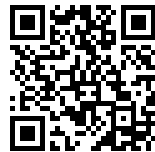

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A

DISSERTATION
ON THE
ETERNAL SONSHIP OF CHRIST;

PROVING THIS TO BE THE DOCTRINE

OF THE

Holy Scriptures;

IN REPLY TO

ADAM CLARKE, LL.D. AND SOME OF HIS ADVOCATES.

BY ABRAHAM SCOTT.

“ Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”—Jer. vi. 16.

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DISSERTATION

ON THE

ETERNAL SONSHIP OF CHRIST,

&c.

THE subject which now claims our consideration, is to ascertain in what sense the sacred Scriptures call Christ the Son of God: whether this appellation is appropriated to his human nature exclusively, or whether it is likewise used to denote his Divine nature. In the present discussion, the Divinity of Christ will be taken for granted, without entering into the Socinian controversy: our animadversions will be confined to those who believe, as well as ourselves, that Christ is God over all, and blessed for ever.

There are now some individuals of great note and celebrity, whose praise is in all the Churches, and whom we highly esteem, who believe in the Godhead of Christ, and yet deny his eternal generation; maintaining that He is called the Son of God in Scripture, with respect to his human nature only, or in reference to some circumstance connected with his human nature; that this appellation never denotes his Divine nature, that it is never used to express any relation, which subsisted between Him and the first person in the Holy Trinity, previous to the incarnation. The worthiness of those persons may make it more painful to oppose their opinions; but, at the same time, it makes it more needful, because the credit they have deservedly obtained will otherwise have a tendency to give such opinions a more extensive circulation, and a firmer establishment.

2. The opinion that Christ was the Son of God before He came into the world, and from all eternity, is what has almost universally prevailed among all who have believed in his proper divinity. All the old divines of our own nation, the venerable reformers abroad, and the primitive fathers of the Christian Church, call Christ, God's Eternal Son, without any exception that is within the limits of our recollection: we speak of those who have been esteemed sound in the faith.

All the celebrated expositors of what is called the apostle's creed,

“ Speak of the eternal generation of the Son of God,” and they state this as the sentiment of all the Christian fathers, including those who lived nearest to the apostles.

That Christ was the Son of God, in his Divine nature, is maintained by Usher, Hammond, Hall, Hopkins, Bull, Taylor, Pearson, Burnet, Barrow, Tillotson, and Secker. This opinion entered into the earliest creeds, which were composed either for the explanation or vindication of the Christian faith; it was incorporated in the creeds of the Asian, Grecian, and Latin Churches. It found a place in the Lutheran creed, and in that of all the reformed Churches abroad, who were not tainted with the Arian heresy. This sentiment is maintained by our own established Church, by Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, Moravians, and Methodists, and by every Christian community who believe in the Divinity of Christ. This opinion is vindicated by Owen, Charnock, Manton, Baxter, Henry, Watts, Doddridge, Wesley, and Fletcher.

The antiquity of this opinion, and its almost universal prevalence among those who have been termed orthodox, will not be disputed. And is it not incredible, that all the primitive fathers of the Christian Church, and all succeeding generations of orthodox Christians should have been mistaken, and totally in the dark, on so important an article of the Christian faith?

3. Those who deny the Eternal Sonship of Christ, and maintain that He was not the Son of God before He came into the world, are not the inventors of this notion, nor do we know who have had the honour of making the discovery. It was made the subject of public discussion about the commencement of the eighteenth century; it is to be found in Ridgeley's system of Divinity; it was warmly vindicated by Romaine, and is generally adopted by those who are called Hutchinsonians. But though the present advocates of the opinion in question are not the inventors of it, they are justly chargeable with vindicating a novel doctrine. And whether any new doctrine since the canon of Scripture was completed can be true, remains to be proved.

4. Socinus introduced a new doctrine into the religious world, when he denied the pre-existence of Christ; and had the temerity to contradict all former interpretations of Scripture on this subject: and this circumstance alone made his opinion incredible, as Tillotson proves in the following words:—“ This assertion,” that the word described by St. John in the beginning of his Gospel, “ is directly against the Socinians, who affirm our blessed Saviour to be a mere man, and deny that He had any existence before He was born of the Virgin Mary: which position of theirs does perfectly contradict all the former conclusions which have been so evidently drawn from the description here given of the word: and not only so, but hath forced them to interpret this whole passage, in the beginning of St. John's Gospel, in a very different sense from that which was constantly received, not only by the ancient fathers, but by the general consent of all Christians 1500 years together; for to establish their opinion of our Saviour having no existence before his birth, they have found it necessary to expound this whole passage quite to another sense, and such as, by their own confession, was never mentioned by any Christian writer before Socinus. And surely it ought to be very considerable,

in this case, that the most ancient Christian writers, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and even Origen himself, who is called the father of interpreters, are most express and positive in this matter. For Ignatius was the scholar of Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John; and Justin Martyr lived in the next age to that of the apostles. So that if this interpretation of Socinus be true, here are two things very wonderful, and almost incredible: First, that those who lived so very near St. John's time, and were most likely to know his meaning, should so widely mistake it: and then, that the whole Christian world should, for so many ages together, be deceived in the ground and foundation of so important an article of faith, if it were true; or, if it were not, should be led into so gross and dangerous an error as this must needs be, if Christ had no real existence before he was born into the world: and which would be necessarily consequent upon this, that no man did understand this passage of St. John aright before Socinus."

What Tillotson urges, in the above quotation, against the novelty of Socinian interpretations, applies with equal force against those who deny the Eternal Sonship of Christ. It is not enough to say that the opinion, which they now advocate, was never held in the purest ages of Christianity; but the very reverse was strongly maintained by the whole orthodox Church for 1700 years together. In the articles of faith, drawn up by the primitive Church, we are taught that Christ was not the Son of God merely by title and adoption, but the only truly begotten Son of God: not created, but generated of the Father before all worlds, and therefore styled God of God, Light of Light.* This was the doctrine taught from the beginning of the Christian dispensation, and what has continued to be the faith of every Christian community who have believed in the Divinity of Christ. And it would be a most marvellous thing indeed, if they should all have been so grossly mistaken for so long a time. But that they have been so far mistaken is what Dr. A. Clarke attempts to prove. The following is taken from his comment on Luke i. 31, &c.

5. "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.* This conception shall take place suddenly, and the Holy Ghost himself shall be the grand operator. The power—the miracle-working power—of the *Most High shall overshadow thee*, to accomplish this purpose, and to protect thee from danger. As there is a plain allusion to the spirit of God brooding over the face of the waters to render them prolific, Gen. i. 2, I am the more firmly established in the opinion advanced on Mat. i. 20, that the rudiments of the human nature of Christ was a real creation in the womb of the Virgin, by the energy of the spirit of God."

"Therefore also that holy thing (or person) shall be called the Son of God." "We may here plainly perceive, that the angel does not give the appellation of Son of God to the divine nature of Christ; but to that holy person or thing which was to be born of the

* See Dr. Nares on the Three Creeds.

“ Virgin, by the energy of the Holy Ghost. The divine nature could not be born of the Virgin; the human nature was born of her. The divine nature had no beginning; it was God manifest in the flesh, 1 Tim. iii. 16. It was that Word which being in the beginning (from eternity) with God, John i. 2., was afterwards *made flesh*, (became manifest in human nature) and tabernacled among us, John i. 14. Of this divine nature the angel does not particularly speak here, but of the *tabernacle* or *shrine* which God was now preparing for it, viz., the holy thing that was to be born of the Virgin. Two natures must ever be distinguished in Christ: the human nature, in reference to which He is the Son of God and inferior to Him, Mark xiii. 32. John v. 19, and xiv. 28.; and the divine nature which was from eternity, and equal to God, John i. 1, and x. 30. Rom. ix. 5. Col. i. 16—18. It is true, that to Jesus the Christ, as He appeared among men, every characteristic of the divine nature is sometimes attributed, without appearing to make any distinction between the divine and human natures; but is there any part of the Scriptures in which it is *plainly said* that the divine nature of Jesus Christ was the Son of God? Here, I trust, I may be permitted to say, with all due respect to those who differ from me, that the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ is, in my opinion, antiscritptural, and highly dangerous; this doctrine I reject for the following reasons:

“ I. I have not been able to find any express declarations in the Scriptures concerning it.

“ II. If Christ be the Son of God as to his *divine* nature, then He cannot be eternal: for son implies a father; and father implies, in reference to son, precedency in time, if not in nature too. Father and son imply the idea of *generation*; and generation implies a *time* in which it was effected, and time also antecedent to such generation.

“ III. If Christ be the Son of God, as to his divine nature, then the Father is of necessity *prior*, consequently *superior* to Him.

“ IV. Again, if this divine nature were *begotten* of the father, then it must be in *time*; i. e., there was a period in which He did not exist, and a period when He *began* to exist. This destroys the eternity of our Blessed Lord, and robs Him at once of his Godhead.

“ V. To say that He was begotten from all eternity, is, in my opinion, absurd, and the phrase *Eternal Son*, is a positive self-contradiction. Eternity is that which had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. Son supposes time, generation, and father; and time also antecedent to such generation. Therefore the conjunction of the two terms, *son* and *eternity*, is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas.” — “The enemies of Christ’s Divinity have in all ages availed themselves of this incautious method of treating this subject, and on this ground, have ever had the advantage of the defenders of the Godhead of Christ. This doctrine of the *Eternal Sonship* destroys the Deity of Christ; now if his Deity be taken away, the whole Gospel scheme of Redemption is ruined. On this ground, the Atonement of Christ cannot have been of infinite merit, and consequently could not purchase pardon for the offences of mankind, nor give any right to, or possession of, an eternal glory.

“ The very use of this phrase is both absurd and dangerous ; therefore
 “ let all those who value Jesus and their salvation abide by the Scrip-
 “ tures.”

6. The Doctor here declares his sentiments without reserve, but with what truth and reason he supports his opinion will have to be examined. Those who take his advice in abiding by the Scriptures, will not imitate his example : for he does not content himself with what the Scriptures have said on the subject. The reasons he assigns for rejecting the doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship are classed under five heads or divisions : but for what purpose such an arrangement is made does not appear ; for his second, third, and fourth, do not differ from each other, and are for substance included in the fifth ; hence the whole of his argument is contained in the first and the last. The former of which states that the doctrine he opposes is not founded on the Scriptures, and the latter declares it to be contrary to reason : both of which will require a reply after a few general observations.

