to express it by the Name of *Life*, first, because of its Permanency and Stability. Religion is not a sudden Start, or Passion of the Mind; not, tho' it should seem to transport a Man to extraordinary Performances. There are few but have Convictions of the Necessity of doing something for the Salvation of their Souls, which may push them forward some Steps with a great deal of Haste; but, anon, they flag and give over; they did shoot forth, fresh and high, but are quickly withered, because they had no Root in themselves. These sudden Fits may be compared to the violent and convulsive Motions of Bodies newly beheaded; which, however violent and impetuous, can be of no long Continuance: whereas the Motions of holy Souls are constant and regular, proceeding from a permanent and lively Principle. It is true, this divine Life continueth not always in the same Strength and Vigour, but many times suffers sad Decays; yet it is not quite extinguished; nor are holy Men abandoned to the Power of these corrupt Affections, which sway the rest of the World.

4. Again,

4. Again, Religion may be term'd *Life*, because it

Its Freedom and Unconstrainedness.

is an inward, free, and self-moving Principle; and those who have it, are not acted only by external Motives, driven merely by Threatenings, nor bribed by

Promises, nor constrained by Laws; but are powerfully inclined to that which is good, and delight in the Performance of it. The Love which a pious Man bears to God, and Goodness, is not so much by virtue of a Command enjoining him so to do, as by a new Nature instructing and prompting him to it; nor doth he pay his Devotions as an unavoidable Tribute, only to appease the divine Justice, or quiet his clamorous Conscience; but these religious Exercises are the proper Emanations of the divine Life, the natural Employments of the new-born Soul. He prays, and gives Thanks, and repents, not only because these Things are commanded, but because he is sensible of his Wants, and of the divine Goodness, and of the Folly and Misery of a sinful Life. His Charity is not forced, nor his Alms extorted from him; his Love makes him willing to give, and, tho' there were no outward Obligation, his Heart would devise liberal Things. Injustice, or Intemperance, and all other Vices, are as contrary to his Temper and Constitution, as the basest Actions are to the most generous Spirit, and Impudence and Scurrility to those who are naturally modest: So that I may well say with St John, *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit Sin: For his Seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* *. Though religious Persons do much eye the Law of God, and have a great Regard unto it, yet it is not so much the Sanction of the Law, as its Purity and Goodness, which prevail with them. They account it excellent and desirable in itself; and that in keeping of it there is great Reward; and that divine Love wherewith they are acted, makes them become a Law unto themselves.

Quis legem det amantibus?

Major est amor lex ipse sibi.

Who shall prescribe a Law to those that love?

Love's a more powerful Law which doth them move.

3. In a word, what our blessed Saviour said of himself, is, in some measure, applicable to his Followers, that it is their *Meat and Drink to do their Father's Will* *. And as the natural Appetite is carried out towards Food, though we should not reflect on the Necessity of it; so are they carried, with a natural and unforced Propension toward that which is good and commendable. It is true, external Motives are of great Use to stir up this inward Principle, especially in its Infancy and Weakness; when 'tis often so languid, that the Man himself can scarce discern it, hardly being able to move one Step forward, but when he is push'd by his Hopes, or his Fears; by the Pressure of an Affliction, or the Sense of a Mercy; by the Authority of the Law, or the Persuasion of others: Yet, if such a Person be conscientious and uniform in his Obedience, and earnestly groaning under the Sense of his Dulness, these are the first Motions of the divine Life; which, though it be faint and weak, will surely be cherished by the Influences of Heaven, and grow unto greater Maturity. But he who is utterly destitute of this inward Principle, and doth not aspire unto it, but contents himself with those Performances, whereunto he is prompted by Education or Custom, by the Fear of Hell, or carnal Notions of Heaven, can no more be accounted a religious Person, than a Puppet can be call'd a Man. This forced and artificial Religion is commonly heavy and languid, like the Motion of a Weight forced upward. It is scant and niggardly, especially in those Duties which do Violence to Mens Inclinations; for those slavish Spirits will be sure to do no more than is absolutely required; 'tis a Law that compels them, and they will be loth to go beyond what it stints them to; nay, they will ever be putting such Glosses on it, as may leave them the greatest Liberty. Whereas the Spirit of true Religion is frank and liberal, far from such peevish and narrow Reckoning; and he who hath given himself entirely unto God, will never think he doth too much for him.

5. By this Time, I hope, it appears, that Religion is, with Reason, term'd *a Life*, or vital Principle; and that we are to distinguish be-

betwixt it, and that Obedience which is constrained, and depends upon external Causes. I come next to give an Account why I term it *divine Life*: And so it may be called, not only in regard of its Fountain and Original, having God for its Author, and being wrought in the Souls of Men, by the Power of his Holy Spirit; but also in regard of its Nature, Religion being a Resemblance of the divine Perfections, the Image of the Almighty shining in the Soul of Man: Nay, it is a real Participation of his Nature, it is a Beam of the Eternal Light, a Drop of that infinite Ocean of Goodness; and they who are endued with it, may be said to have *God dwelling in their Souls, and Christ formed within them.*

7. Before I descend to a more particular Consideration of this divine Life, it will perhaps be

What the natural Life is.

fit to speak a little of that natural or animal Life which prevails in those who are Strangers to the other: And by this I understand nothing else, but our Inclination and Propension toward those Things, which are pleasing and acceptable to Nature; or Self-love issuing forth, and spreading itself into as many Branches as Men have several Appetites and Inclinations. The Root and Foundation of the animal Life I reckon to be Sense, taking it largely, as it is opposed unto Faith, and importeth our Perception and Resentment of Things, that are either grateful or troublesome to us. Now these animal Affections, considered in themselves, and as they are implanted in us by Nature, are not vicious or blameable; nay, they are Instances of the Wisdom of the Creator, furnishing his Creatures with such Appetites as tend to the Preservation and Welfare of their Lives. These are instead of a Law to the Brute Beasts, whereby they are directed towards the Ends for which they were made. But Man, being made for higher Purposes, and to be guided by more excellent Laws, becomes criminal when he is transported by the Inclinations of this lower Life, to neglect the more noble Designs of his Creation. Our natural Affections are not wholly to be destroyed, but only to be moderated and over-ruled by a more excellent Principle: And the Difference betwixt a religious and wicked

ed Man is, that in the one the divine Life bears Sway ; in the other, the Animal doth prevail.

8. But it is strange to observe unto what different Courses this natural Principle will sometimes carry those who are wholly guided by it, according to the divers Circumstances that concur with it to determine them ; and the not considering this, doth frequently occasion very dangerous Mistakes, making Men think well of themselves, by reason of that seeming Difference which is betwixt them and others ; whereas, perhaps, their Actions all the while flow from one and the same Original. If we consider the natural Temper and Constitutions of Men, we shall find some to be airy, frolicksome, and light, which makes their Behaviour extravagant and ridiculous ; whereas others are naturally serious and severe, and their whole Carriage composed into such Gravity, as gains them Reverence and Esteem. Some are of an humorous, rugged, and morose Temper, and can neither be pleased themselves, nor endure that others should be so ; while others have a Sweetness and Benignity in their Natures, and find the greatest Pleasure in the Endearments of Society, and the mutual Complacency of Friends. And it is well that Nature hath provided this complectional Tenderness to supply the Defect of true Charity in the World, and to incline Men to do something for one another's Welfare. Again, in regard of Education, some have never been taught to follow any other Rules, than those of Pleasure or Advantage ; but others are so enur'd to observe the strictest Rules of Decency and Honour, that they are hardly capable of doing any thing which they have been accustomed to look upon as base and unworthy.

9. In fine, it is no small Difference in the Department of meer natural Men that doth arise from the Strength or Weakness of their Wit or Judgment, and from their Care or Negligence in using them. Intemperance and Lust, Injustice and Oppression, and all those other Impieties which abound in the World, and render it so miserable, are the Effect of the *animal Life* when it is neither over-powered by Religion, nor governed by natural Reason ; but if it once take hold

of Reason, and get Judgment and Wit to be of its Party, it will many Times disdain the grosser sort of Vices, and spring up unto fair Imitations of Virtue and Goodness. If a Man have but so much Reason as to consider the Prejudice which Intemperance and inordinate Lust bring to his Health, his Fortune, and his Reputation, Self-love may suffice to restrain him; and one may observe the Rules of moral Justice in dealing with others, as the best Way to secure his own Interest, and maintain his Credit in the World. But this is not all: This natural Principle, by the Help of Reason, may take a higher Flight, and come nigher the Instances of Piety and Religion; it may incline a Man to the diligent Study of divine Truths: For why should not these, as well as other Speculations, be pleasant and grateful to inquisitive Minds? It may make Men zealous in maintaining and propagating such Opinions as they have espoused. It may make them delight to hear and compose excellent Discourses about the Matters of Religion; for Eloquence is very pleasant, whatever be the Subject; nay, some it may dispose to a kind of Devotion. The glorious Things that are spoken of Heaven; the Similitudes made use of in Scripture, of Crowns and Sceptres, and Rivers of Pleasure, &c. will easily affect a Man's Fancy, and make him wish to be there, tho' he neither understand nor desire those spiritual Pleasures which are shadowed forth by them: And when such a Person believes that Christ has purchased those glorious Things for him, he may feel a kind of Tenderness and Affection, and imagine he is mightily enamoured with him, and yet all the while continue a Stranger to the holy Temper and Spirit of the blessed Jesus.

10. To conclude, there is nothing proper to make a Man's Life pleasant, or himself eminent and conspicuous in the World, but *this* natural Principle, assisted by Wit and Reason, may prompt him to it. And tho' I do not condemn these Things in themselves; yet it concerns us nearly to know and consider their Nature, both that we may keep within Bounds, and that we may learn never to value ourselves on the account of such Attainments, nor lay the Stress of Religion upon our natural Appetites or Performances.