We are here told, that “ the enemies of Christ's Divinity have in all ages availed themselves of this incautious method of treating the subject, and on this ground, have ever had the advantage of the defenders of the Godhead of Christ.” This shews, by the Doctor's own admission, that the Eternal Sonship has been taught in all ages, by all those who have defended the Godhead of Christ. But the most prominent feature in the statement is the extreme severity of the charge which he brings against the doctrine of Christ's Divine Sonship ; not content with pronouncing it a positive self-contradiction, he asserts that it destroys the Deity of Christ, and ruins the whole scheme of Gospel redemption. If this charge can be substantiated it falls of course with all its overwhelming weight on those who have taught and defended it ; including the most eminent Christian divines of all ages and nations. All who have attempted to prove the Divinity of Christ have destroyed his Godhead. They have, it seems inflicted upon it a death that never dies : hence every succeeding generation have had to repeat the same work of destruction. We might have expected that the utter ruin and destruction of the Godhead of Christ would have been as much as its enemies could have desired, but this has not been the case : for not being content with the perdition which the friends of this doctrine have inflicted upon it in all ages, its enemies have likewise assailed it, and in every encounter have had the advantage. The contest has been to determine whether Christ was possessed of proper Divinity, and the friends of this doctrine have always been vanquished by their adversaries.—Such for substance is the Doctor's statement ; and the tremendous charge he brings against the defenders of the Godhead of Christ. But for the credit of Christianity, it is to be hoped, that this charge does not contain one shadow of truth, nor any particle of credibility.

Is it possible to believe, that all the Christian Fathers, including those who received their instruction from the apostles, have in all their defences of Christ's Divinity, destroyed his Godhead and ruined the scheme of Redemption ; and that every succeeding generation of orthodox professors, have dealt the same deadly blows to the heart of Christianity ? If the doctrine of Christ's Divinity has always been abhorred by its ene-

mies, and murdered by its friends, it should now be abandoned by common consent, for its friends can have nothing to hope from it, and its enemies nothing to fear.

The Deity of Christ and the scheme of Redemption contain every thing vital to Christianity; and if these doctrines have been destroyed in all ages, no part of the Christian system, worth preserving, can have escaped the slaughter. And is it not proper to ask what has become of all those who have made such havoc in the Church, and of those who have placed their dependance on a ruined system? We may now be warned to leave the old paths if we value our "*salvation*," but this cannot profit our predecessors.

The charge under consideration is more dreadful than that which belongs to the apostacy of the Romish Church: for that apostacy did not commence in the earliest ages of Christianity, nor was it ever at any period universal: there were always a considerable number who bore witness to the truth, and with whom it found a refuge. And the fault of that Church did not consist so much in destroying the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, as in making erroneous and superstitious additions to them. Therefore the corruptions of that community have not amounted to such a total destruction of Christian doctrines, as that which is now charged upon those who have vindicated the Godhead of Christ, for they are said to have ruined the Gospel scheme of Redemption, in all ages.

It has already been noticed, that Socinus gave a new exposition of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel; and if the sense he put upon the apostle's words could have been supported, it would have convicted all former expositors of the grossest errors, on the most important points of the Christian religion. As to the novelty of his opinion, says Tillotson, "Socinus himself makes no difficulty to own it." Speaking of the first verses of St. John's Gospel he says, "the true sense of which words seems to have been hid from all the expositors that ever were extant.— And Schlictingius after him, with more confidence, but much less decency, tells us, that concerning the meaning of those expressions, *in the beginning*, and of those which follow concerning the word, the ancient interpreters went so far from the Apostle's meaning as if they had rav'd and been out of their wits: which is so extravagantly said, and with so much contempt of those great and venerable names, who were the chief propagators of Christianity in the world, and to whom all ages do so justly pay a reverence, that nothing could be said in excuse of him, but only that it is not usual with him to fall into such rash and rude expressions." But if the Eternal Sonship of Christ be so absurd and dangerous a doctrine, as it is now stated to be, must not all former expositors of the Christian faith have raved and been out of their wits?

7. It has been seen what a severe and awful charge is brought against all orthodox Christians of every age and nation, and it now remains to consider how this charge is supported. It is stated, that the Eternal Sonship is a doctrine not found in Scripture, and contrary to reason: the latter argument may be first examined.

The Doctor's words on this subject are — "To say that He (Christ) *was begotten* from all eternity, is, in my opinion, absurd; and the *phrase* Eternal Son, is a positive self-contradiction." That is, the

doctrine that Christ in his divine nature is the Son of God, is contrary to reason. This argument is inconclusive and inadmissible, because it brings the subject before an incompetent tribunal, and whose jurisdiction in deciding on divine mysteries is not to be acknowledged. It is not the province of reason to decide on those points of religion which are incomprehensible. If we receive no article of faith which we cannot comprehend, we must commence open hostility with divine revelation in general: but if we admit that great is the mystery of godliness, then it follows, that there are doctrines to be believed of which human reason is not a competent judge. Reason has its own sphere of operations in the investigation of divine truth, but when it exceeds its bounds, it becomes a blind leader of the blind till both fall into the pit. Reason may discover that there is a God: but the manner of his existence is unknown. Whether it be essential to the Divine Being to have a son in his own image, is what unassisted human reason can with no propriety either affirm or deny.

The argument before us is, that the Son cannot be of equal duration with the Father. This is what all the opposers of Christ's Divinity have said since the beginning; and we admit it would be true if God was such a one as ourselves; but a Being that exists without a cause, must exist in a manner which to us is incomprehensible. It may therefore be essential to the Divine Being to have a son in his own nature from eternity. All reasoning from analogy on such a subject is futile and inconclusive, because we cannot discern where the dissimilarity between things human and divine commences, nor how far it extends.

How the Son of God can be of equal duration with the Father we shall not attempt to explain; but we may shew that the argument against the possibility of it, even in reference to things with which we are acquainted, does not prove the point for which it is produced. The sun produces light of equal duration with itself; if the substance of the sun had been eternal, light would have been so likewise. Two lines, having such an inclination as to meet in the same point, form an angle: but the angle so formed is as old as the lines by which it was produced.— We again affirm, that we are not attempting to explain the Sonship of Christ, for who can declare his generation? but these instances shew the weakness of the argument by which the doctrine is assailed.* But if it

* "But if the Son and Holy Ghost derive their nature from the Father, will it not follow that they must be posterior to Him in time, since every effect is posterior to its cause? No; this consequence seems to follow only by reasoning too closely from one nature to another; when there is between the two but a very distant analogy. It is true, indeed, that among men, every father must be prior in time as well as in the order of nature to his son; but were it essential to a man to be a father, so as that he could not exist otherwise than in that relation, it is obvious that his son would be coeval with himself, though still as proceeding from him he would be posterior in the order of nature. This is the case with all necessary causes and effects. The visible sun is the immediate and necessary cause of light and heat, either as emitting the rays from his own substance, or as exciting the agency of a fluid diffused for that purpose through the whole system. Light and heat, therefore, must be as old as the sun; and had he existed from all eternity, they would have existed from eternity with him, though still, as his effects,

was otherwise, if the argument, that whatever is produced must be posterior in time to that of which it is the production, was universally true as applied to earthly things, it does not follow that it is true when applied to things divine; for the nature of divine things, in many respects, are to us unsearchable and past finding out.

8. The phrase *Eternal Son* is declared to be a positive self-contradiction. But does not this involve the Scriptures in the same condemnation? for in Scripture we find the phrase, *Everlasting Father*. If either of these phrases contain a self-contradiction it must be the case with them both; and so far as we have the Scriptures for our guide we need not be afraid to defend our phraseology.

The phrase, *Eternal Son*, is said to be a contradiction, in order to induce us to relinquish the doctrine connected with it. But before we do this, it would be well to enquire what doctrines belonging to man's redemption can be retained by the same rule of interpretation. Those who reject the *Eternal Sonship*, for the reason assigned, would not wish to go so far as their own mode of argument would lead them. For instance, a Being self-existent and in all respects independent, is sent into the world by the authority and determinate counsel of another Being: the Person so sent makes satisfaction to the justice of another Person who was in all respects his equal: and He either made satisfaction to his own justice or it must remain unsatisfied. We are told that the Person so sent could only suffer in his human nature, which was finite, and yet He made infinite satisfaction. The sufferings of an innocent Person made satisfaction to Divine Justice for the guilty. If every guilty person had suffered all he was capable of, for myriads of ages, such sufferings could have made no satisfaction to Divine Justice, but yet the sufferings endured in human nature for a short period by one innocent person made full satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Every one of these propositions are believed and defended by Dr. Clarke; but were we to reason on them from analogy, as he does respecting the *Sonship of Christ*, we might pronounce every one of them a positive self-contradiction; and as such they are rejected by those who call themselves Unitarians; and on the same account they reject many others which we believe to be of the last importance. And, therefore, before we give up the *Eternal Sonship*, because it is said to be contrary to reason, we should see, whether, by the same mode of argument, we should have any doctrines left which would be worth contending for.

9. When those who oppose the *Eternal Sonship* declare it is contrary to reason, we reply, that we do not acknowledge the authority of the court before which the subject is brought: but if we did acknowledge it, this would afford them no advantage. If the cause came to be fairly tried it would be decided against them at the bar of reason: because, by renouncing this article their own creed becomes more irrational, as we shall proceed to shew.

they would have been behind him in the order of nature." "The Nicene fathers illustrate the eternal generation of the second person of the blessed Trinity by this procession of light from the corporeal sun, calling him God of God, Light of Light."

The Scriptures ascribe Divine attributes, and whatever is essential and peculiar to the Deity, to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. The Scriptures likewise declare that there is but one God; and that the Son is the only begotten of the Father, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and is sent by the Son, and He is sometimes called the Spirit of the Father, and sometimes the Spirit of the Son. From hence we conclude that the Father is the Fountain of Deity, from whom the Son and Holy Spirit are in some ineffable manner derived: so as to partake of his essence without its being divided. On this ground we say there are three Persons and one God; which is more agreeable to reason than the supposition of three Beings originally distinct without any communication from one to the other, where there was no kind of derivation, for this would be to make them three Gods.

“Three persons consubstantial, co-eternal, co-ordinate, without derivation, subordination, or dependence of any sort as to nature or essence, is palpable polytheism; more palpable indeed than that of the Grecian philosophers, who, though they worshipped gods many and lords many, yet all held one God supreme over the rest.” This great error, is what those who reject the Eternal Sonship cannot avoid, if they remain trinitarians. And hence by rejecting the Divine Sonship of Christ they make their creed more opposite to reason. “Let all who value Jesus and their salvation” avoid this fatal rock “and abide by the Scriptures.”

We are commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And we ask why the first is called the Father, and the second the Son? and the answer given by those who reject the Eternal Sonship is, that they have these appellations in reference to the miraculous conception which was effected by the Holy Ghost. We then ask again, if Christ be the Son of God only with respect to his incarnation, which was effected by the Holy Ghost, how is it that He is not called the Son of the Holy Ghost? for on the principle laid down, the first person of the Trinity is no more the Father of Christ than Christ is the father of himself. To this question no answer is returned, nor can they return any, without involving a positive self-contradiction. And thus it appears, that by rejecting the Divine Sonship of Christ, they make their creed irrational, out of compliment to reason. Reason decides for the Eternal Sonship of Christ, because it gives the most consistency to the doctrine of the Trinity, and the scheme of Redemption.

10. Dr. Clarke maintains, that the conjunction of the two terms, *Son* and *Eternity*, is absolutely impossible. That is, if Christ be the Son of God in his divine nature, He cannot be eternal in his duration. This is what he exerts all his power to prove; and if he does not prove this point, he proves nothing to the purpose for which the subject was introduced. And if he proves that Christ, as the Son of God, cannot be eternal, he proves more than he would wish to do; for he proves at the same time, that Christ, as the Word of God, cannot be eternal. If his arguments be allowed in the former case, they must inevitably be so in the latter. If the term *Son*, when applied to Christ, cannot be a character of divinity, neither can the term *Word* in Scripture denote our Saviour's divine nature; as will appear by adopting the same mode of argument in the latter case, which he has pursued in the former.

If Christ be the Word of God as to his *divine* nature, then He cannot be eternal: for word implies a *speaker*; and speaker implies, in reference to word, precedency in time, if not in nature too. Speaker and word imply the idea of utterance; and utterance implies a *time* in which it was effected, and *time* also antecedent to such utterance. If Christ be the Word of God as to his divine nature, then the speaker is of necessity prior, consequently *superior* to him. Again, if the divine nature of Christ were a word spoken by the Almighty, then it must be in *time*; that is, there was a period when the *word* did not exist, and a period when it began to exist. This destroys the eternity of our blessed Lord, and robs Him at once of his Godhead. To say that the word was uttered from all eternity, is, in my opinion, absurd; and the phrase *Eternal Word*, is a positive self-contradiction. Eternity is that which had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. Word supposes time, utterance, and speaker; and time also antecedent to such utterance. Therefore the conjunction of these two terms *word* and eternity, is absolutely impossible; as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas. The enemies of Christ's Divinity might in all ages have availed themselves of this incautious method of treating the subject, and on this ground would ever have had the advantage of the defenders of the Godhead of Christ. This doctrine of the *eternal word* destroys the deity of Christ; now, if the Deity of Christ be taken away, the whole Gospel scheme of Redemption is ruined. The very use of the phrase *eternal word* is both absurd and dangerous; therefore, let all those who value Jesus and their salvation, abide by the Scriptures.

From what has now been stated, it will be seen, that every one of the Doctor's arguments against the eternity of the Son, applies with equal force against the eternity of the word; if they overturn either doctrine, they inevitably overturn both: and arguments which prove too much are fallacious. These arguments do not prove too much for Socinians, but they prove too much for Dr. Clarke; for he strongly contends for the eternity of the word. He says, "The divine nature (of Christ) had no beginning; it was that word which, being in the beginning (from eternity) with God, John, i. 2, was afterwards *made flesh*." This, to say the least of it, is palpable inconsistency; and what makes it more glaring and conspicuous, he not only declares the word to be eternal in the very place where he is maintaining that the term Son, as applied to Christ, cannot be a designation of divinity, but he likewise uses the eternity of the word as an argument against the Eternal Sonship; which is not only maintaining both sides of a contradiction, but making one the reason of the other. To preserve any degree of consistency, he must either renounce the eternity of the word, or admit the Eternal Sonship.

11. When it is requisite to demolish a building, it may not be needful to break every fragment: but it may not be improper to prosecute the subject a little more in detail. The Doctor tells us, that the divine nature of Christ could not be born of the Virgin. But how is this proved, and for what purpose is it advanced? It is admitted, that the divine nature was so united with the human, as to constitute one person, and if this union was the work of the Holy Spirit in the miraculous conception, then one of the natures could not be born without the other. If

it could be proved, that the divine nature of Christ could not be born of the Virgin, it surely would not prove that He was not begotten of the Father before all worlds. And his being the son of Mary in his human nature, does not prove that He was not the Son of God in his divine nature.

The Doctor says, "If the *divine nature* were begotten of the Father, then it must be in time. This destroys the eternity of our blessed "Lord." In this way he attempts to prove, that the divine nature of Christ could not be begotten of the Father. This is exactly what Mahomet asserts in the Koran; and what he appears to have learned from some who had called themselves Christians, but who were such enemies to the doctrine of the Trinity, that they were prepared to unite with that impostor, and lend him their aid to oppose the orthodox faith. But the objection, that the divine nature could not be begotten, is much older than Mahomet, and the answer which the ancient Christians returned to it was, If you will tell us how the Father was unbegotten, we will tell you how the Son was begotten. This was a proper reply, for the former position which the objectors admitted, was altogether as incomprehensible as the latter which they objected.

The Doctor says, "If Christ be the Son of God, as to his divine nature, then the Father is of necessity prior, consequently superior to "Him." When he asserts, that superiority is the consequence of priority, he is not sufficiently intelligible. If he confines this superiority to precedency in time, then he only asserts, that if the Father be prior, then he is consequently prior, which is an attempt to make something out of nothing. But if he means to assert any other kind of superiority, then we deny the consequence. For one thing may be before another, without being in any other respect superior.* A son may not be inferior to his father in any kind of talents, whether natural or acquired, otherwise every generation would be inferior to that which preceded it. With respect to the necessity of the father being prior to the son, it is an argument, when applied to the divine existence, which has already been overthrown.

12. Before we leave the argument drawn from reason against the doc-

* A superiority in the order of nature is to be attributed to the Father: and many venerable divines have been of opinion that Christ spake of his divine nature, when He said, "my Father is greater than I." On this passage, Burket says, "The Father may be said to be greater than Christ in regard to his pater-
 nity, as being the fountain of the Deity: the Father is of himself, but the Son is begotten of the Father; but being of the same substance with the Father, he is consequently God, as the Father is God; for the inequality arises not from the essence, but from the order and manner of subsistence. Thus the Father was greater than he — greater as to his original, the son being begotten by him: and greater is he that gives, than he that receives; but, as to his essence, they are both one God, and so equal."

Pearson says, "What the Father is, he is from none; what the Son is, he is from Him. Upon this pre-eminence may be grounded the congruity of the Divine mission. We often read that Christ was sent; but we never read that the Father was sent, there being an authority in that name which seems inconsistent with this Mission."

trine under consideration, it will be needful to notice some other writers on the same side of the question, and to point out the pernicious tendency of their writings. Socinians are capable of doing more injury to Christianity than avowed infidels; and in like manner, those who oppose the Eternal Sonship of Christ, may militate more effectually against the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, than its open adversaries; because they carry the ensign of friendship, and under such colours, are not so likely to excite alarm; and they play off their destructive artillery within the city, and under cover of the fortress; and inadvertently open the gates to the enemy. We say nothing against the purity of their motives; we only speak of consequences. The following is a specimen of their manner of handling the subject:—

“ The doctrine of the eternal communication of the divine nature appears to be involved in insurmountable difficulties; for the Son and Spirit must either have existed, or not existed, prior to the act of communicating the divine nature to them. Now, if the Son and Spirit existed prior to their reception of the divine nature, they must have so existed as inferior beings; but if they did not exist previous to it, then they could not be eternal in their duration; and consequently, in either case, they could not, either one or both of them, be the Eternal God.”

The reader might suspect, by the preceding paragraph, that we were drawing off the very dregs of the Socinian school. The Socinians reason in the same manner, only they do it more consistently, when they employ this mode of argument to overthrow the whole Trinitarian system. But the writers whom we have quoted, profess at the same time to believe the doctrine of the Trinity, of three persons in the Godhead, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; but do they ever expect to place this doctrine within the limits of any finite capacity, or to reconcile it to the dictates of human reason? The denial of the Eternal Sonship necessarily leads them to disclaim all communication of essence from the Father to the Son and the Spirit; consequently in their Trinity they have three persons who, in substance, nature, or essence, are originally distinct and independent, each existing of himself only, and each possessed of omnipotence; but a being possessed of omnipotence has ability to preserve himself, and to annihilate every other being in the universe, and reason demonstrates that there can be only one Being of this description in existence. What will our opponents make of the other two, or how will they dispose of them. They found the doctrine of the Trinity a venerable mystery, and they leave it a palpable absurdity. Hence the communication of the divine essence from the Father to the Son, is not only supported by Scripture, but likewise by reason, as far as the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned, because three persons cannot be one God on any other supposition, and where we have only a choice of difficulties, reason dictates that we should choose the least.

The preceding quotation, from the opposers of the Eternal Sonship, shows that when they attempt to reason on the subject, they sometimes fall into egregious mistakes. They say, “ the doctrine of the eternal communication of the divine nature appears to be involved in insurmountable difficulties,” for “ if the son and spirit existed prior to their reception of the divine nature, they must have existed as in-

ferior beings." But we ask how can persons be supposed to exist, previous to the substance of which they consist? How can they be supposed to exist prior to an *eternal* communication? No rational supposition can admit of time previous to eternity. If a supposition could be made, of their existing prior to eternity, it would not follow that they existed as inferior beings: for if a being could be supposed to exist prior to eternity, he would be superior to every other, whose existence was *only* eternal. They proceed to say, "If they did not exist previous to it," (the eternal communication,) "they could not be eternal in their duration." This is such a manifest contradiction, in their own words, as we could not have expected to have met with any where. Whatever exists by an eternal communication, must of necessity be eternal in duration. What they affirm is, that if a thing be not older than eternity itself, it cannot be eternal. The doctrine of the eternal communication of the divine nature most evidently involves them in insurmountable difficulties: it places such a gulf between their own speculations and right reason, that there can never be any communication from the one to the other.