11. It is now Time to return to the Consideration of that *divine Life*, that *Life which is hid with Christ in God*, and therefore hath no glorious Shew or Appearance in the World, but to the natural Man seems mean and insipid. As the animal Life consists in that narrow Love which is terminated on a Man's self, and in his Propension to those Things that are pleasing to Nature; so the divine Life stands in an universal and unbounded Affection, and in the Mastery over our natural Inclinations. The Root of the divine Life is Faith; the chief Branches are, Love to God, Charity to Man, Purity and Humility: For (as an excellent Person observed) however these Names be common and vulgar, yet do they carry such a mighty Sense, that the Tongue of Man or Angel can pronounce nothing more weighty or excellent. Faith hath the same Place in the divine Life, which Sense hath in the natural; being indeed a kind of Sense, or feeling Persuasion of spiritual Things: It extends itself unto all divine Truths; but in our lapsed Estate, it hath a peculiar Relation to the Declarations of God's Mercy to Sinners thro' a Mediator; and therefore, receiving, its Denomination from that principal Object, is ordinarily termed *Faith in Jesus Christ*.

12. The Love of God is such a delightful Sense of God's Love to us, as makes the Soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all Things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in Fellowship and Communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any thing for his Sake, or at his Pleasure. A Soul thus possessed with divine Love, must needs be enlarged towards all Mankind in a sincere and unbounded Affection, because of the Relation they have to God, being his Creatures, and having something of his Image stamped upon them. And this is that *Charity* I named as the second Branch of Religion, and under which all the Parts of Justice, all the Duties we owe to our Neighbour, are eminently comprehended. For he who doth truly love all the World, will be nearly concerned in the Interest of every one, and so far from wronging any Person, that he will resent any Evil that befalls others, as if it happened to himself.

13. By *Purity*, I understand such a Disposition of Mind, as makes a Man despise and abstain from all Pleasures of Sense or Fancy, which either are sinful in themselves, or tend to extinguish or lessen our Relish of more divine and intellectual Pleasures. It doth also infer a Resoluteness to undergo all those Hardships he may meet with in the Performance of his Duty; so that not only Charity and Temperance, but also Christian Courage and Magnanimity, may come under this Head.

14. *Humility* imports a deep Sense of our inward and outward Sins, and of our utter Helplessness; which is always accompanied with a profound Submission to the Will of God, and Deadness to the Applause of Men.

These are the highest Perfections that Men are capable of, the very Foundation of Heaven laid in the Soul; and he who hath attained them, needs not desire to pry into the hidden Rolls of God's Decrees, or search the Volumes of Heaven to know what is determined about his everlasting Condition, but he may find a Copy of God's Thoughts concerning him written in his own Breast. His Love to God may give him Assurance of God's Favour to him; and those Beginnings of Happiness which he feels in the Conformity of the Powers of his Soul to the Nature of God, are a sure Pledge that his Felicity shall be perfected, and continued to all Eternity. And it is not without Reason that one said, *I had rather see the real Impressions of a God-like Nature upon my own Soul, than have a Vision from Heaven, or an Angel sent to tell me that my Name were enroll'd in the Book of Life.*

15. When we have said all we can, the secret Mysteries of a new Nature and divine Life can never be sufficiently express'd. Language cannot reach them; nor can they be truly understood but by those that have a Sense and Relish of spiritual Things.

There is a Spirit in Man, and the Inspiration of the Almighty giveth this Understanding. The Power and Life of Religion may be better expressed in Actions than in Words: And therefore we may take the best Measure of those gracious Endowments, from the Deportment of those in whom they reside; especially from the holy

Life of our blessed Saviour, a main Part of whose Business in this World was to teach by his Practice what he did require of others, and to make his own Conversation an exact Resemblance of those unparallel'd Rules which he prescribed: So that if ever true Goodness was visible to mortal Eyes, it was when his Presence did beautify this lower World.

16. That sincere and devout Affection wherewith his blessed Soul did constantly burn towards his heavenly Father, did express itself in an entire Resignation to his Will. It was this was his *very Meat, to do the Will, and finish the Work of him that sent him.* This was the Exercise of his Childhood, and the constant Employment of his riper Age. He spared no Travail or Pains while he was about his Father's Business; but took such Satisfaction in the Performance of it, that, when being faint and weary with his Journey, he rested on *Jacob's Well*, and intreated Water of the *Samaritan Woman*; the Success of his Conference with her, and the Accession that was made to the Kingdom of God, filled his Mind with such Delight, as seemed to redound to his very Body, refreshing his Spirits, and making him forget his Thirst, and refuse the Meat which he had sent his Disciples to buy. Nor was he less patient and submissive in suffering the Will of God, than diligent in doing of it. He endured the sharpest Afflictions, and extremest Miseries that ever were inflicted on any Mortal, without a repining Thought, or discontented Word. For tho' he was far from a stupid Insensibility, or stoical Obstinacy, and had as quick a Sense of Pain as other Men, and the deepest Apprehension of what he was to suffer in his Soul, (as his *bloody Sweat*, and the *fore Amazement and Sorrow* which he profess'd do abundantly declare) yet did he entirely submit to that severe Dispensation of Providence, and willingly acquiesced in it.

Divine Love exemplified in our Saviour.

His Diligence in doing God's Will.

His Patience in bearing it.

17. And when he prayed to God, that *if it were possible* (or, as one of the Evangelists has it, *if he were willing*) that *Cup might be removed*; yet he gently added, *nevertheless, not my Will, but thine be done.* Of

what strange Importance are the Expressions, *John xii, 27.* where he first acknowledgeth the Anguish of his Spirit, *Now is my Soul troubled*; which would seem to produce a kind of Demur; *And what shall I say?* And then he goes on to deprecate his Sufferings, *Father, save me from this Hour*; which he had no sooner uttered, but he doth, as it were, on second Thoughts, recall it in these Words, *But for this Cause came I into the World*; and concludes, *Father, glorify thy Name.* Now we must not look on this as any Levity: He knew all along what he was to suffer, and did most resolutely undergo it. But it shews us the unconceivable Weight and Pressure that he was to bear; which, being so afflicting to Nature, he could not think of without Terror: yet, considering the Will of God, and the Glory which was to redound to him from thence, he was not only content, but desirous to suffer it.

18. Another Instance of his Love to God, was his Delight in conversing with him by Prayer; which made him frequently retire from the World, and spend whole Nights in that heavenly Exercise; though he had no Sins to confess, and but few secular Interests to pray for: which, alas! are almost the only Things that are wont to drive us to our Devotions. Nay, we may say his whole Life was Prayer, a constant Course of Communion with God. If the Sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the Fire still kept alive. Nor was he ever surpris'd with that Dulness of Spirit which we must many Times wrestle with, before we can be fit for the Exercise of Devotion.

19. In the second Place I should speak of Love towards all Men; but he who would express it must transcribe the History of the Gospel: For scarce any thing is recorded to have been done or spoken by him, which was not designed for the good of some one or other. All his miraculous Works were Instances of his Goodness, as well as his Power, and they benefited those on whom they were wrought, as well as amazed the Beholders. His Charity was not confined to his Kindred, or Relations; nor was all his Kindness swallowed up in the Endearments of that peculiar Friendship which he carried to-
ward

ward the beloved Disciple. But every one was his *Friend* who obeyed his *holy Commands*, John xv. 4. and *whosoever did the Will of his Father*, the same was to him as *his Brother, and Sister, and Mother*.

20. Never was any unwelcome to him, who came with an honest Intention; nor did he deny any Request, which tended to the Good of those that asked it: So that what was spoken of that *Roman Emperor*, whom, for his Goodness, they called the *Darling of Mankind*, was really performed by him, that never any departed from him with a heavy Countenance, except that rich Youth, *Mark 10*. who was sorry to hear that the Kingdom of Heaven stood at so high a Rate, and that he could not save his Soul and his Money too. And certainly it troubled our Saviour to see, that when a Price was in his Hand to get Wisdom, yet he had no Heart to it. The Ingenuity that appeared in his first Address, had already procured some Kindness for him; for it is said, *And Jesus beholding him, loved him*. But must he for his sake cut out a new Way to Heaven, and alter the Nature of Things; which make it impossible that a covetous Man should be happy?

21. And what shall I speak of his Meekness, who could encounter the monstrous Ingratitude of that Miscreant who betrayed him, in no harsher Terms than these, *Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a Kiss?* What further Evidence could we desire of his fervent and unbounded Charity, than that he willingly laid own his Life for his most bitter Enemies, and mingling his Prayers with his Blood, besought the Father that his Death might not be laid to their Charge, but might become the Means of eternal Life, to those very Persons who procured it.

22. The third Branch of the divine Life is *Purity*, a Neglect of worldly Enjoyments and Accommodations, and a resolute enduring of all such Troubles as we meet with in the doing of our Duty. Now surely if ever any Person was wholly dead to all the Pleasures of the natural Life, it was the blessed Jesus; who seldom tasted them when they came in his Way, but never stepped out of his Road to seek them. Tho' he allowed others the Comforts of Wedlock, and he;

honoured Marriage with his Presence, yet he chose the Severity of a Virgin Life; And tho' at the same Time he supplied the want of Wine with a Miracle, yet he would not work one for the Relief of his own Hunger in the Wilderness. So gracious was he in allowing others such Gratifications, as himself thought good to abstain from, and supplying not only their pressing Necessities, but also their less considerable Wants. We many Times hear of our Saviour's Sighs, and Groans, and Tears, but never that he laugh'd, and but once that he rejoiced in Spirit; so that thro' his whole Life he exactly answered that Character given of him by the Prophet, *A Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Griefs*. Nor were the Troubles and Disaccommodations of his Life other than Matters of Choice: For never did there any appear on the Stage of the World with greater Advantages to have raised himself to the highest secular Felicity. He who could bring together such a prodigious Number of Fishes into his Disciples Net, and at another Time receive that Tribute from a Fish which he was to pay to the Temple, might easily have made himself the richest Person in the World; nay, without any Money, he could have maintained an Army powerful enough to have justled *Cæsar* out of his Throne, having oftner than once fed several Thousands with a few Loaves and small Fishes: But to shew how small Esteem he had of all the Enjoyments in the World, he chose to live in so poor and mean a Condition, that *the Foxes had Holes, and the Birds of the Air had Nests, yet he, who was Lord and Heir of all Things, had not where to lay his Head*. He did not frequent the Courts of Princes, nor affect the Acquaintance and Converse of great Ones; but being reputed the Son of a Carpenter, he had Fishermen, and other such poor People, for his Companions, and lived at such a Rate as suited with the Meanness of that Condition.