Our opponents (as for convenience we call them,) sometimes speak with great propriety, and to give them the credit of it, we insert the following specimen:—"The precise manner in which the three persons of the Holy Trinity have existed from eternity,—the omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, &c. of the Divine Being, are all subjects which lie far beyond the reach of the human intellect: and for man to write or speak on these subjects dogmatically—to assert that it must be so—it cannot be otherwise, &c., is to speak unadvisedly, or presumptuously, or worse. When the sacred Scriptures leave us on these deeply mysterious subjects, we lose our only safe guide, and it becomes us suddenly to pause, and humbly to adore. Presuming further on these subjects than the Scriptures guide us, we soon become bewildered; and, though a man thus bewildered, may make a wonderful display of his metaphysical skill and powers of ratiocination, still he is bewildered; and may be properly addressed in the language of Zophar the Naamathite, Job. xi. 7. 8, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? 'Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as 'heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou 'know?'"

How forcible are right words? All the sentiments contained in the preceding extract have our most cordial approbation; and we say, as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy. But if our opponents had been guided by the rule which they prescribe to others, they would not have agitated the present question, they would not have advocated a novel opinion founded on metaphysical speculations. They most notoriously violate their own rule, when they assert that Christ in his divine nature cannot be the only begotten of the Father; that if Christ be the Son of God as to his divine nature, then the Father is of necessity prior, consequently *superior* to Him. Is not this, to speak unadvisedly, or presumptuously, or worse, on subjects which lie far beyond the reach of the human intellect. If there be any impropriety in the exercise of metaphysical skill on theological subjects, the

blame rests with those who first introduced it into the present controversy. When metaphysical objections are made to established doctrines, they may be properly met by replies of the same description. And though metaphysical skill cannot explain the mysteries of the Gospel, it may overturn the objections by which those mysteries have been assailed.

18. The rule of interpretation laid down in the preceding extract breathes the spirit of Christian modesty and humility, which does not affect to be wise above what is written; but how far our opponents deviate from it may be seen by what follows, where they say, "Can that which is eternal be begotten, produced, or receive life, as the gift of another? Can that which is independent depend like an effect upon its cause, like light upon the sun, or the flowing of a stream from the fountain? Can the Supreme God learn obedience by suffering, or become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? Can that which is subject to death be eternal? St. Paul declares that the Son of God was made of a woman; therefore, the Son of God thus made, could not, as a Son, possibly be eternal. Mr. Wesley declares our redemption is by the death of the only begotten Son of God. By confining the term Son to the divine nature, the advocates of the Eternal Sonship make Mr. Wesley declare, that he has killed the Supreme God himself."

This is in direct opposition to the rule of discussion which they prescribe to others. In this place, when they meet with a difficulty, they do not suddenly pause and humbly adore, but labour as much to display metaphysical skill and the powers of ratiocination, as if they could by searching find out God to perfection. And they so far transgress the bounds of decorum, as to speak in a strain that is next to impious, when they use such revolting language as killing the Eternal God himself.

It is by a sacrifice of all modesty and veracity, that they charge the defenders of the Eternal Sonship with making Mr. Wesley say, that he has killed the Supreme: for they cannot make it appear that any construction is put on Mr. Wesley's words, which he did not put on them himself. They did not like to appear as avowed adversaries to Mr. Wesley; and, therefore, mask their decided opposition to his doctrine, under a pretence that others have put a wrong construction upon his words, which is a very visible, and a contemptible subterfuge.

Mr. Wesley most distinctly states, that Christ was the Son of God from Eternity, and likewise that our redemption is by the death of the only begotten Son of God; but in this there is no contradiction.

The advocates of the Eternal Sonship are charged with making Mr. Wesley say he has killed the Supreme, "by confining the term Son to the divine nature;" but this charge is manifestly false, for they do not confine the term Son to the divine nature: they maintain that the term Son applies both to the human and divine nature of Christ, which most assuredly is not confining it to one of them,—the fabric, therefore, which is raised on this false foundation, falls to the ground.

In reference to these words of St. Paul, "God sent forth his Son made of a woman," our opponents say "therefore the Son of God thus made, could not, as a Son, possibly be eternal." We ask, who-

ever supposed that He could? As made of a woman He was human but this circumstance, to those who admit his divinity, cannot afford the shadow of a reason against his being the Son of God in his divine nature. If the word, which was from eternity with God, was made flesh, then as a Son begotten before all worlds, He might be sent forth in the fulness of time made of a woman.

In reference to the declaration that our redemption is by the death of the only begotten Son of God, they ask, "Can that which is subject to death be eternal?" If there be any difficulty in this case, it equally belongs to their side of the question, for they admit that He was eternal, and that He died on the cross. On this ground they raise difficulties, where none in reality exist. The human and divine natures in Christ constituted one person, not two; but what is affirmed of Him in Scripture sometimes belonged exclusively to one of these natures, and sometimes to the other. To the Son, he saith, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth:" but of this Son, it is likewise said, that He grew in wisdom and in stature. The former of these declarations could only belong to his divine nature, and the latter to his human. The Socinian cavil on this point, is easily refuted, for there is no impropriety in saying that Christ was God's eternal Son; and likewise that He was subject to death: for this only implies that He was eternal in one nature, and mortal in another. We are told that the rich man died and was buried, and that Lazarus died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; but it was the body only of the former that was buried, and the soul of the latter that was taken to heaven. It is consequently proper to speak of Christ being subject to death, though in his divine nature, He was eternally the Son of God. Hence, all that has been said about making Mr. Wesley kill the Supreme, vanishes away, as to any support it can give to their side of the question. But our opponents on this point are weaving Socinian snares for themselves; and though they are mere cobwebs, yet, as they produce them for arguments, this will give them validity when they come to be employed against themselves; they will then find that they have furnished their adversaries with destructive weapons, and afforded them such shelter, that they cannot be attacked, till their own works are first demolished.

They ask, "Can the Supreme God become obedient unto death?" It has been shewn how this can be done, as it only implies that he was divine in one nature, and mortal in the other. The question cannot affect the Eternal Sonship, unless it is intended to overthrow his divinity. If Christ, notwithstanding his divine nature, could become obedient unto death, then, as the Eternal Son, He might learn or *teach* obedience by what He suffered.

14. Our opponents proceed as follows:—"The same hostility exists against the disciples of Christ. St. Peter, Acts, iii. 13, says, the God of our fathers hath glorified his son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and killed, the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead. I ask, Does the term Son designate the divinity of Christ, as the advocates for the Eternal Sonship declare? Was it the Eternal God that was delivered up, killed, and raised from the dead? or was it the man Christ Jesus, who is here called the Son of God? It could be

“ no other. This was the doctrine which the Apostles taught, and to support which, they counted not their lives dear ; and yet, notwithstanding this testimony, and the sufferings by which it was attested, we are told, that the term Son, as applied to Jesus, is a title of absolute divinity ; in other words, that God himself was delivered up, killed, and raised “ from the dead.” All this, for substance, has been answered in the preceding paragraphs ; but it requires a few additional remarks. In reference to Acts, iii. 13, our opponents affirm, that the term Son does not apply to the divine nature, but to the man Christ Jesus. Allowing this to be correct, it is no argument in their favour ; because, what the term may signify in one passage, does not fix the sense of it in all others. We admit that the term Son applies both to the human and divine nature of Christ ; but they maintain that this term never applies to the divine nature. Consequently, if they can produce a thousand passages where the term Son denotes the human nature of Christ, it does not furnish the shadow of an argument against our cause ; but if we produce a single passage where the term Son applies to the divine nature of Christ, their whole system is exploded at once ; and such passages we shall produce, when we come to examine the Scriptures on this subject.

In the preceding quotation, a very extraordinary charge is brought against the defenders of the Eternal Sonship. They are said to discover “ hostility against the disciples of Christ.” And this charge, however heavy and dreadful, must be allowed to be just, if the indictment can be supported by evidence. The plain English of the preceding statement made by our opponents is, that the Apostles taught that Christ was the Son of God as to his human nature only ; that this was the doctrine which they uniformly taught, and for which they suffered. Consequently, it is hostility to them to assert that Christ was the Son of God as to his divine nature. But by what evidence is this charge supported ? In preaching the doctrine here specified, whom had the Apostles to contend with ? Were the Jews such strenuous advocates for the Divine Sonship of Christ, as to persecute the Apostles for preaching his human sonship ? If so, they must have been greatly changed from the time they charged Christ with blasphemy, because, He said God was his father, which, in their account, was making himself equal with God. And the doctrine of the human sonship, was no more likely to offend the Gentiles than the Jews, as it must have corresponded with their own notions, much better than the opposite doctrine. It is certain that this doctrine is never mentioned in Scripture as the cause of their persecutions. Our opponents, therefore, on this subject, speak without book, and exceed all the bounds of credibility.

Another charge brought forward by our opponents is as follows :— They say, “ It is amusing to see what ingenuity is employed in proving “ this doctrine (Eternal Sonship) from Scripture. The eighth chapter “ of the Proverbs is brought forward for the purpose ; unfortunately, the “ person there speaks in the feminine gender, and describes herself as a “ child growing at her father’s side. And yet this lady is positively “ said to be the Son of God.”

This is a burlesque on the sacred Scriptures. The person who speaks, we are told, was a lady ; but, we ask, what lady could say, By me kings

reign, and princes decree justice. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, &c. ? The exposition of this passage is not our concern at present. But if the person speaking is to be taken for a lady, what reverence can we have for the book in which such a passage is contained ? If the person speaking be a created being, how can it be said, that the Lord possessed her in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old, and that she was set up from everlasting ? If this person be uncreated, then we have a female deity, exercising divine attributes, and governing the world. In this case, what becomes of the doctrine of the Trinity, if there be another person possessing divine attributes, besides Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ? And what becomes of the Scriptures, if they can either speak of such a deity, or use such language of a creature ?

15. We now return to Dr. Clark, who tells us, that he rejects the Eternal Sonship, because he has "not been able to find any express declarations in the Scriptures respecting it." It appears from this, that he has not been able to find any express declarations in Scripture against the doctrine which he has rejected. Is express declaration any criterion of Scriptural doctrine ? We believe the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, of the Christian Sabbath, and of infant baptism, to be Scriptural, though they are not by such words expressed in Scripture. What is evidently implied, is as really the doctrine of Scripture as what is expressed. That the dead are raised, Moses shewed at the bush, as our Saviour informs us ; but this was not by any express declaration concerning it. By this we learn, from an infallible commentator, that a doctrine may be established by the Scriptures, when there is no express declaration respecting it.