23. And thus I am brought unawares to speak of his His Humility. *Humility*, the last Branch of the divine Life, wherein he was a most eminent Pattern to us, that we might learn of him to be meek and lowly in Heart. I shall not now speak of that infinite Condescension of the eternal Son of God, in taking our Nature

upon him; but only reflect on his lowly Department while he was in the World. He had none of those Sins and Imperfections, which may justly humble the best of Men; yet he was so entirely swallowed up with a deep Sense of the infinite Perfections of God, that he appeared as nothing in his own Eyes, I mean so far as he was a Creature. He considered those eminent Perfections which shined in his blessed Soul as not his own, but the Gifts of God; and therefore assumed nothing to himself for them, but with the profoundest Humility renounced all Pretences to them. Hence did he refuse that ordinary Compellation of *Good Master*, from one, who, it seems, was ignorant of his Divinity: *Why callest thou me good? There is none good but God only.* As if he had said, "The Goodness of any Creature (and such only thou takest me to be) is not worthy to be named or taken notice of; 'tis God alone who is originally and essentially good." He never made Use of his miraculous Power for Vanity or Ostentation: He would not gratify the Curiosity of the *Jews* with a Sign from Heaven, some prodigious Appearance in the Air; nor would he follow the Advice of his Countrymen and Kindred, who would have had all his great Works performed in the Eyes of the World, for gaining him the greater Fame. When his Charity had prompted him to the Relief of the Miserable, his Humility made him many Times enjoin the Concealment of the Miracle; and when the Glory of God, and the Design for which he came into the World, required the Publication of them, he ascribed the Honour of all to his Father, telling them, *That of himself he was able to do nothing.*

24. I cannot insist on all the Instances of Humility in his Department towards Men; his withdrawing himself when they would have made him a King; his Subjection, not only to his blessed Mother; but to her Husband, during his younger Years, and his Submission to all the Indignities and Affronts which his rude and malicious Enemies did put upon him: The History of his holy Life, recorded by those who conversed with him, is full of such Passages as these; and indeed the serious and attentive Study of it, is the best Way to get right

Mea.

Measures of Humility, and all the other Parts of Religion, which I have been endeavouring to describe.

Let me here subjoin a Prayer that might be proper when one, who had formerly entertained some false Notions of Religion, begins to discover what it is.

A P R A Y E R.

Infinite and eternal Majesty, Author and Fountain of Being and Blessedness, how little do we poor sinful Creatures know of thee, or the Way to serve and please thee? We talk of Religion, and pretend unto it; but alas! how few are there that know and consider what it means? How easily do we mistake the Affections of our Nature, for those divine Graces which alone are acceptable in thy Sight? It may justly grieve me to consider, that I should have wandered so long, and contented myself so often with vain Shadows of Religion; yet I cannot but acknowledge and adore thy Goodness, who hast been pleased, in some Measure, to open mine Eyes, and let me see what it is at which I ought to aim. I rejoice to consider what mighty Improvements my Nature is capable of, and what a divine Temper doth shine in those whom thou art pleased to chuse, and causest to approach unto thee. Blessed be thine infinite Mercy, who sentest thine own Son to dwell among Men, and instruct them by his Example, as well as his Laws, giving them a perfect Pattern of what they ought to be. O that the holy Life of the blessed Jesus may be always in my Thoughts, till I receive a deep Sense and Impression of those Graces that shined so eminently in him; and let me never rest, till that new and divine Nature prevail in my Soul, and Christ be formed within me.

I. **A**ND now, having discovered the Nature of true Religion, before I proceed any further, it will not, perhaps, be unfit to fix our Meditations a little on the Excellency and Advantages of it. But alas! what Words shall we find to express that inward Satisfaction, those hidden Pleasures which can never be rightly understood, but by those who feel them?

The Excellency and Advantage of Religion.

A Stranger intermeddletb not with their Joy *. Holiness is the right Temper, the vigorous and healthful Constitution of the Soul: Its Faculties had formerly been enfeebled and disordered, so that they could not exercise their natural Functions; it had wearied itself with endless Tossings and Rollings, and was never able to find any Rest. Now that Distemper being removed, it feels itself well; there is a due Harmony in its Faculties, and a sprightly Vigour possesseth every Part: The Understanding can discern what is good, and the Will can cleave unto it; the Affections are not tied to the Motions of Sense, and the Influence of external Objects; but are stirred by more divine Impressions, are touched with a Sense of invisible Things.

2. Let us descend into a nearer View of Religion, in those several Branches of it which were named before. Let us consider that Love and Affection wherewith holy Souls are united to God, that we may see what Excellency and Felicity is involved in it. Love is that powerful and prevalent Passion, by which all the Faculties and Inclinations of the Soul are determined, and on which both its Perfection and Happiness depend. The Worth and Excellency of a Soul is to be measured by the Object of its Love. He who loveth mean and sordid Things, doth thereby become base and vile; but a noble and well-placed Affection advances the Spirit to a Conformity with the Perfections which it loves. The Images of these frequently present to the Mind, and, by a secret Force and Energy, insinuate into the very Constitution of the Soul, and mould and fashion it unto their own Likeness. Hence we see how easily Lovers or Friends slide into the Imitation of the Persons whom they affect; and how, even before they are aware, they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable Instances of their Deportment, but also in their Voice and Gesture, and that which we call their Mien and Air: And certainly we should as well transcribe the inward Beauties of the Soul, if they were the Object and Motive of our Love. But as all the Creatures we converse with have their Mixture and Alloy, we are always in Hazard to be sullied and corrupted by placing our

The Excellency
of divine Love.

Af-

Affection on them: Passion doth easily blind our Eyes, so that we first approve, and then imitate the Things that are blameable in them. The true Way to improve and enoble our Souls, is by fixing our Love on the divine Perfections, that we may have them always before us, and derive an Impression of them on ourselves; and beholding, with open Face, as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same Image, from Glory to Glory. He who hath raised his Eyes towards that uncreated Beauty and Goodness, and fixed his Affection there, is quite of another Spirit, of a more excellent and heroick Temper than the rest of the World; and cannot but infinitely disdain all mean and unworthy Things, will not entertain any low or base Thoughts, which might disparage his high and noble Pretensions. Love is the greatest and most excellent Thing we are Masters of; and therefore it is Folly and Baseness to bestow it unworthily. It is indeed the only thing we can call our own; other Things may be taken from us by Violence, but none can ravish our Love. If any thing else be counted ours, by giving our Love, we give all, so far as we make over our Hearts and Wills, by which we possess our other Enjoyments. It is not possible to refuse him any thing, to whom, by Love, we have given ourselves; nay, since it is the Privilege of Gifts, to receive their Value from the Mind of the Giver, and not to be measured by the Event, but by the Desire, he who loveth, may, in some Sense, be said not only to bestow all that he hath, but all Things else which may make the beloved Person happy; since he doth heartily wish them, and would really give them, if they were in his Power. Certainly therefore Love is the worthiest Present we can offer unto God, and it is extremely debased when we bestow it another Way.

3. When this Affection is misplaced, it doth often vent itself in such Expressions, as point at its genuine and proper Object. The blasphemous Terms of Adoration, wherein Men sometimes express their Passion, are the Language of that Affection which was designed for God; as he who is accustomed to speak to some great Person, doth perhaps unawares accost another with those Titles he was wont to give him: But certainly that Pas-

sion which accounteth its Object a Deity, ought to be bestowed on him who really is so ; those unlimited Submissions, which debase the Soul, if directed to any other, will exalt and enoble it, when placed here ; those Chains and Cords of Love, are infinitely more glorious than Liberty itself ; this Slavery is more noble than all the Empires in the World.

4. Again, as divine Love doth advance and elevate the Soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy. The highest Pleasures, the most substantial Delights, that human Nature is capable of, are those which arise from the Endearments of a well-placed and successful Affection. That which imbitters Love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome Passion, is the placing it on those who have not Worth enough to deserve it, or Gratitude to requite it, or whose Absence may deprive us of their Converse, or their Miseries occasion our Trouble. To all these Evils are they exposed, whose chief Affection is placed on Creatures ; but the Love of God delivers us from them all.

5. First, Love must needs be full of Disquietude, when there is not Excellency in the Object to answer the Vastness of its Capacity : So violent a Passion cannot but fret and torment the Spirit, when it finds not wherewith to satisfy its Cravings ; and indeed so large and unbounded is its Nature, that it must be extremely straiten'd, when confined to any Creature : Nothing below an infinite Good can afford it room to stretch itself, and exert its Vigour and Activity. What is a little Skin-deep Beauty, or some small Degrees of Goodness, to satisfy a Passion which was made for God ? No wonder Lovers do so hardly suffer any Rival, and do not desire that others should approve their Passion by imitating it : They know the Scantiness of the Good which they love, that it cannot suffice two, being in effect too little for one. Hence Love, *which is strong as Death, occasioneth Jealousy, which is cruel as the Grave ; the Coals whereof are Coals of Fire, which hath a most violent Flame.*

6. But divine Love hath no Mixture of this Gall. When once the Soul is fixed on that supream Good, it finds

finds so much Goodness, as doth not only satisfy its Affection, but master and overpower it too : It finds all its love to be too faint and languid for such an Object, and is only sorry that it can command no more : It wishes for the Flames of a *Scrapp*, and longs for the Time when it shall be wholly melted and dissolved in Love ; and because it can do so little itself, it desires the Assistance of the whole Creation, that Angels and Men would concur with it in the Admiration and Love of those infinite Perfections.

7. Again, Love is accompanied with Trouble, when it misses a suitable Return of Affection.

The Certainty
to be beloved
again.

Love is the most valuable Thing we can bestow, and, by giving it, we do in effect give all that we have : And therefore it must needs be afflicting, to find so great a Gift despised ; that the Present which one hath made of his whole Heart, cannot obtain any Return. Perfect Love is a kind of Self-dereliction, a wandering out of ourselves : It is a sort of voluntary Death, wherein the Lover dies to himself, and all his own Interests ; not thinking of them, nor caring for them any more ; and minding nothing but how he may please and gratify the Party whom he loves. Thus he is quite undone, unless he meets with reciprocal Affection ; he neglects himself, and the other hath no Regard to him : But if he be beloved, he is revived, as it were, and liveth in the Soul and Care of the Person whom he loves. And now he begins to mind his own Concernments, not so much because they are his, as because the Beloved is pleased to own an Interest in them ; he becomes dear unto himself, because he is so unto the other.

8. And herein the divine Lover hath unspeakably the Advantage, having placed his Affection on him whose Nature is Love, whose Goodness is as infinite as his Being ; whose Mercy prevented us, when we were his Enemies, therefore cannot chuse but embrace us, when we are become his Friends. It is utterly impossible that God should deny his Love to a Soul wholly devoted to him, and which desires nothing so much as to serve and please him. He cannot disclaim his own Image, nor the Heart on which it is engraven. Love is all the
Tribute

Tribute which we can pay him, and it is the Sacrifice which he will not despise.

9. Another Thing which disturbs the Pleasure of Love, and renders it a miserable and unquiet Passion, is Absence and Separation from those we love. It is not without a sensible Affliction that Friends do part, tho' for some little Time: But if Death have made the Separation, as some time or other it must, this occasions a Grief scarce to be parallel'd by all the Misfortunes of human Life. But, O how happy are those who have placed their Love on him, who can never be absent from them! They need but open their Eyes, and they shall every where behold the Traces of his Presence and Glory, and converse with him whom their Soul loveth; and this makes the darkest Prison, or wildest Desert, not only supportable, but delightful to them.

10. In fine, a Lover is miserable, if the Person whom he loveth be so. They who have made an Exchange of Hearts by Love, get thereby an Interest in one another's Happiness and Misery; and this makes Love a troublesome Passion, when placed on Earth. The most fortunate Person hath Grief enough to mar the Tranquility of his Friend; and it is hard to hold out, when we are attacked on all Hands, and suffer not only in our own Person, but in another's: But if God were the Object of our Love, we should share in an infinite Happiness, without any Mixture or Possibility of Diminution; we should rejoice to behold the Glory of God, and receive Comfort and Pleasure from all the Praises wherewith Men and Angels extol him. It would delight us beyond all Expression to consider, that the Beloved of our Souls is infinitely happy in himself, and that all his Enemies cannot shake or unsettle his Throne: *That our God is in the Heavens, and doth whatsoever pleaseth him.*

Behold, on what sure Foundations his Happiness is built, whose Soul is possessed with divine Love, whose Will is transformed into the Will of God, and whose sole Desire is, that his Maker should be pleased! O the Peace,

Peace, the Rest, the Satisfaction that attendeth such a Temper of Mind!

11. What an infinite Pleasure must it needs be, thus

He that loveth
God finds Sweet-
ness in every Dis-
pensation.

as it were to lose ourselves in him; and, being swallowed up in the overcoming Sense of his Goodness, to offer ourselves a living Sacrifice, always ascending unto him in Flames of Love? Never doth

a Soul know what solid Joy is, till it give itself up unto the Author of its Being, and feel itself become a hallowed and devoted Thing; and can say, from an inward Sense and Feeling, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*: I am content to be any thing for him, and care not for myself, but that I may serve him. A Person moulded into this Temper, finds Pleasure in all the Dispensations of Providence: Temporal Enjoyments have another Relish, when he tastes the divine Goodness in them, and considers them as Tokens of Love sent by his dearest Lord and Maker: And Chastisements hereby lose their Sting; the Rod, as well as the Staff, comfort him: He rejoices, that tho' God does not the Will of such a worthless and foolish Creature as himself, yet he doth his own Will, and accomplishes his own Designs; which are infinitely more holy and wise.

12. The Exercises of Religion, which to others are

The Duties of
Religion are
delightful to
him.

insipid and tedious, yield the highest Pleasure to Souls possessed with divine Love: They rejoice when they are called to go up to the House of the Lord, that they may see his Power and his Glory, as they

have formerly seen it in his Sanctuary*. They never think themselves so happy, as when, having retired from the World, they have placed themselves in the Presence of God, and entertain Fellowship and Communion with him: They delight to adore his Perfections, and recount his Favours; and to protest their Affection to him, and tell him a Thousand Times that they love him; to lay out their Troubles or Wants before him, and disburthen their Hearts in his Bosom. Repentance itself is a delightful Exercise, when it floweth from the Principle of Love. There is a secret

Sweet-

Sweetness which accompanieth those Tears of Remorse, those Meltings and Relentings of a Soul returning unto God, and lamenting its former Unkindness.

13. The Severities of a holy Life, and that constant Watch which we are obliged to keep over our Hearts and Ways, are troublesome to those who are only ruled by an external Law, and have no Law in their Minds inclining them to their Duty. But where divine Love possesseth the Soul, it stands as Centinel to keep out every Thing that may offend the Beloved. It complieth cheerfully, not only with explicite Commands, but with the most secret Notices of the Beloved's Pleasure; and is ingenious in discovering what will be most grateful and acceptable unto him. It makes Mortification and Self-denial change their harsh and dreadful Names, and become easy, sweet and delightful Things.

14. The next Branch of the divine Life is *universal Love* to Man. The Excellency of this Grace will be easily acknowledged; for what can be more noble than a Heart enlarged to embrace the whole World? Whose Wishes and Designs are levell'd at the Welfare of the Universe, which considereth every Man's Interest as its own? He, who loveth his Neighbour as himself, can never entertain any base or injurious Thought, or be wanting in Expressions of Bounty. He had rather suffer a thousand Wrongs, than be guilty of one; and never accounts himself happy, but when some one or other hath been benefited by him. The Malice or Ingratitude of Men is not able to resist his Love. He overlooks their Injuries, and pities their Folly, and overcomes their Evil with Good; and never designs any other Revenge against his most bitter and malicious Enemies, than to put all the Obligations he can upon them, whether they will or not. This inward Goodness and Benignity of Spirit reflects a Sweetness and Serenity upon the very Countenance, and makes it amiable and lovely: It inspires the Soul with a noble Resolution and Courage, and makes it capable of enterprising and effecting the highest Things: Those heroick Actions which we are wont to read with Admiration, have, for the most Part, been the Effects of the Love of one's Country, or of particular

cular Friendships; and certainly a more extensive Affection must be much more powerful and efficacious.

15. Again, as *Charity* flows from a noble and excellent Temper, so it is accompanied with the greatest Satisfaction and Pleasure. It delights the Soul to feel itself thus enlarged; to be delivered from those disquieting Passions, Malice, Hatred, and Envy; and to become gentle, sweet, and benign. Had I my Choice of all Things for my present Felicity, I would pitch upon this, to have my Heart possessed with the greatest Kindness and Affection towards all Men in the World. I am sure this would make me partake in all the Happiness of others, their inward Endowments, and outward Prosperity. And tho' I should frequently meet with Occasions of Grief and Compassion, yet there is a Sweetness in Commiseration, which makes it infinitely more desirable than a stupid Insensibility. And the Consideration of that infinite Goodness and Wisdom, which governs the World, might repress any excessive Trouble for particular Calamities that happen in it. Certainly, next to the Love of God, that ardent Affection wherewith blessed Souls embrace one another, is justly to be reckoned as the greatest Felicity of those Regions above. And did it universally prevail in the World, it would anticipate that Blessedness, and make us taste the Joys of Heaven upon Earth.

16. A third Branch of Religion is *Purity*; a Contempt of sensual Pleasures, and Resoluteness to undergo those Troubles and Pains we may meet with in the Performance of our Duty. Now, the naming of this may suffice to recommend it as a most noble and excellent Quality. There is no Slavery so base, as that whereby a Man becomes a Drudge to his own Lusts. Never can that Person be capable of any Thing noble and worthy, who is sunk in the gross Pleasures of Sense, or bewitched with the airy Gratifications of Fancy. But the religious Soul is of a more sublime and divine Temper. It knows it was made for higher Things, and scorns to step aside one Foot out of the Ways of Holiness, for obtaining any of these.

17. And this *Purity* is accompanied with a great deal of Pleasure. Whatsoever defiles the Soul disturbs it too. All impure Delights have a Sting in them, and leave Smart and Trouble behind them. Excess and Intemperance, and all inordinate Lusts, are so much Enemies to the Health of the Body, and the Interests of this present Life, that a little Consideration might oblige any rational Man to forbear them on that very Score. And if the religious Person go higher, and do not only abstain from noxious Pleasures, but neglect those that are innocent, this is not to be look'd upon as any violent and uneasy Restraint, but as the Effect of better Choice: His Mind is so taken up with sublime and refin'd Delights, that he cannot be concerned in these. Any Person that is engaged in a violent and passionate Affection, will easily forget his ordinary Gratifications; will be little curious about his Diet, or his bodily Ease, or the Divertisements he was wont to delight in. No Wonder then, if Souls, overpowered with divine Love, despise inferior Pleasures, and be almost ready to grudge the Body its necessary Attendance for the common Accommodations of Life, judging all these impertinent to their main Happiness, and those higher Enjoyments they are pursuing. As for the Harshships they may meet with, they rejoice in them, as Opportunities to exercise and testify their Affection; and since they are able to do so little for God, they are glad of the Honour to suffer for him.

18. The last Branch of Religion is *Humility*; and however, to vulgar and carnal Eyes, this may appear a base and despicable Quality, yet, really, the Soul of Man is not capable of a higher and more noble Endowment. It is a silly Ignorance that begets Pride; but Humility arises from a nearer Acquaintance with excellent Things, which keeps Men from doating on Trifles, or admiring themselves because of some petty Attainments.

I know not what Thoughts People may have of *Humility*, but I see almost every Person pretending to it, and shunning such Expressions and Actions as may make them be accounted arrogant and presumptuous; so that those who are most desirous of Praise, are loth to commend

mend themselves. What are all those Compliments and Modes of Civility so frequent in our ordinary Converse, but so many Protestations of the Esteem of others, and the low Thoughts we have of ourselves? And must not Humility be an excellent Endowment, when the very Shadows of it are so necessary a Part of good Breeding?

19. Again, this Grace is accompanied with a great deal of Happiness and Tranquility. The proud and arrogant Person is a Trouble to all that converse with him, but most of all unto himself. Every thing is enough to vex him; but scarce any thing sufficient to content and please him. But the humble Person hath the Advantage when he is despised, that none can think more meanly of him than he doth of himself; and as he is less affected with Injuries, so he is less obnoxious unto them. *Contention, which cometh of Pride*, betrays a Man into a thousand Inconveniences, which those of a meek and lowly Temper seldom meet with. True Humility begets Veneration among wise Men, whilst Pride defeateth its own Design, and depriveth a Man of that Honour it makes him pretend to.