If there be three persons and one God, there must be some distinction in their manner of existence, and that distinction must have been eternal ;* and the only designation we can find in Scripture of this distinction, is by the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it is most reasonable to suppose, that these terms are expressive of their original existence.

St. Austin, as quoted by Nares, says, "Observe, that when in the creed, to the name of God, the Father is conjoined, it is thereby declared that he was not first a God and afterwards a Father, but without any beginning he is both God and Father : when thou hearest the word Father, acknowledge that he hath a Son truly born, or begotten. God the Father is a term of a secret mystery, whose true Son is the Word."

With respect to the Holy Spirit, He is said to proceed from the

* Since there are three who are one God, and these three are distinct persons, there must be something which distinguishes them from each other ; and that distinction be it what it may, is not merely nominal, as when the Sabellians say, God is one person, having three names, Father, Son, and Spirit ; here is no distinction. A man may have three names, and yet be no more distinguished from other men, than by one name. Nor is the distinction merely in mode or manner of existing. The three in the Godhead are not merely three modes, but three distinct persons in a different mode of subsisting, and are really distinct from each other ; so that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, nor the Holy Spirit either the Father or the Son : but the difficulty is, what that is which

Father, to be sent by the Father; and it is said the Lord, by his spirit, hath garnished the heavens; but the Father is never said to proceed from

gives the distinction between them? Now, observe,—1st. Be it what it may which makes the distinction, it must be as early as the existence of the divine nature itself. God is from everlasting to everlasting. What God is now, He ever was, the immutable "I am." He is He which is, and was, and is to come: He is invariably the same: and therefore that which gives them their distinction, must be coeval with their existence.

2d. Whatever, therefore, distinguishes them, does not depend upon any works done by them in time, since their distinction is eternal; and the Scriptures assert, that the works of God are common to all the three persons, and that they have a concern in each; and therefore these cannot distinguish them from each other. The salvation of sinners is commonly ascribed to the Son, and He is commonly called Jesus our Saviour; and God the father is said to beget men again, according to his mercy, and is God our Saviour. The works of God may be proof that there is a glorious God; but these do not make God to be; but to appear to be what He is: had they never been done, He would have been the same as He is, in Being and Glory. The works of God, whether of creation or redemption, are works of sovereign pleasure. "For thy pleasure they are." These things might or might not have been, as He thought meet or fit; but not so his being, the nature of his being and its manner of subsisting. For suppose these works of nature or of grace had never been; God would have been the same in his nature, three persons in one essence. In the plan of man's salvation, to which some ascribe the distinction of persons as originating thence, the plural distinction is not made but manifested,—the distinction is not artificial but essential and natural, what could not be otherwise, no more than the essence itself. It existed, therefore, before the work either of creation or redemption; and, therefore, would have continued so, had there been no redemption. As the Divine existence is not a matter of choice or will, which to admit would imply another and a separate antecedent to him, so neither is that which gives the distinction what might or might not have been but by necessity of nature, as God is such, as the mode in which He is eternal and unchangeable. Observe, by necessity of nature, is not meant that the nature distinguishes them—that nature is one and common to Father, Son, and Spirit, and this nature is not divided; it is not parted among them, as that one might have a greater, and one a lesser, but the whole fulness of the Godhead is in each.

3. It is the personal relations, or distinctive relative properties in each person which distinguishes them from each other, as paternity in the first person, filiation in the second, and aspiration in the third. There the distinction arises from something in the divine nature, and not from without, and that something is couched in the word generation, Psalm ii. 7, which is peculiar to the first, and is never affirmed of the second and third; and upon this is founded the propriety of the name Father, and it is being begotten that founds the personal relation of the second person, the only begotten of the Father, which distinguishes him from the first and third, and gives him the name Son, and the relative property, or relation of the third is, that He is breathed of the first and second persons; hence called the breath of the Almighty, and is never said of the other persons, and so distinguishes him from them, and gives him the name of Spirit. Thus the names Father, Son, and Spirit, denote realities worthy the confidence of sinners. But it is urged that this renders the Son later in existence than the Father, as that a father who begets must be before him that is generated, and therefore the Son of God has a beginning, and so not from everlasting. But it is worthy of notice, that Father and Son are co-relatives, they suppose each other, a Father a Son, and a Son a Father. These relations commence and exist together; one is not absent from the other. The Father, as a Father, is not before the Son as such, nor the Son, as a Son, later than the Father. Their relations rise and continue together; there is no priority or posterity, no before or after in these relations. With God's no past existence of him that is begotten, nor pre-existence of him that begets. An Eternal Father must have an Eternal Son.

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the Spirit, nor to be sent by the Spirit, nor is the Spirit ever said to do any thing by the Father. Does not this indicate that the Spirit is essentially distinct, and that the proper appellation of that distinction is that of Holy Spirit? With respect to the Son, it is said He was God, and was with God in the beginning; that He was in the form of God, and had a glory with the Father before the world was; that He was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his Father's person; and do not these declarations indicate that He was eternally distinct in the mode of his existence from the Father, and that the designation of that distinction is the term *Son*?

If Christ be not the Son of God, as to his divine nature, He is not in reality the Son of God at all. Two celebrated writers, about the eighth century, maintained that Christ was not the Son of God by nature, but only by adoption: and those who deny his Eternal Sonship, revive for substance this exploded error. Created beings are only called the sons of God by grace and favour. Angels are figuratively called the sons of God; but if they were his sons in reality, then fallen angels would continue to be his sons. If creation really makes God a father, then the brute creation are the sons of God, and this appellation applies to the wicked as well as the righteous, for we are all his offspring. And if the Sonship of Christ be restricted to his human nature, it will follow, that He is only the Son of God in common with other men, and that He is not in reality the Son of God, but has that title given him by grace and favour.

17. Under the old dispensation, it was understood that God had a son. In the second Psalm, Christ is described as a king, who was to have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. And the Almighty declares Him to be his son, and calls upon the kings and judges of the earth to give the Son the testimony of their homage and subjection, lest they should perish; and He adds, "blessed are they that put their trust in Him." This conveyed the idea that God had a son in his own likeness.

Many eminent divines have proved that the description of wisdom, in the eighth of Proverbs, relates to Christ, and what is there said is not applicable to any other person or thing. It is there said, "From the beginning, or ever the earth was, when there were no depths, I was brought forth." And the word rendered brought forth, signifies travail, or to give birth to, and might have been rendered born or generated. In this place, therefore, we read of his eternal generation. Accordingly the Jewish writers speak of the generation of wisdom, which they call the Word of God, and they declare that word to be the first born of God, the creator of the world: the Son of God: the Son of God that conducted Israel through the wilderness.*

Prov. xxx. 4. Agur says, "Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" This indicates that God had a son, whose name was as mysterious as his own. The name of God, in Scripture, signifies that which

* See Allix's Judgment of the Jewish Church, page 195.

expresses or manifests his nature ; and the second person mentioned here, with respect to the mystery of his divine nature, is called God's son. The prophet Isaiah says, " Unto us a child is born, unto us a *son is given*, and his name shall be called Mighty God," &c. And what is most naturally suggested by these words is, that Christ in his human nature was the child born, and in his divine nature the son given, on which account He might be properly called Immanuel, God with us. Nebuchadnezzar was favoured with divine visions and revelations, and on a certain occasion he saw one, whose form was like the Son of God. Daniel, who records this, had evidently no idea that God could not have a son in his divine nature. The language of Scripture, therefore, most obviously indicated that God had a son in his own nature, and it is most certain that in this sense it was understood by the ancient Jews.

One of the most extraordinary passages to be found in the Scriptures is Micah v. 2. But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting. The margin renders the last clause, from the days of eternity, which is a literal version of the Hebrew. It is admitted that these words are a prediction of Christ. The principal point we shall endeavour to ascertain is, what is meant by his coming or going forth. The Jews understood this word to denote the Saviour's birth. When Herod requested to be informed where Christ should be born, they produced this passage to prove that Bethlehem was to be the place of his nativity. But it is declared that he had had a previous going forth, which had been from the days of eternity. The same word in the original, which is used for his birth in Bethlehem, is used to denote his eternal production, derivation, coming forth, or what ever it may be called. The original word is frequently used in Scripture to denote issue or offspring : it signifies that which proceeds from something else, that which is produced or *born*. This word is used to denote the flowing of a stream from the fountain, Gen. ii. 10. The diffusion of light by the rising sun, Psalm lxxv. 8. The growing up of a branch from the root, Job xxxviii. 27. The flowing forth of waters into the depths prepared for them at the creation, Job xxxviii. 8. It is likewise used to denote the birth of children, Gen. xvii. 6. ; 2 Kings xx. 18. It is used to denote the birth of Christ, Isaiah xi. 1. In the words before us, it most evidently signifies our Saviour's eternal generation. It is applied to our Saviour's divine nature, and no sense can be made of it, but that He was begotten of the Father before all worlds. Thus we find in the Scriptures the doctrine of our Saviour's Eternal Sonship.

18. We have seen that the Old Testament held out the idea of Christ being the Son of God in his divine nature, that the Jews believed this doctrine, as their writings abundantly testify. They were known to believe this when Christ commenced his public ministry, and when the gospels and epistles were written by the evangelists and apostles. How is it then that the opinion was never contradicted in any part of the New Testament. The opinion of God having a son in his own nature, is of the greatest importance in the judgment, both of those who oppose it, and of those who defend it. Those who oppose this opinion declare it

to be absurd and dangerous, destructive to the Deity of Christ, and ruinous to the whole scheme of Gospel redemption. If such an opinion as this was held by those who sat in Moses's seat, and expounded the law to the people, is it not marvellous, that neither Christ nor any of his apostles ever contradicted it? It cannot be denied that they frequently discoursed on the Sonship of Christ, and if they knew that so dangerous an opinion was held respecting it, can it be believed that they would never have spoken one word for its refutation?

Though the Jews believed that God had a son in his own nature, they would not believe that Christ was that person. They seem to have imbibed a notion from the prophecy of Daniel, that the Messiah would descend with a visible glory in the clouds of heaven: they demanded this sign from heaven, and because it was not given they refused to believe.