20. And the Exercises of Humility which relate unto Almighty God, are accompanied with the greatest Satisfaction and Sweetness. It is impossible to express the Delight which religious Persons feel in the lowest Prostrations of their Soul before God; when, having a deep Sense of the divine Majesty and Glory, they sink (if I may so speak) to the Bottom of their Beings, and vanish and disappear in the Presence of God, by a serious and affectionate Acknowledgment of their own Nothingness; when they understand the full Sense of the Psalmist's Exclamation, *Lord, what is Man?* and can utter it with the same Affection. Never did any haughty Person receive the Praises of Men with so much Pleasure as the humble renounce them, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give Glory.*

21. Thus I have spoken something of the Excellencies and Advantages of Religion in its several Branches. Let us acquaint ourselves with it, and Experience will

teach us more than all that ever hath been spoken or written concerning it. If we may suppose the Soul to be already awakened unto some longing Desires after so great a Blessedness, it will be good to give them Vent, and suffer them to issue forth in some such Aspirations as these.

A P R A Y E R.

Good God! what a mighty Felicity is this to which we are called? How graciously hast thou joined our Duty and Happiness together, and prescribed that for our Work, the Performance whereof is a great Reward? And shall such silly Worms be advanced to so great a Height? Wilt thou allow us to raise our Eyes to thee? Wilt thou admit and accept our Affection? Shall we receive the Impression of thy divine Excellencies, by beholding and admiring them, and partake of thy infinite Blessedness and Glory, by loving thee, and rejoicing in them? O the Happiness of those Souls that are disintangled from every narrow and particular Good; whose Understandings are enlightned by thy Holy Spirit, and their Wills enlarged to the Extent of thine; who love thee above all Things, and all Mankind for thy sake! I am persuaded, O God, I am persuaded that I can never be happy, till my corrupt Affections be mortified, and the Pride and Vanity of my Spirit subdued, and till I come seriously to despise the World, and think nothing of myself. But O when shall it once be? O when wilt thou come unto me, and satisfy my Soul with thy Likeness, making me holy as thou art holy, even in all Manner of Conversation? Hast thou given me a Prospect of so great a Felicity, and wilt thou not bring me unto it? Hast thou excited these Desires in my Soul, and wilt thou not also satisfy them? O teach me to do thy Will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me unto the Land of Uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy Name's sake, and perfect that which concerneth me. Thy Mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever, forsake not the Work of thine own Hands

1. **I** Have hitherto considered wherein true Religion doth consist, and how desirable a Thing it is ;

The despondent Thoughts of some newly awaken'd to a right Sense of Things.

but when one sees how infinitely distant he is from it, he may perhaps be ready to despond : He may sit down in Sadness, and bemoan himself, and say, in the Anguish and Bitterness of his Spirit, " They are happy indeed whose

" Souls are awakened unto the divine Life, who are thus
 " renewed in the Spirit of their Minds ; but alas ! I am
 " quite of another Constitution. If outward Observan-
 " ces could have done, I might have hoped to acquit
 " myself by Diligence and Care : But since nothing
 " but a new Nature can serve, what am I able to do ?
 " I could give all my Goods to the Poor, but cannot
 " command that Love, without which this would profit
 " me nothing. This Gift of God cannot be purchased
 " with Money *. If a Man should give all the Sub-
 " stance of his House for Love, it would utterly be con-
 " demned †. I could pine and macerate my Body ; but
 " I cannot starve my Corruptions, nor wean my Af-
 " fections from earthly Things. I am many Times
 " convinced of my own Vileness ; but this doth rather
 " beget Discontent in me, than true Humility ; and
 " tho' I should come to think me *only* of myself, yet I
 " cannot endure that others should think so too. In a
 " word, when I reflect on my most specious Attain-
 " ments, I have Reason to suspect that they are all but
 " the Effects of Nature ; and Sin is so powerful and so
 " deeply rooted in me, that I can never hope to be de-
 " livered from the Dominion of it. I may tofs and turn
 " as a Door on the Hinges, but can never get clear off ;
 " so that all the Advantage I can draw from the Disco-
 " very of Religion, is but to see, at a huge Distance, that
 " Felicity which I am not able to reach ; like a Man in
 " a Shipwreck, who discerns the Land, and envies the
 " Happiness of those there, but cannot himself get ashore.

2. These, or such like Thoughts, may arise in the

The Unreasonableness of these Fears.

Minds of those who begin to conceive the Nature and Excellency of Religion. They have spied the

C² Google

Land

Land, and seen that it is exceeding good, that it floweth with Milk and Honey; but they find they have the Children of *Anack* to grapple with, many powerful Lusts and Corruptions to overcome, and they fear they shall never prevail against them. But why should we give way to such discouraging Suggestions? Why should we entertain such unreasonable Fears, which damp our Spirits, and weaken our Hands, and augment the Difficulties of our Way? Let us encourage ourselves with those mighty Aids we are to expect in this spiritual Warfare; for greater is he that is for us, than all that can rise up against us. *The eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting Arms. Let us be strong in the Lord, and the Power of his Might;* for he it is that shall tread down our Enemies. God hath a tender Regard unto the Souls of Men, and is infinitely willing to promote their Welfare. He hath condescended to our Weakness, and declared with an Oath, that he hath no Pleasure in our Destruction. There is no such thing as Despise in the Bosom of that ever blessed Being, whose Name and Nature is Love. He created us at first in a happy Condition, and now when we are fallen from it, *he hath laid Help upon One that is mighty to save**, hath committed the Care of our Souls to no meaner Person than the eternal Son of his Love. It is he that is the Captain of our Salvation, and what Enemies can be too strong for us, when we are fighting under his Banner? Did not the Son of God come down from the Bosom of his Father, and pitch his Tabernacle amongst Men, that he might recover them to the divine Life, and restore the Image of God in their Souls? All the mighty Works he performed, all the Afflictions he sustained, had this for their Scope and Design: For this did he labour and Toil; for this did he bleed and die. *He was with Child, he was in Pain, and hath he brought forth nothing but Wind†? Hath he wrought no Deliverance in the Earth? Shall he not see of the Travail of his Soul‡?* Certainly it is impossible that this great Contrivance of Heaven should prove abortive, that such a mighty Undertaking should miscarry. It hath already been effectual for the Salvation of many

Thou-

Thousands, who were once as far from the Kingdom of Heaven as we. And our *High Priest continueth for ever, and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him* *. He is tender and compassionate; he knoweth our Infirmities, and had Experience of our Temptations. *A bruised Reed will be not break, and smoking Flax will be not quench, till he send forth Judgment unto Victory* †. He hath sent out his holy Spirit, whose sweet but powerful Breathings are still moving up and down in the World, to quicken the Souls of Men, and awaken them unto the Sense and Feeling of those divine Things for which they were made. He is ready to assist such weak and languishing Creatures as we are, in our Essays towards Holiness and Felicity. And when once it hath taken hold of a Soul, and kindled in it the smallest Spark of divine Love, will he not preserve and cherish, and bring it forth into a Flame, which many Waters shall not quench ‡? Whenever this Day begins to dawn, and the *Day-star to arise in their Heart* §, it will dispel the Powers of Darkness, and make Ignorance and Folly, and all corrupt Affections, flee away as fast before it as the Shades of Night, when the Sun cometh out of his Chambers. For *the Path of the Just is as the shining Light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect Day* ††. *They shall go on from Strength to Strength, till every one of them appear before God in Zion* **.

3. Why should we think it impossible that true Goodness and universal Love should come to sway and prevail in our Souls? Is not this their primitive Condition, their genuine Constitution, as they came first from the Hands of their Maker? Sin and Corruption are but Usurpers; and tho' they have long kept the Possession, yet *from the Beginning it was not so*. That inordinate Self-love which one would think were interwoven with the Constitution of our Nature, is nevertheless of foreign Extraction, and had no Place at all in the State of Integrity. We have still so much Reason left as to condemn it. Our Understandings are easily convinced that we ought to be wholly devoted to him from whom we have our Being, and to love him infinitely more than

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our,

* Heb. vii. 24, 25. † Matth. xii. 29. ‡ Cant. viii. 7.
§ 2 Pet. i. 19. †† Prov. iv. 18. ** Psal. lxxxiv. 7.

ourselves, who is infinitely better than we. And our Wills would readily comply with this, if they were not disordered and out of Tune. And is not he who made our Souls able to mend them again? Shall we not be able, by his Assistance, to vanquish and expel those violent Intruders, *and turn unto Flight the Armies of the Aliens* *.

4. No sooner shall we take up Arms in this holy War, but we shall have all the Saints on Earth, and all the Angels in Heaven engaged on our Side. The holy Church throughout the World is daily interceding with God for the Success of all such Endeavours. And doubtless those heavenly Hosts above, are nearly concerned in the Interests of Religion, and infinitely desirous to see the divine Life prevailing in this inferior World, and that the Will of God may be done by us on Earth, as it is done by them in Heaven. May we not then encourage ourselves, as the Prophet did his Servant, when he shewed him the Horses and Chariots of Fire, *Fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be against us* †?

5. Away then with all desponding Thoughts. To undertake vigorously, and rely confidently on the divine Assistance, is more than half the Conquest: *Let us arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with us* ‡.

It is true, Religion in the Souls of Men is the immediate Work of God; and all our natural Endeavours can neither produce it alone, nor merit those supernatural Aids by which it must be wrought. The Holy Ghost must come upon us; and the Power of the Highest overshadow us, before that holy Thing can be begotten, and Christ formed in us. But yet we must not expect that this Work should be done without any Endeavours of our own; we must not lie loitering in the Ditch, and wait till Omnipotence pulls us thence; no, no, we must bestir ourselves, and actuate these Powers which we have already received. We must put forth ourselves to our utmost Capacities, and then *our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* §. All the Art and Industry

* Heb. xi. 34. † 2 Kings vi. 16, 17. ‡ 1 Chron. xxiii. 18.
§ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

Industry of Man cannot form the smallest Herb, or make a Stalk of Corn to grow in the Field. It is the Energy of Nature, and the Influences of Heaven, which produce this Effect. It is God who causeth the Grass to grow, and Herb for the Service of Man *; and yet no body will say that the Labours of the Husbandman are useless or unnecessary. So likewise the human Soul is immediately created by God; it is he who both formeth and enliveneth the Child, and yet he hath appointed the Marriage-bed as the ordinary Means for the Propagation of Mankind: And so, tho' there must intervene a Stroke of Omnipotence to effect this mighty Change in our Souls; yet ought we to do what we can, that we may be more ready to receive the Seeds of Grace and the Dew of Heaven. It is true, God hath been found of some who sought him not; he hath cast himself in their Way who were quite out of his; he hath laid hold upon them, and stopt their Course on a sudden; for so was St Paul converted in his Journey to *Damascus*. But certainly this is not God's ordinary Method of dealing with Men: Tho' he hath not tied himself to Means, yet he hath tied us to the Use of them; and we have never more Reason to expect the divine Assistance, than when we are doing our utmost Endeavours. It shall therefore be my next Work to shew what Course we may take for attaining that blessed Temper I have described.

6. Now if we desire to have our Souls moulded to this holy Frame, to become Partakers of the divine Nature, and have Christ formed in our Hearts, we must carefully endeavour to avoid and abandon all sinful Practices. There can be no Treaty of Peace, till once we lay down these Weapons of Rebellion wherewith we fight against Heaven; nor can we expect to have our Distempers cured, if we be daily feeding on Poison. Every wilful Sin gives a mortal Wound to the Soul, and puts it at a greater Distance from God. And we can never hope to have our Hearts purified from corrupt Affections, till our Hands are cleansed from vicious Actions.

7. And first, let us inform ourselves well what those Sins are from which we ought to abstain. And here we must not take our Measures from the Maxims of the World, or the Practices of those whom, in Charity, we account good Men: Most People have very light Apprehensions of these Things, and are not sensible of any Fault, unless it be gross and flagitious; and scarce reckon any so great, as that which they call Preciseness; and those who are more serious, do many Times allow themselves too great Latitude and Freedom. Alas! how much Pride, and Vanity, and Passion, and Humour; how much Weakness, and Folly, and Sin, doth every Day shew itself in their Converse and Behaviour. It may be they are humbled for it, and striving against it, and are daily gaining some Ground; but then the Progress is so small, and their Failings so many, that we had need to chuse an exacter Pattern. Every one of us must answer for himself, and the Practices of others will never warrant and secure us. It is the highest Folly to regulate our Actions by any other Standard, than that by which they must be judged. If ever therefore we would *cleanse our Way*, it must be *by taking heed thereto according to the Word of God* *. And that *Word which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart* †, will certainly discover many Things to be sinful and heinous, which pass for very innocent in the Eyes of the World. Let us therefore imitate the Psalmist, who saith, *Concerning the Works of Men, by the Words of thy Lips, I have kept myself from the Path of the Destroyer* §. Let us acquaint ourselves well with the holy Laws of our Religion: Let us consider the Discourses of our blessed Saviour, (especially that divine Sermon on the Mount) and the Writings of his holy Apostles; where an unbiassed Mind may clearly discern those Bounds by which our Actions ought to be confined: And then let us never look upon any Sin as light and

* Psa. cix. 9. † Heb. iv. 12. § Psa. xvii. 4.

and inconsiderable, but be fully persuaded, that the smallest is infinitely heinous in the Sight of God, and prejudicial to the Souls of Men; and that if we had the right Sense of Things, we should be as deeply affected with the least Irregularities, as now we are with the greatest Crimes.

8. But now amongst those Things which we discover to be sinful, there will be some unto which, thro' the Disposition of our Nature, or long Custom, we are so wedded, that it will be like cutting off the Right-hand, or pulling out the Right-eye, to abandon them. But must we therefore sit down and wait till all Difficulties be over, and every Temptation be gone? This were to imitate the Fool in the Poet, who stood the whole Day at the River-side, till all the Water should run by. We must not indulge our Inclinations, as we do little Children, till they grow weary of the Thing they are unwilling to let go. We must not continue our sinful Practices, in hopes that the divine Grace will one Day overpower our Spirits, and make us hate them for their own Deformity.

9. If the heinous Nature of Sin cannot affect us, at least we may be frightened by those dreadful Consequences that attend it: That same selfish Principle which pusheth us forward unto the Pursuit of sinful Pleasures, may make us loath to buy them at the Rate of everlasting Misery. Let us therefore accustom ourselves to consider seriously what a fearful Thing it must be to offend that infinite Being, on whom we hang and depend every Moment; who needs but withdraw his Mercies to make us miserable, or his Assistance to make us nothing. Let us remember the Shortness and Uncertainty of our Lives, and that after we have taken a few Turns more in the World, and conversed a little longer amongst Men, we must all go down to the dark and silent Grave, and carry nothing along with us but Anguish and Regrete for all our sinful Enjoyments. What Horror must then seize the guilty Soul, to find itself naked and all alone before the impartial Judge of the World, to render an exact Account, not only of its more important and considerable Transactions, but of every

Word

Word that the Tongue hath uttered, and the swiftest and most secret Thought that ever passed through the Mind. Let us represent unto ourselves the Terrors of that dreadful Day, when *the Foundations of the Earth shall be shaken, the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat* *. The present Frame of Nature shall be dissolved, and our Eyes shall behold the blessed Jesus, (who came once into the World in all Humility to visit us, to purchase Pardon for us, and beseech us to accept of it) now appearing in the Majesty of his Glory, and descending⁷ from Heaven *in flaming Fire, to take Vengeance on those that have despised his Mercy, and perished in Rebellion against him.* Then all the hidden Things of Darkness shall be brought to Light, and the Counsels of the Heart shall be made manifest †. Then those secret Impurities and subtle Frauds whereof the World did never suspect us, shall be exposed and laid open to publick View; and many Thousand Actions which we never dreamed to be sinful, or else had altogether forgotten, shall be charged home upon our Consciences, with such evident Convictions of Guilt, that we shall neither be able to deny or excuse them. Then shall all the Angels in Heaven, and all the Saints that ever lived on the Earth, approve that dreadful Sentence which shall be passed on wicked Men; and those who perhaps did love and esteem them when they lived in the World, shall look upon them with Indignation and Abhorrence, and never make one Request for their Deliverance. Let us consider the eternal Punishments of damned Souls, which are shadowed forth in Scripture by Metaphors taken from those Things that are most terrible and grievous in the World; and yet all doth not suffice to convey unto our Minds any full Apprehension of them. When we have joined together the Importance of all these Expressions, and added unto them whatever our Fancy can conceive of Misery and Torment, we must still remember that all this comes infinitely short of the Truth and Reality of the Thing.

10. 'Tis true, this is a sad and melancholy Subject; there is Anguish and Horror in the Consideration of it: But sure it must be infinitely more dreadful to endure

it;

it; and such Thoughts as these may be very useful to fright us from the Courses that would lead us thither. How fond soever we may be of sinful Pleasures, the Fear of Hell may make us abstain; our most forward Inclinations will startle when pressed with that Question, *Who can dwell with everlasting Burnings* * ?

To this very Purpose it is that the Terrors of another World are so frequently represented in holy Writ. Indeed these Fears can never suffice to make any Person truly good; yet they may restrain us from much Evil, and have often made way for more ingenious and kindly Impressions.

11. But it will not suffice to consider those Things

We must keep a constant Watch over ourselves.

once and again, nor to form some Resolutions of abandoning our Sins, unless we maintain a constant Guard, and be continually watching against them.

Sometimes the Mind is awakened to see the Consequences of a vicious Life, and straight we are resolved to reform: But alas! it presently falleth asleep, and we lose that Prospect which we had, and then Temptations take the Advantage; they solicit and importune us continually, and so frequently engage our Consent before we are aware. It is the Folly and Ruin of most People to live at Adventure, and take part in every thing that comes in their Way, seldom considering what they are about to say or do. If we would have our Resolutions take Effect, we must take heed unto our Ways, and set a Watch before the Door of our Lips, and examine the Motions that arise in our Heart, and cause them to tell us whence they come, and whither they go; whether it be Pride or Passion, or any corrupt Humour, that prompteth us to any Design, and whether God will be pleased with it. And if we have no Time for long Reasonings, let us at least turn our Eyes towards God, and place ourselves in his Presence, to ask his Leave and Approbation for what we do. Let us consider ourselves under the All-seeing Eye of that divine Majesty, as in the Midst of an infinite Globe of Light; which compasseth us about both behind and before, and pierceth to the innermost Corners of our Soul. The

Sense

Sense of the divine Presence is a ready Means, both to discover what is unlawful, and to restrain us from it. There are some Things a Person could make a Shift to palliate or defend, and yet he dares not look Almighty God in the Face, and adventure upon them. If we look unto him we shall be lightned; *if we set him always before us, he will guide us by his Eye, and instruct us in the Way wherein we ought to walk.*

12. This Care and Watchfulness over our Actions, must be seconded by frequent and serious Reflections upon them; not only that we may obtain the divine Mercy and Pardon of our Sins; but also that we may reinforce and strengthen our Resolutions, and learn to decline or resist Temptations. It is an Advice worthy of a Christian, tho' it first drop'd from a Heathen Pen, That before we betake ourselves to Rest, we renew and examine all the Passages of the Day, that we may redress what we find to have been amiss, and make the Shipwrecks of one Day be as Marks to direct our Course in another. But, withal, we must not forget to implore the divine Assistance, especially against those Sins that do most easily beset us: And tho' it be supposed that our Hearts are not yet moulded into that spiritual Frame, yet methinks such Considerations as have been proposed to deter us from Sin, may stir us up to some Seriousness, and make our Prayers against it as earnest, at least, as they are wont to be against other Calamities; and I doubt not but God, who heareth the Cry of the Ravens, will have some Regard even to such Petitions as proceed from those natural Passions which himself hath implanted in us.

13. Thus we are to make the first Essay for recovering the divine Life, by restraining the natural Inclinations, that they break not out into sinful Practices. But now I must add, that Christian Prudence will teach us to abstain from Gratifications that are not simply unlawful; and that not only that we may secure our Innocence, which would be in continual Hazard, if we should strain our Liberty to the utmost Point; but also that hereby we may teach our Appetites to obey,

We must often examine our Actions.