Our Saviour was so far from refuting the opinion that God had a Son in his own nature that He abundantly confirmed it. The Jews charged him with blasphemy when He said God was his own or his proper Father, for they inferred that He thereby made Himself equal with God. This was not a denial on their part that God could have such a Son, but they would not allow Christ to be that person, because He had not given the sign they expected. 1 Cor. i. 22—24. But if the Jews had here said that God could not have such a Son, it would not affect our argument, it would only shew that they were inconsistent with themselves, denying at one time what they affirmed at another. In the answer our Saviour returned there is no intimation that the Jews had drawn a wrong inference from the Sonship He claimed. There was nothing to convince them that by calling God his own Father He did not make Himself equal with God. So far from denying his Divine Sonship, He confirmed it in the clearest manner. He said, as the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given the Son to have life in Himself. Whatsoever the Father hath is mine. Whatsoever doeth the Father that doeth the Son. I and my Father are one. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten that is in the bosom of the Father, He hath revealed Him. No man knoweth the Son but the Father, so no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.— These various passages speak for themselves without comment, they shew that the Jews drew a proper inference from the Sonship which our Saviour claimed when they said He made Himself equal with God. Consequently these passages prove that Christ is the Son of God as to his divine nature.

The Apostles did not contradict the notion which the Jews had entertained that God had a Son in his own nature, but expressed themselves so as to confirm what the Jews had taught on the subject. Philo, stating the opinion of the Jewish Church, calls the Second Person of the Trinity, God's first born Son: and St. Paul calls him God's first begotten. Philo calls the Logos the image of God: and St. Paul declares him to be the image of the invisible God. Philo says the Logos was the Son of God that led Israel through the wilderness, which the apostle confirms when he says the Jews tempted Christ in the wilderness. Philo calls the Second Person both the Word of God and the Son of God, and declares that He created

the world. And St. John speaks of Him in the same manner when he says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The world was made by Him : and without Him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The glory that distinguished Him to be the Son of God was the evidence of his divine nature which appeared in his words and actions, tempers and dispositions. It was no Sonship in his human nature that was thus beheld. He might have had all the glory spoken of had He come into the world by natural generation, or his human nature might have been produced in the miraculous manner recorded by St. Luke, without having the glory which St. John speaks of. Consequently that glory could not prove Him to be the only begotten of the Father, any other way than as he was the Son of God in his divine nature. We see, therefore, that the apostles confirmed the opinion which the Jews had held, that God had a Son in his own nature : and if that opinion was absurd and dangerous the Apostles were absurd and dangerous writers.

19. To overthrow the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship, our opponents bring forward a passage in Luke, i. 35. But this passage will not answer their purpose. When a Socinian produces a passage which calls Christ a man, we reply that it accords with our belief, but it no more proves that Christ was not God, than another passage which calls Him God, proves him not to be a man. In like manner, a passage which calls Christ the Son of God in reference to his human nature perfectly agrees with the Eternal Sonship.

It is pleaded that it is on account of the miraculous operations of the Spirit in the production of the human nature, that He is called the Son of God. This may be granted, but this does not prove that He was not the Son of God before his incarnation. He is called the Son of God in reference to his resurrection, but it will be allowed that though He is called the Son of God, on that account, that He was the Son of God before He was raised from the dead. And by a parity of reason when He is called the Son of God in reference to his incarnation, it does not follow that He was not the Son of God before that event took place.

Dr. Clarke, in his comment on this passage, says "of his divine nature the angel does not particularly speak here." But if the angel speaks generally, or any way whatever of the divine nature, is it not under the appellation of the Son of God? If the angel says nothing here about the divine nature, then he says nothing against the divine Sonship.

Our version of this passage, assigns, as is supposed, the miraculous production of his human nature as the cause of his being called the Son of God ; but Guyse, instead of "therefore also," translates "even because ;" and the passage when so rendered does not make his extraordinary birth the reason of his being called the Son of God ; but it declares his being the Son of God to be the reason of his extraordinary birth. Why the angel should tell Mary that because of Christ's miraculous birth He should be called the Son of God remains to be accounted for. What could be the intent or importance of such a communication? And we ask whether the declaration has been verified in fact? It does

not appear that He is ever in any other part of Scripture called the Son of God in reference to that event. If it be replied that the meaning is not merely that He should have this appellation given Him on that account, but that He should by that means be the Son of God. But neither is this strictly true : He did not by that means become the Son of God only in a figurative manner, and in common with others.

Dr. Clarke says, " I am the more firmly established in the opinion " that the rudiments of the humanity of Christ was a real creation by " the Spirit of God." Granting this to be correct, it follows that in his opinion, Christ is only the Son of God by creation, as Adam was, and indeed as every other man is, for He has made us, and not we ourselves. But if this was all the angel Gabriel meant when he said Christ should be called the Son of God, what could be the use or import of the communication ? The title in this case could be no exclusive honour to Christ as all men are the sons of God by creation. And if the angel had never mentioned it, his right on that ground to be called the Son of God would never have been questioned. We expect some important meaning in a message from heaven, and if the passage be understood to mean that Christ should have a miraculous conception, because He was the Son of God, then it conveys a sense of vast importance, worthy the messenger that brought it, and the place from whence it came.

If the passage be taken as it is in our version, there is no necessity to allow the construction that is put upon it. The meaning might be, not that the manner of his conception made Him the Son of God, but that it discovered Him to be so ; as He was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. It was predicted that a virgin should bear a son whose name should be Immanuel, God with us, but only one person was to be brought forth in this miraculous manner, and, therefore, whenever such an event transpired the person so brought forth might be known to be the Son of God ; and the circumstance which made known what He was, might be said to be the cause of his being called the Son of God.

On this passage our opponents build their superstructure, but we have shewn that the sense which they put upon it, if admitted, does not disprove the Eternal Sonship. It has likewise been shewn that the passage is capable of another translation, which totally changes the meaning of it : and that if our own version be considered correct, the words will bear another construction which contains a more important meaning than that which they put upon it ; and in this manner their very foundation is taken away.

20. The Sonship of Christ is distinguished from all others in the Scriptures : He is not only called God's own Son, his dear Son, and his well-beloved Son, but He is likewise called the first begotten, and the only begotten of the Father. But if his Sonship be confined to his human nature, or to any circumstance connected with it, He was neither the first nor the only begotten of the Father. His miraculous conception was not a greater deviation from the course of nature, nor a greater display of divine power, nor in any way more immediately the work of the Almighty, than the formation of the first man out of the dust ; in reference to which circumstance St. Luke calls Adam, the son of God. With respect to his

resurrection, that did not in reality make His Sonship, but declared him to be the Son of God; as it was the fulfilment of prophecy; as it was such an evident interposition of heaven in favour of his cause; and as it was such a confirmation of his claims to that title. But in whatever way the resurrection might be said to constitute Him the Son of God, it was not peculiar to Himself, many others have been raised from the dead. His being the Messiah could not entitle Him to be called the only begotten, because there were other Messiahs or anointed ones. Therefore unless Christ is the Son of God as to his divine nature, He is neither God's first nor his only begotten Son.

In those places where men were induced to make an open confession that Christ was the Son of God, there is not the most distant allusion to the manner in which his human nature was produced. In most cases it was impossible the speakers could have any knowledge of that circumstance; where it might have been known, it was never that circumstance which produced the confession, but invariably some display of the divine nature. When He manifested his omniscience, when He displayed his power by walking on the waters, and discovering that the winds and the seas obeyed him, when the sun was darkened and nature convulsed at the crucifixion: on these occasions a confession was excited that He was the Son of God. But in these and all other similar cases, it was a display of his divine nature which called forth the confession. But, if Christ was not the Son of God as to his divine nature, though the language of the confession was correct, the faith which produced it was erroneous. But these confessions met with our Saviour's approbation; they must therefore have proceeded from a right faith: consequently Christ as to his divine nature is the Son of God.

21. Various passages speak of God's sending his Son, as the greatest display of his love to mankind: St. John says the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Our Saviour says, God sent his Son, that the world through Him might be saved. For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. And when we are told, in the language of inspiration, that God sent his Son into the World, it is a plain indication that Christ was the Son of God before He was sent. It is further to be observed, that the Father's sending of the Son is represented as the greatest display of divine love; but how could this appear, if God was not a Father, nor Christ his Son, till after he was sent? There is nothing said, or can be said of the Divine Being, that can so affect the human heart with a sense of his goodness, as the consideration that He spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. But if Christ was not the Son of God as to his divine nature, then He was not the Son in any sense at the time He was given, and consequently the consideration of his being the Son of God is to be left out of the question, whenever we take a correct view of the manifestation of the divine goodness in the work of redemption: and then we may write Ichabod upon these passages, for the glory will then be departed.

That the love of God might have been displayed in sending Christ, if

He had not been his Son, is what we do not deny, but whatever that might have been, it could not have been what constitutes the beauty and force of these passages; and what gives them all their heart melting tenderness; and what is more, that love could not have been what the Scriptures represent it to have been. And for what purpose can the Scriptures use the term Son as a proof of the great love wherewith God has loved us, if the term Son is to be taken in a sense that affords no display of divine love? In this case these passages are not only rendered meagre but erroneous: they are made in calling our attention to divine love, to pass over more interesting subjects, and to lay the chief stress, on a circumstance which is not able to bear the weight. But when we consider that Christ was a Son, whom the Father had begotten in his own nature, and who was as perfect as Himself, and whom on that account He loved as his own person, then we see that the giving of such a Son was a proof of that love which passeth knowledge.*

22. Another passage which claims our attention, is Matt. xvi. 13—18. When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, some say Thou art John the Baptist: some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He said unto them, but whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The question here is, had Peter no higher views of the Sonship of Christ, than believing that it resulted from the production of his human nature? The disciples had better opportunities of knowing Christ than the men of the world had, by their converse with Him, and their revelations from heaven: to them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, when to others it was not given: and therefore unless they had formed more exalted ideas of the Saviour's Sonship than others did, we have no reason to believe that their confession of it would have met with such an extraordinary commendation, as we find it did in this place. But the confession that He was the Son of God in his human nature did not imply a more exalted idea of Him, than those had

* "To lose sight of the true and proper Sonship, is to lose one of the most affecting views of the love of God towards man. Had Abraham been called to sacrifice one of his servants, the trial would have been comparatively small. But take thy son, thine only son Isaac, was very different language; and the service was valued accordingly. We are thus furnished in some degree with the means of judging as to the import of that astonishing language, 'God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son.' This view of divine love is not simply the most affecting in itself; it is so also from being the idea of the Spirit, who, in the above, and many similar passages, expressly refers to the previously existing relation of Sonship, as the great testimony of God's peculiar love to the family of Adam. To suppose the contrary, is not only to divest them of their beauty and meaning, but also to represent the Spirit of all truth as leading, by his language, the most careful and candid into error."

who said He was Elias, that is, Elijah. Elijah had a miraculous translation out of the world, and if he had dwelt among the Apostles, he must have had a miraculous translation into the world, which would have entitled him as much to be called the Son of God, as a miraculous conception could do. Hence, if Peter did not believe in the Eternal Sonship, he confessed Christ to be the Son of God on no higher grounds than was implied in the faith of those who believed Him to be Elijah : but in this case how did he become entitled to a peculiar blessing, and our Saviour's high commendation ? It would have appeared more reasonable that a peculiar blessing should have been pronounced on those whose faith was equally exalted, whilst their opportunities were so much inferior. Instead of our Saviour saying, blessed art thou Simon Barjona, we might have expected that He would have replied as He did to Thomas ; Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed ; but blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.

The faith of which St. Peter here makes a confession was produced by a revelation from heaven, as appears by our Saviour's reply : Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. But St. Peter might have known that Christ was the Son of God as to his human nature without a revelation, and we cannot discover what purpose such a revelation was to serve : but that Christ was the Son of God in his divine nature could not have been known unless it had been revealed from heaven, and the doctrine was of such importance as to be worthy of being made the subject of a revelation. And if we understand the Sonship here spoken of to include the divine nature, the whole passage is animated and intelligible : but on any other supposition, our Saviour's reply is altogether inexplicable.

To Peter's confession our Saviour replies, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The apostle's name signified a rock, and he was now worthy of that appellation, because he was so firmly established in the Christian faith. And it is incredible that his faith should have been so highly extolled, if it had consisted merely in believing that Christ was the Son of God as to his human nature only. Could that be the faith on which the Church is erected, of which Christians have been ignorant for 1700 years together ? There is no proof whatever that St. Peter in his confession made any allusion to the miraculous conception, nor any evidence that he was then acquainted with such a circumstance. If the apostle here only spoke of the Sonship of our Saviour's human nature, it was no more than those may admit who deny his divinity. And is this the faith which gives its possessor the firmness of a rock, and that can give such stability to the Church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it ? But a belief that Christ was the Son of God, as to his divine nature, necessarily includes whatever is essential to his divinity, and this is of such importance in the Christian cause as to justify our Saviour's high commendation of it. We may, therefore, rest assured that St. Peter's confession implied that Christ was the Son of God as to his divine nature.

23. In the third chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle declares that Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses : and if he

could have persuaded the Jews of this, he would have removed their prejudice against the Gospel; it might be expected, therefore, that he would bring forward the strongest arguments to establish his position. For this purpose, he maintains that Christ is the builder of the Church, which He styles a house, on which account He had more glory than Moses, because a builder must be superior to the materials of a building; "He that buildeth the house has more honour than the house." But Christ could not be the builder of a house, of which Moses was only one of the materials, unless He possessed proper divinity. Accordingly, he says, "He that built all things is God." He had before proved that Christ laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens were the work of his hands; and, in this place, he shows Christ to be the builder of the Church, and then significantly adds, "He that built all things is God." And the next argument he uses to prove Christ's superiority is, that Moses was faithful as a *servant*, but *Christ as a son*. And it would be very strange indeed, if the apostle, after referring to our Saviour's divine nature as a proof of the superiority, should, in the next place, and for the same purpose, mention a title which only belonged to his human nature. If the apostle, under the term Son, included the divine nature, it was very properly introduced, to show the Jews that though He had an office to fill, it did not detract from his real dignity, because in the discharge of that office he was not as a servant, but as a son over his own house. But if the apostle, under the term Son, only included his human nature, it no ways answered his purpose. The apostle makes a contrast between Moses as a servant, and Christ as a son, in order to prove the superiority of the latter over the former; but where is the force of his argument, if he only meant that Christ was a son as to his human nature, in which nature he declares Him to be made like to his brethren.

As the apostle was labouring to persuade the Hebrews of Christ's superiority, he would certainly intend to be understood; but if he knew at that time of the miraculous conception, he never mentions it, and how were the Jews to know that he called Christ the Son of God in reference to that event? If they had both known and believed this circumstance, they might have disputed the ground which he had taken. They might have said Moses was the Son of God by creation, and therefore the Sonship of Christ, as to his human nature, could not give Him a superiority over Moses. If the apostle had explained that Christ had a miraculous birth, they might still have disputed that this circumstance alone did not prove his superiority; because Adam was the Son of God by a miraculous production, and yet that circumstance alone did not render him superior to other men. Plants grow from seed; but if divine power should now produce a new plant, it would not on that account be superior to others: for others, though in a different way, are as really the production of a divine power. Therefore, if the apostle, by the term Son in this place, meant our Saviour's human nature only, it seems impossible for the Jews to have understood him; and if they had understood him, they might have disputed his argument: it was no way likely to carry conviction to their minds. But if the apostle, under the term Son, included the divine nature, then the argument is obvious,

strong, and conclusive ; we may be, therefore, assured that this was the sense in which he intended to be understood.

24. In the beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle shows that Christ has a Sonship which discovers his superiority, not only to all the prophets, but likewise to all the angels in heaven. He describes our Saviour as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power ; being made, he says, so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. " For unto which of the angels, said he, at any time Thou art my Son : this day have I begotten Thee ? " And when He brought his first begotten into the world, He saith, " Let all the angels of God worship Him." That which is to our purpose in these words, is the argument of the apostle, that Christ, when called the Son of God, has a more excellent name than the angels. But how does this come to be a more excellent name ? It cannot be meant that however it be applied, or in whatever sense it be taken, that it is a more excellent name, because both angels and men are called the sons of God. This name, therefore, must be attributed to Christ in a peculiar manner, or it could not distinguish Him from others, and it must be given to Him on higher grounds than it is to any other ; otherwise, though it might distinguish Him, it could not display his superior excellence : and if it does not display his superior excellence, the apostle's argument falls to the ground. And the name can only show Christ to be superior, so far as it is expressive of a superior nature.

Dr. Owen says, " Being the Natural and Eternal Son of God, upon the discharge of his work, the Father declared and pronounced that to be his name. His being the Son of God, is the proper foundation of his being called so ; and his discharge of his office the occasion of its declaration." " He is not called the Son of God upon such a common account as angels and men—the one by creation, and the other by adoption—but peculiarly and by way of eminence." " It is required that in the testimony produced, a signal name be appropriated to the Messiah, so as that He may inherit it exclusively. It is not being called by this or that name, in common with others, that is intended ; but such a peculiar assignation of a name to Him whereby He might for ever be distinguished from others. This name must be such as proves his pre-eminence above all the angels. It is not then the general name of a Son of God that the apostle insisteth on, but the peculiar assignation of this name to the Lord Jesus on his own particular account ; and this appropriation proves his unrivalled dignity, for it is evident that God intended thereby to declare his singular honour and glory, giving Him a name to denote it, that was never assigned to any mere creature as his peculiar inheritance."

Dr. Macknight, on these words, *Thou art my Son* : To-day have I begotten Thee, says—" The emphasis of this speech lieth on the word begotten, importing that the person addressed is God's son, not by creation, but by generation. It was on account of this speech, Psalm ii. 2, that the Jews universally believed the person, the Lord's Messiah, or Christ, to be really the Son of God." " It is true, some contend that the words, ' My son, thou art, ' &c. are a predication of our Lord's

miraculous conception. But, on that supposition, the argument taken from the name falls : for instead of proving Jesus superior to angels, his miraculous conception does not make Him superior to Adam, who was as much the immediate work of God, as Christ's human nature was the immediate work of the Holy Ghost."

When, like the two writers above, we consider Christ to be the Son of God as to his divine nature, we see the strength, and feel the force of the apostle's argument; but if the Sonship of Christ be confined to his human nature, the apostle's argument is totally destroyed. And if the apostle could have reasoned so fallaciously, as to attempt to prove that the miraculous conception made Christ greater than the angels, when in fact that circumstance did not make Him equal to them, what becomes of his inspiration? And what dependance can be placed on any description he gives of our Saviour? If we allow the apostle to have understood the subject, we must admit that Christ was the Son of God as to his divine nature.

25. In Hebrews v. 8, the apostle, speaking of Christ, says—*Though He were a son, yet learned He obedience, by the things which He suffered.* This denotes that He had a Sonship which exempted Him from all obligation to the obedience here mentioned; and that the obedience He paid was a wonderful display of humility and condescension, considering that He was a son; likewise that the relation in which He stood to God the Father, showed his obedience to be what could not have been expected of Him, or demanded from Him: also that the Sonship attributed to Christ in Scripture appeared inconsistent to some, with what He was said to do and to suffer, so that they might be led to doubt or deny either the one or the other: and both have in fact been denied. "Some of the most pernicious errors that ever disturbed the Christian Church, took their rise from the sublime display of the greatness of the Son of God, which is made in the Jewish Scriptures. For certain false teachers in the Christian Church, probably converts from Judaism, holding the doctrine of their unbelieving brethren, fancied that the greatness of the Son of God was inconsistent with the nature of man. They therefore affirmed that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh; that his body was nothing but the appearance of a body; and that He was crucified only in appearance. Of these pernicious tenets we have clear traces in the epistles of John, where they are expressly condemned; and the teachers who maintained them are called Antichrists, or opposers of Christ."

On the contrary, others admit his sufferings, but deny that he was the Son of God as to his divine nature. But in the beginning of this epistle, the apostle has declared Him to be the Son of God in such a way, as to shew his pre-eminence over all the angels in heaven, and in such a manner, as to be the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of the Father's person. And in this chapter he exhibits Him offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death; and to obviate the objection that might be taken, either against his divinity or his humanity, he thought proper to add, that *though He was a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.* Dr. Whitby, instead of *learned*, would ren-

der he *taught* obedience ; and shews that the original will bear this construction. Taken in this sense, it amounts to what St. Peter says, that Christ suffered, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. But whether we take it in this sense or the other, the apostle's argument remains the same. It depends on the contrast between what Christ *was* and what He *did*. What He did, was his obedience unto death ; What He was, is expressed by the term *Son*. And though He was a son, yet He learned or taught obedience by what He suffered.