It is fit to restrain ourselves in many lawful Things.

as prudent Parents deal with their Children, who cross their Wills in many little indifferent Things, to make them manageable and submissive in more considerable Instances. He who would mortify the Pride and Vanity of his Spirit, should stop his Ears to the most deserved Praises, and sometimes forbear his just Vindication, from the Censures and Aspersions of others. He who would check a revengeful Humour, would do well to deny himself the Satisfaction of representing unto others the Injuries which he hath sustained; and if we would so take heed to our Ways, that we sin not with our Tongue, we must accustom ourselves to Solitude and Silence. Thus we may make our Appetites more moderate in their Cravings, by accustoming them to frequent Refusals; but it is not enough to have them under Violence and Restraint.

14. Our next Essay must be to possess our Minds with a deep Persuasion of the Vanity and Emptiness of worldly Enjoyments. We must strive to put ourselves out of Love with the World. This is an ordinary Theme, but alas! how few understand and believe what they say? These Notions float in our Brains, and come sliding off our Tongues, but we have no deep Impression of them on our Spirits. We feel not the Truth which we pretend to believe. We can tell that all the Glory and Splendour, all the Pleasures and Enjoyments of the World, are Vanity and nothing; and yet these Nothings, take up all our Thoughts, and engross all our Affections. Perhaps sometimes we resolve to be no longer deluded with them; but these Thoughts seldom outlive the next Temptation. And after we have been frustrated a thousand Times, we must continually be repeating the Experiment; The least Difference of Circumstances is enough to make us expect that Satisfaction in one Thing, which we missed in another. But had we once a real Contempt of worldly Things, this were a considerable Advancement in our Way. The Soul of Man is of a vigorous and active Nature, and hath in it a raging and unextinguishable Thirst, an immaterial kind of Fire, always catching at some Object or other, in Conjunction wherewith it thinks to be happy: And were it once rent from the World, it would search after some higher Object,

Gbje&, to fatisfie its ardent and importunate Cravings. The Love of the World and the Love of God, are like the Scales of a Ballance, as the one falleth the other doth rife. It doth therefore nearly concern us to be convinced of the Emptinefs and Vanity of Creature Enjoyments. Let us ferioufly confider what our Reason and Faith, our own Experience, and the Obfervation of others fuggelt. Amidft all our Pursuits and Defigns, let us ftop and ask ourfelves, For what End is this? At what do I aim? Can the grofs and muddy Pleafures of Senfe, or a Heap of white or yellow Earth, or the Esteem and Affection of filly Creatures like myfelf, fatisfy a rational and immortal Soul? Have I not tried thefe Things already? Will they have a higher Relifh, and yield me more Contentment To-morrow than Yefterday, or the next Year than they did the laft? There may be fome little Difference between that which I am now purfuing, and that which I enjoyed before: But fure my former Enjoyments did fhew as pleafant, and promife as fair before I attained them. Like the Rainbow, they looked very glorious at a Difance, but when I approached, I found nothing but Emptinefs and Vapour. O what a poor Thing would the Life of Man be, if it were capable of no higher Enjoyments!

15. When our Appetites and Inclinations towards worldly Things are in fome meafure fubdued, we muft proceed confcientioufly to perform thofe Duties which Religion doth require, and whereunto it would incline us if it did prevail in our Souls. If we cannot get our inward Difpofition prefently changed, let us ftudy at leaft to regulate our outward Deportment: If our Hearts be not yet inflam'd with divine Love, let us however own our Allegiance to that infinite Majesty, by attending his Service, and liftning to his Word; by fpeaking reverently of his Name, and praifing his Goodnefs, and exhorting others to ferve and obey him. If we want that Charity, and thofe Bowels of Compaffion which we ought to have towards our Neighbours, yet muft we not omit any Occafion of doing them Good. If our Hearts be haughty and proud, we muft nevertheless ftudy a modeft and humble Deportment. Thefe external

We muft do thofe outward A&tions that are commanded.

mal Performances are of little Value in themselves, yet may they help us forward to better Things. The Apostle indeed telleth us, *that bodily Exercise profiteth little*; but he seems not to affirm, that it is altogether useless. It is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is wont to pity our Weakness, and assist our feeble Endeavours. Nor need we fear the Imputation of Hypocrisy, tho' our Actions do thus somewhat out-run our Affections, seeing they do still proceed from a Sense of our Duty, and our Design is not to appear better than we are, but that we may really become so.

16. Moreover, let us be often lifting up our Hearts to God; and if we do not say that we love

We must endeavour to form internal Acts of Devotion, Charity, &c.

him above all Things, let us at least acknowledge that it is our Duty, and would be our Happiness so to do. Let us lament the Dishonour done unto him by foolish and sinful Men, and applaud

the Praises and Adorations that are given him by that blessed and glorious Company above. Let us resign and yield ourselves up unto him a thousand Times, to be governed by his Laws, and disposed of at his Pleasure: And tho' our stubborn Heart should start back, yet let us tell him we are convinced that his Will is always just and good; and therefore desire him to do with us whatsoever he pleaseth, whether we will or not.

Thus should we exercise ourselves unto Godliness: and when we are employing the Powers that we have, the Spirit of God is wont to strike in, and elevate these Acts of our Soul beyond the Pitch of Nature, and give them a divine Impression.

17. I shall mention but two other Helps; and the first is, deep and serious Consideration.

Consideration a great Instrument of Religion.

The Assent which is ordinarily given to divine Truths, is very faint and languid, flowing from a blind Inclination

to follow that Religion which is in Fashion, or a lazy Unconcern whether Things be so or not. Men are unwilling to quarrel with the Religion of their Country; but are seldom at the Pains to consider what they profess to believe; and thence it is, that they have so little Influence on their Practice. Those spiritless and paralytick

tytick Thoughts (as one doth rightly term them) are not able to move the Will, and direct the Hand. We must therefore labour for a full Persuasion of divine Truths, a Sense and Feeling of spiritual Things. Let us urge forward our Spirits, and make them approach the invisible World, and fix our Mind upon immaterial Things, till we clearly perceive that these are no Dreams; nay, that all Things are Dreams and Shadows besides them. When we look about us, and behold the Beauty and Magnificence of this goodly Frame, the Order and Harmony of the whole Creation, let our Thoughts from thence take their Flight toward that omnipotent Wisdom and Goodness which did at first produce, and doth still establish and uphold the same. When we reflect upon ourselves, let us consider that we are not a meer Picce of organiz'd Matter, a curious and well contrived Engine; that there is more in us than Flesh, and Blood, and Bones, even a divine Spark, capable to know, and love, and enjoy our Maker; and tho' it be now exceedingly clogged with its dull and lumpish Companion; yet ere long it shall be delivered, and can subsist without the Body, as well as that can do without the Cloaths, which we throw off at our Pleasure. Let us often withdraw our Thoughts from this Earth, this Scene of Misery, and Folly, and Sin, and raise them towards that more vast and glorious World; whose innocent and blessed Inhabitants solace themselves eternally in the divine Presence, and know no other Passion, but an unmixed Joy, and an unbounded Love: And then consider how the blessed Son of God came down to this lower World to live among us, and die for us, that he might bring us to a Portion of the same Felicity; and think how he hath overcome the Sharpness of Death, and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers, and is now set down on the *Right-hand of the Majesty on high* *; and yet is not the less mindful of us, but receiveth our Prayers, and presenteth them unto his Father, and is daily visiting his Church with the Influences of his Spirit, as the Sun reacheth us with his Beams.

18. Let me further suggest some particular Subjects of

Meditation. And first, if we would love God, let us consider the Excellency of his Nature, and his Love and Kindness towards us. It is little we know of the divine Perfections; and yet that little may suffice to fill our Souls with Admiration and Love. If it be the Understanding that directs the Affections, certainly the Excellencies of the divine Nature (the Traces whereof we cannot but discover in every thing we behold) should not fail to engage our Hearts. Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that Almighty Wisdom and Goodness, which fills the Universe, and displays itself in all the Parts of the Creation, which establisheth the Frame of Nature, and turneth the mighty Wheels of Providence, and keepeth the World from Disorder and Ruin, than with the faint Rays of the same Perfections which we meet with in our Fellow Creatures? Shall we doat on the scattered Pieces of a rude and imperfect Picture, and never be affected with the original Beauty? This were an unaccountable Stupidity and Blindness. Whatever we find lovely in a Friend, or in a Saint, ought not to engross, but to elevate our Affection: We should conclude with ourselves, that if there be so much Sweetness in a Drop, there must be infinitely more in the Fountain. If there be so much Splendor in a Ray, what must the Sun be in its Glory?

19. Nor can we pretend the Remoteness of the Object, as if God were at too great a Distance for our Converse or Love: *He is not far from everyone of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our Being* *. We cannot open our Eyes, but we must behold some Footsteps of his Glory; and we cannot turn them toward him, but we shall be sure to find his Intent upon us, waiting as it were to catch a Look, ready to entertain the most intimate Fellowship and Communion with us. Let us therefore endeavour to raise our Minds to the clearest Conceptions of the divine Nature. Let us consider all that his Works declare, or his Word discovers of him unto us; and let us especially contemplate that visible Representation of him which was made in our own Na-

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ture by his Son, who was *the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person* *, and who appeared in the World to discover at once what God is, and what we ought to be. Let us represent him unto our Minds as we find him described in the Gospel, and there we shall behold the Perfections of the divine Nature, tho' covered with the Vail of human Infirmities; and while we contemplate a Being, infinite in Power, in Wisdom, and Goodness, the Author and Fountain of all Perfections, let us pray that our Eyes may affect our Heart †, and while we are musing the Fire may burn §.