The point now to be determined is, in what sense the apostle speaks of Christ being a *Son*. If he meant his humanity only, or his miraculous conception, where is the contrast or opposition between what he was, and what He suffered ? Where is the reason for saying *though* He was a son ? Could such a Sonship have placed Him above obedience, or exempted Him from sufferings, any more than if He had come into the world in the regular course of nature ? Did the miraculous formation of the first man lessen his obligation to obedience ? What should we have thought of St. Luke, who says Adam was the Son of God, if he had likewise said, though he was a son, yet he was required to obey ? But if Christ had no Eternal Sonship, St. Paul must be supposed to speak in this manner, and to say that though Christ was a son as to his human nature, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. But was there in this any thing marvellous or contrary to the common notions of mankind, so as to require the apostle to say, Though He was a son, &c. The apostle in these words makes an admission of what might be urged as an objection to the sufferings of Christ ; but surely no one could ever urge the miraculous conception as being inconsistent with his sufferings : those who denied his sufferings, denied the existence of his human nature ; and to refute those persons, St. John proved that the Son of God came in the flesh. His coming in the flesh was what made Him capable of suffering ; and to do this, was the end and design of his incarnation. St. Paul could therefore never suspect that any would ever plead his coming in the flesh as any hindrance to his sufferings ; and hence it is impossible that He should confine his Sonship to his human nature, when He said, though he was a son, yet learned He obedience, &c. His incarnation, or his coming in the flesh, could never be thought a reason against his sufferings ; for it was the very circumstance that made his sufferings possible, and what the Apostles produced as a proof that He did suffer.

It follows from what has been advanced, that the apostle uses the term *Son* for our Saviour's divine nature. Dr. Owen's note on the place is as follows :—" *He was a son* ; and yet, being a son, that is, such a son as we have described, or, *that Son* of God. It was no singular thing for a Son of God, by adoption, to be chastised, to suffer, and thereby to be instructed to obedience. He therefore speaks not of Him as a son on *any* account, or such as any mere creature can claim an interest in ; but He was God's own son, the only begotten of the Father, who was also in the form of God. That He should do the things here spoken of is great and marvellous ; therefore it is said, he did thus, although He was a son. Here is implied his *love*, that he would submit to this condition for our sakes. On his own account, no such thing was

required, or any way needful to him ; but for our sakes (such was his love, he would do it, although he was a son."

When the Apostle is writing to the Philippians, he says, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And the very same sentiment is expressed in the words under consideration, Though He was a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. These two passages mutually explain and support each other. Though Christ was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God ; nevertheless He took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death. For such a son to learn obedience by what he suffered, was a most marvellous display of kindness and condescension ; we are therefore under the necessity to understand the apostle, in these words, to be speaking of our Saviour's divine nature ; consequently of his Eternal Sonship, which is a doctrine so clearly proved, and so strongly established by the Scriptures, that it has stood and will stand throughout all generations.

26. Further evidence from Scripture might be collected in great abundance ; but this is not requisite, because that which has been already produced, is more than sufficient to prove, that Christ, as to his divine nature, is the Son of God. The sense which has been put upon the various passages brought forward, is what they naturally and obviously suggest, and in which they have been understood in all ages, and in which every man would understand them, if he did not bring a mind to the perusal prepossessed by an opposite opinion. If these passages be so expounded as to correspond with the notion that Christ is the Son of God as to his human nature only, the spirit of them evaporates, the propriety and utility of them are annihilated, and the arguments of the inspired penmen are totally destroyed.

Another circumstance which renders it unnecessary to collect any more evidence from Scripture to prove that Christ is the Son of God as to his divine nature, is, that the Scriptures furnish no evidence whatever on the other side of the question. We allow, and firmly believe, that Christ was the Son of God as to his human nature ; and the Scriptures may give him that title in reference to his incarnation, and to his resurrection from the dead ; but that is perfectly consistent with his being the Son of God before He came into the world : consequently, it furnishes no evidence against the Eternal Sonship. No evidence of this description can be produced from the Word of God.

Since the notion that Christ is not the Son of God as to his divine nature, is not supported by the Word of God ; that alone is a sufficient reason for its rejection ; but it is not the only reason, for it is utterly useless in the Christian cause ; it can be turned to no advantage in any branch of theology ; it can have no good influence on any part of religious experience or practice. It does not represent the Deity in a more amiable light to the world ; it has no tendency in any degree to make Him any more the object of our love, our reverence, or our confi-

dence. It invests Him with no additional terrors to the wicked, nor with any more grace and favour to the righteous. It does not make the Christian system more easy to be understood; it removes no objections from infidels, nor does it tend to reconcile any parties in the church. In some of these respects, it has a direct opposite tendency; it may therefore do evil, but it can do no good.

We are aware that the advocates of this notion maintain that it has its advantages in some of the respects we have mentioned, because they say it is more agreeable to reason. But the assertion that it is more agreeable to reason is what we deny, and have already refuted. It may indeed appear more agreeable to reason when we only view one side of the subject, but it will be found to be the reverse, when every side of the doctrine is placed under our inspection. For, among Trinitarians, the opinion that Christ is not the Son of God as to his divine nature, involves the notion of three distinct Supreme Beings, amongst whom no one is the fountain of communication to the others; which is a notion that divides the divine essence, and is incompatible with the unity of the Godhead: and which consequently overthrows the Christian system. It is, therefore, both worthless and pernicious, and should be utterly discarded from the religious world.

To some persons this notion may possess all the fascinating charms of novelty; but a desire for novelty in religious opinions should not be indulged; for such an appetite is both corrupt and insatiable; the more it receives the more it craves; it grows stronger in proportion to its indulgence. It can only be subdued by cutting off its supplies: it is an unclean spirit that goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. To prevent being lost in endless mazes, we should beware of striking out into any new theological path, which no prophet nor apostle ever explored: "Thus saith the Lord, stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls."

27. One of our opponents on this subject manifests great displeasure against those who believe in the Eternal Sonship, because they require candidates for the ministry in their community, to be of the same mind with themselves. He reprobates such conduct, as he states, "*Because the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship is allowed by its advocates to be a mystery, (and of course they do not understand it themselves,) neither is it essential to salvation.*" On these accounts he thinks those who disbelieve the Eternal Sonship should be freely admitted without any scruple, to labour in the word and doctrine with those who do believe it. To prove that there should be no hinderance to the admission of such candidates, the first argument he brings forward is, that the doctrine in question is mysterious. The position which he takes, viz., that the doctrine is mysterious, will be granted, but whether the inference he draws from it be legitimate and conclusive requires examination. If it be allowed that he has come to a proper conclusion on this subject, it will follow of course, that we may lawfully preach against any doctrine which is confessedly mysterious. We have hope towards God that there will be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust; but after all the revelation which has been made of this doctrine, its advocates allow it is a

mystery ; and according to the argument of our opponent, they do not understand it themselves ; they ought therefore to admit those to preach among them, who have imbibed so much of Baron Swedenborgs' tenets, as to declare there will be no resurrection of the dead. St. Paul says great is the mystery of godliness, of course he did not understand it himself, yet we do not find that he was willing that any thing should be preached against living soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. The doctrine of the divine existence is allowed by its advocates to be a mystery ; of course they do not understand it themselves, and therefore ought to receive with open arms all who come to declare that there is no God. All this must be admitted, or the argument here brought forward must be abandoned. We are told that the advocates of the mystery under consideration do not understand it themselves ; but this requires some explanation. They may clearly understand it as a fact, when the manner of it is incomprehensible : for instance, with respect to the resurrection of the body, it may be clearly understood as a fact, but we cannot know the manner in which it will be accomplished. So it is with respect to the Eternal Sonship ; it may be clearly understood as a fact, but the manner of it is above our conception : but this is no reason why we should suffer it to be assailed with impunity, unless the same liberty is to be taken with all other Gospel mysteries.

The other argument, for the admission of candidates to the ministry, who disbelieve the Eternal Sonship, is, that the doctrine is not essential. We should have known better what to reply to this, if a line had been drawn between such tenets as are essential, and those which are not so. But without giving any opinion on the subject, we may for convenience admit that it is not essential. Yet are there not many doctrines of this description, the belief of which would disqualify a person from preaching amongst a people by whom such doctrines are rejected ? The peculiarities of Calvinism, Quakerism, and Winchesterianism, we suppose are not essential ; for we are unwilling to believe that the adoption of any of these creeds would render a man's salvation impossible. But would it be proper to permit men of these persuasions to labour among a people who firmly believe that such peculiarities have no foundation in the Word of God ? In this case, the pulpit might be occupied one day by a preacher who might maintain that Christ only died for a select and limited number of mankind, and all the rest were left to perish, and could not by any means escape the damnation of hell. The next day, another person might come and proclaim, that Christ died for all ; that it was possible for every individual to be saved ; for there is no respect of persons with God. The reader will be able to pursue the illustration with respect to other conflicting opinions. And we ask, if such jarring sentiments would be likely to promote the comfort and edification of the people ? Would they cause peace to attend the gates of Zion, and prosperity its borders ? Would they not be much more likely to kindle the flame of discord and strife, and instead of inducing the people to love one another, would they not be more likely to make them ready to bite and devour one another ? To prevent such disturbance men of opposite sentiments ought to be in separate communities.

What has now been stated applies to the doctrine of the Eternal Son

ship: one may come and preach that this is the doctrine clearly and uniformly taught in the Scriptures; that the doctrine of the Trinity can be established on no other basis; that if this doctrine be not admitted, the words of the Apostles are without meaning, and their arguments are fallacious. But the next opportunity another might come into the same pulpit and declare that the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship is both absurd and dangerous; that it destroys the Deity of Christ, and ruins the scheme of Redemption. And would not such a conflict of opinions disturb the minds of the people, prevent the progress of the Gospel, and be a disgrace to the community? There may be some individuals who have more prudence than to make their peculiarities a bone of contention, and whose general excellence more than counterbalances their particular defects; but this could not be expected to be the case with all who adopt such peculiarities. And, therefore, a religious community, who believe in the Eternal Sonship, do not do their duty, unless they reject such candidates for the ministry as maintain the opposite doctrine.

FINIS.