20. Hereunto add the Consideration of God's Favour and Good-will towards us. Now as the Word of God is full of the Expressions of his Love towards Man, so all his Works do loudly proclaim it. He gave us our Being, and by preserving us in it, doth renew the Donation every Moment. He hath placed us in a rich and well-furnished World, and liberally provided for all our Necessities. He raineth down Blessings from Heaven upon us, and causeth the Earth to bring forth our Provision. He giveth us our Food and Raiment; and while we are spending the Productions of one Year, he is preparing for us against another. He sweetneth our Lives with innumerable Comforts, and gratifieth every Faculty with suitable Objects. The Eye of his Providence is always upon us, and he watcheth for our Safety when we are fast asleep, neither minding him nor ourselves. But lest we should think these Testimonies of his Kindness less considerable, because they are the easy Issues of his omnipotent Power, and do not put him to any Trouble or Pain, he hath taken a more wonderful Method to endear himself to us. He hath testified his Affection to us, by suffering as well as by doing; and because he could not suffer in his own Nature, he assumed ours. The eternal Son of God clothed himself with the Infirmities of our Flesh, and left the Company of those innocent and blessed Spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among Men, and wrestle with the Obstinacy of that rebellious Race, to reduce them to their Allegiance and Fidelity, and to offer himself up as a Sa-

crifice and Propitiation for them. I remember one of the Poets hath an ingenious Fancy to express the Passion wherewith he found himself overcome after a long Resistance, *That the God of Love had shot all his Golden Arrows at him, but could never pierce his Heart, till at length he put himself into the Bow, and darted himself straight into his Breast.* Methinks this doth someway adumbrate God's Method of dealing with Men: He had long contended with a stubborn World, and thrown down many a Blessing upon them; and when all his other Gifts could not prevail, he at last made a Gift of himself. The Account which we have of our Saviour's Life in the Gospel doth all along present us with the Story of his Love. All the Pains that he took, and the Troubles that he endured, were the wonderful Effects, and uncontrollable Evidences of it. But, O that last, that dismal Scene! Is it possible to remember it, and question his Kindness, or deny him ours? Here, here it is we should fix our most serious and solemn Thoughts, *that Christ may dwell in our Hearts by Faith; that we being rooted and grounded in Love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the Breadth and Length, and Depth and Height; and to know the Love of Christ, which passeth Knowledge, that we may be filled with all the Fulness of God!**

21. We ought also frequently to reflect on those particular Tokens of Favour and Love, which God hath bestowed on ourselves; how long he hath born with our Follies and Sins, and waited to be gracious unto us; wrestling, as it were, with the Stubbornness of our Hearts, and essaying every Method to reclaim us. We should keep a Register in our Minds of all the eminent Blessings and Deliverances we have met with; some whereof have been so conveyed, that we might clearly perceive they were not the Issues of Chance, but the gracious Effects of the divine Favour, and the signal Returns of our Prayers. Nor ought we to imbitter the Thoughts of these Things with any harsh or unworthy Suspicion, as if they were designed on Purpose to enhance our Guilt, and heighten our eternal Damnation. No, no; God is Love, and he hath no Pleasure in the Ruin of his

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Creatures. If they abuse his Goodness, and turn his Grace into Wantonness, and thereby plunge themselves into the greater Depth of Guilt and Misery, this is the Effect of their obstinate Wickedness, and not the Design of those Benefits which he bestows.

22. If we would love all Men, let us consider the

As a Help to Charity, we must remember that all Men are nearly related to God.

Relation wherein they stand unto God, and the Impresses of his Image, which are stamped upon them. They are not only his Creatures, the Workmanship of his Hands, but such of whom he taketh special Care, and for whom he hath a very dear and tender Regard; having laid the Designs of their Happiness before the Foundations of the World; and being willing to live and converse with them to all the Ages of Eternity. The meanest and most contemptible Person whom we behold, is the Offspring of Heaven, one of the Children of the Most High; and, however unworthy he may behave himself of that Relation to God, so long as God hath not abdicated and disowned him by a final Sentence, he will have us to acknowledge him as one of his; and, as such, to embrace him with a sincere and cordial Affection. What a Concern are we wont to have for those that do any ways belong to the Person whom we love? How gladly do we lay hold on every Opportunity to gratify the Child or Servant of a Friend? And sure our Love towards God would as naturally spring forth in Charity towards Men, did we mind the Interest that he is pleased to take in them; and consider that every Soul is dearer to him than the material World; and that he did not account the Blood of his Son too great a Price for their Redemption.

23. Again, as all Men stand in a near Relation to

That they carry his Image upon them.

God, so they have still so much of his Image stamped on them, as may oblige and excite us to love them. In some this Image is more conspicuous, and we can discern the lovely Tracts of Wisdom and Goodness. And tho', in others, it be miserably sullied and defaced, yet it is not altogether erased. Some Lineaments at least do still remain: all Men are endowed with rational and immortal Souls, with Understandings and Wills capable

capable of the highest and most excellent Things. And if they be at present disordered and put out of Tune by Wickedness and Folly, this may indeed move our Compassion, but ought not to extinguish our Love. When we see a Person of a rugged Humour and perverse Disposition, full of Malice and Dissimulation, very foolish and very proud; it is hard to fall in Love with an Object that presents itself unto us, under an Idea so little grateful and lovely. But when we consider these evil Qualities as the Diseases and Distempers of a Soul, which in itself is capable of all that Wisdom and Goodness, wherewith the best of Saints have ever been adorned, and which may one Day come to be raised unto such Heights of Perfection as shall render it a fit Companion for the holy Angels, this will turn our Aversion into Pity, and make us behold him with such Resentments, as we have when we look on a beautiful Body that is mangled with Wounds, or disfigured by some loathsome Disease. And however we hate the Vices we shall not cease to love the Man.

24. There remains yet another Help; and that is, fervent Prayer. Holiness is the Gift of God; indeed the greatest Gift he doth bestow, or we are capable to receive, and he hath promised his holy Spirit to those that ask it him. In Prayer we make the nearest Approaches unto God, and lie open to the Influences of Heaven: Then it is that the Sun of Righteousness doth visit us with his directest Rays, and dissipateth our Darkness, and imprinteth his Image on our Souls. I cannot now insist on the Advantages of this Exercise, or the Dispositions wherewith it ought to be performed; and there is no need I should, there being so many Books that treat on this Subject: I shall only tell you, that as there is one sort of Prayer, wherein we make Use of the Voice, which is necessary in publick, and may sometimes have its own Advantages in private; and another wherein, tho' we utter no Sound, yet we conceive the Expressions, and form the Words, as it were, in our Mind; so there is a third and more sublime kind of Prayer, wherein the Soul takes a higher Flight, and having collect-

Prayer another Instrument of of Religion.

The Advantages of mental Prayer.

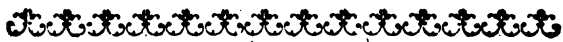
ed all its Forces, by long and serious Meditation, it darterh itself (if I may so speak) towards God, in Sighs and Groans, and Thoughts too big for Expresssion. As when, after a deep Contemplation of the divine Perfections, appearing in all his Works of Wonder, it adresses itself unto him in the profoundest Adoration of his Majesty and Glory; or when, after sad Reflections on its Vileness and Mis-carriages, it prostrates itself before him with the greatest Confusion and Sorrow, not daring to lift up its Eyes, or utter one Word in his Presence: Or, when having well considered the Beauty of Holiness, and the unspeakable Felicity of those that are truly good, it panteth after God, and sendeth up such vigorous and ardent Desires, as no Words can sufficiently express.

This mental Prayer is one of the most powerful Instruments of the divine Life; and it may be the Apostle hath a peculiar Respect unto it, when he saith, that *the Spirit helpeth our Infirmities, making Intercession for us with Groanings that cannot be uttered*. Yet I do not so recommend this sort of Prayer, as to supersede the Use of the other; for we have so many several Things to pray for, and every Petition of this Nature requireth so much Time, and so great an Intention of Spirit, that it were not easy therein to overtake them all: To say nothing, that the deep Sighs and Heavings of the Heart, which are wont to accompany it, are something oppressive to Nature, and make it hard to continue long in them.

25. I shall recommend but one more Help; and that is, the conscientious Use of that holy Sacrament, which is peculiarly appointed to nourish and increase the spiritual Life, when once it is begotten in the Soul. All the Instruments of Religion do meet together in this Ordinance; and while we address ourselves unto it, we are put to practise all the Rules which were mentioned before. Then it is that we make the severest Survey of our Actions, and lay the strictest Obligations on ourselves: Then are our Minds raised to the highest Contempt of the World, and every Grace doth exercise itself with the greatest Activity and Vigour. All the Subjects of Contemplation there present themselves unto us with the greatest Advantage; and then, if ever, doth the Soul make its
 most

The Use of the
 holy Sacrament.

most powerful Sallies towards Heaven, and assault it with a holy and acceptable Force. And certainly the Neglect, or careless Performance of this Duty, is one of the chief Causes that be-dwarfs our Religion, and makes us continue of so low a Size.



A P R A Y E R.

AND now, O most gracious God, Father and Fountain of Mercy, who hast blessed us with the Knowledge of our Happiness, and the Way that leadeth unto it, excite in our Souls such ardent Desires after the one as may put us forth to the slight Prosecution of the other. Let us neither presume on our own Strength, nor distrust thy Assistance; but while we are doing our outmost Endeavours, teach us still to depend on thee for Success. Open our Eyes, O God, and teach us out of thy Law. Bless us with an exact and tender Sense of our Duty, and a Knowledge to discern perverse Things. O that our Ways were directed to keep thy Statutes, then shall we not be ashamed when we have Respect unto all thy Commandments. Possess our Hearts with a generous and holy Disdain of all those poor Enjoyments which this World holdeth out to allure us, that they may never be able to inveigle our Affections, or betray us to any Sin. Turn away our Eyes from beholding Vanity, and quicken thou us in thy Law. Fill our Souls with such a deep Sense of those great Truths which thou hast revealed in the Gospel, as may influence and regulate our whole Conversation; so that the Life which we henceforth live in the Flesh, we may live through Faith in the Son of God. O that the infinite Perfections of thy blessed Nature, and the astonishing Expressions of thy Goodness and Love, may conquer and overpower our Hearts; that they may be constantly rising towards thee in Flames of devout Affection, and enlarging themselves in sincere and cordial Love towards all the World for thy Sake; and that we may cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in thy Fear, without which we can never hope to behold and enjoy thee. Finally, O God; grant, that the

Consideration of what thou art, and what we ourselves
are, may both humble and lay us low before thee, and also
stir up in us the strongest and most ardent Aspirations to-
wards thee. We desire to give up ourselves to the Con-
duct o thy holy Spirit: Lead us in thy Truth, and teach
us, for thou art the God of our Salvation. Guide us
with thy Counsel, and afterwards receive us unto Glory;
for the Merits and Intercession of thy blessed Son, our Sa-
viour. Amen.

F I N I S

